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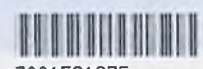
Profile: Why Joumana Haddad is Lebanon's most hated magazine editor

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Pope's visit highlights the crimes of the Roman Catholic Church

The Pope has been to the UK, and gone, leaving in his wake a trail of anger and disgust that the British Government saw fit to welcome the head of an international criminal organisation on a STATE visit to these shores.

Calling for "a little earthly justice" to be applied to the Roman Catholic Church, Christopher Hitchens, writing in the US magazine *Slate* on the eve of the Pope's visit, said that he had recently come across the following passage from Cardinal John Henry Newman's classic statement of belief, his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*: "The Catholic Church holds it better for the Sun and Moon to drop from Heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die from starvation in extremest agony ... than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse."

Said Hitchens: "In a few days, Joseph Ratzinger will make one of the most portentous voyages of his papacy, landing in Britain to announce the beatification of the author of those remarkable words. I am not writing about Catholic dogma today, and in any case do not have the space to discuss the hysterical, totalitarian fanaticism of Newman's statement, coming as it does from a learned man celebrated for his relative 'moderation'. I thought I would simply ask how the church would emerge if anything remotely like Newman's criterion were to be applied to it.

"As we have recently been forcibly reminded, the Roman Catholic Church holds it better for the cries of raped and violated children to be ignored, and for the excuses and alibis of their rapists and torturers indulged, and for a host of dirty and wilful untruths to be manufactured wholesale, and for the funds raised ostensibly for the poor to be paid out in hush money and shame-

ful bribery, rather than that one tiny indignity or inconvenience be visited on the robed majesty of a man-made church or any limit set to its self-proclaimed right to be judge in its own cause."

He added: "Earlier this year, as Roman Catholic authorities from Ireland to Germany to Australia to Belgium to the United States were being confronted with the fallout of decades of sexual assault and subsequent denial, I asked a simple question in print. Why was this not considered a matter for the police and the courts? Why were we asking the church to 'put its own house in order', an expression that was the exact definition of the problem to begin with? Why had almost no offending priest or bishop faced justice, and even then usually after a long period of protection from the church's own 'courts'?"

Hitchens then pointed out that, after a group of generous humanists and atheists agreed to pay his extremely modest fee, Geoffrey Robertson QC produced a detailed legal brief against the papacy and has made it widely available for the use of all interested or aggrieved parties. Titled *The Case of the Pope: Vatican Accountability for Human Rights Abuse*, it was published last month in the UK.

Hitchens added that the recent disclosures of "the putrid state of the church in Belgium have thrown the whole scandal into an even sharper relief. Consider: The now-resigned bishop of Bruges, Roger Vangheluwe, stands revealed by his own eventual confession as being guilty of incest as well as rape, having regularly abused his male nephew between the ages of 5 and 18. The man's superior as head of the Belgian church, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, has been caught on tape urging the victim



The Queen and Ratzinger pictured leaving the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. Photo: Thompson/AP

Continued on p4)

Cardinal Kasper's amazing gaffe

BARRY DUKE FINDS THIS CATHOLIC SPOKESMAN'S OUTBURST HILARIOUS

My heartfelt thanks this month goes to Cardinal Walter Kasper, 77, who went a long way to relieving some of the intense stress I have been under over the past few weeks.

When I read that the Vatican "diplomat" had developed some mysterious illness and had withdrawn from the Ratzinger's UK state visit after accusing Britain of being a "third world country" marked by "a new and aggressive atheism", I almost fell off my chair laughing.

My immediate thought was "if we were really 'a third world country' we would be mired to the eyeballs in superstition, and welcoming the rancid old closet queen with open arms." Or, as National Secular Society President Terry Sanderson better put it: "Cardinal Kasper thinks we are a third world country because we don't kow-tow to Vatican teachings. He's entitled to his opinion and we are pleased he isn't coming. I just wish his boss would follow his example, for he too is completely out of step with the feelings of this country, as poll after poll shows.

"If the choice is living in Britain – one of the

most civilised nations in the world, despite our constant self-deprecation – or the heartless theocracy that is the Vatican, I know which most people would choose."

Guardian columnist Andrew Brown put the boot in too, saying that "Cardinal Walter Kasper's sudden diplomatic illness tells us almost as much about the Vatican's real plans as his undiplomatic remarks." He pointed out that "Kasper is normally one of the Vatican's more diplomatic and emollient figures. He spent years negotiating with the Church of England. He was the man the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, rang up in a rage when plans emerged for a mass defection to the Roman Catholic Church of Anglican opponents to women priests.

"Yet he was also the man who in 2008 urged the Anglican communion to take a stand against homosexuality."

Brown added: "The standard liberal remedies for the church's decline hold no attraction for the cardinal. 'Look at the Protestant churches,' he said: 'They have married priests and women priests, too. Are they doing better? The Church of England has also taken on terrible problems with these developments. I wouldn't wish those problems on my church.'

"This is not only stupefyingly tactless, and wrong (the Church of England has 600 priests in training, half of them women; the Roman Catholic church has 39 priests in training), it is also bizarre, in view of the pope's initiative last year to welcome married Anglican clergy, if they are opposed to women priests.

"The C of E, Kasper believes, has been brought to the point of schism and collapse by compromise with the spirit of the age. He says: 'There is a crisis of values and direction in Western society which has its roots in the Enlightenment, and was given added impetus by the radical movements of the '60s. And because the churches live in this society, their faith is weakened.'

"This view will horrify many English Catholics. For the liberals in the English church, the reforming Second Vatican Council of the '60s opened the church to learning from the outside world, and the last two popes have attempted to drag down again the iron shutters which once kept the church distinct. But to Pope Benedict and his circle, the council showed it had learned all the necessary lessons of the 500 years since the Reformation. Now it is time once more for the world to learn from the church.

"This view has a certain lunatic consistency. By blaming almost everything wrong with the

church on liberalism and acoustic guitars, it pushes into the future any consideration of whether things will get better when those have been extirpated. It sets up the Catholic Church as defender of European identity against Islam, and against secularism ...

"All this, I think, is what the Vatican really believes it is up to, and Kasper just blurted it out. What his sudden mysterious illness adds to the picture is that it is determined that there should be no diplomatic incidents on this trip – and that it still has no clue how to avoid them."

So why exactly have I been under so much pressure these past few weeks? Last winter, as you will recall, was one of the worst in years, and the cold triggered awful pains in some of my joints, the likes of which I had never before experienced. My GP, a paid-up member of the Kasper school of tact, reminded me I was "knocking on a bit", and suggested the best way of avoiding what he diagnosed as arthritic pain (particularly in the knees) was to move to a warmer climate. I interpreted this as "bugger off before you become too decrepit and expensive to treat". But I allowed the idea to percolate for a while. Then, wracked with pain on a cold, drizzly Saturday morning, I made a snap decision to up sticks at the end of summer, and relocate to the Costa Blanca in Spain – a part of the world I know well.

I then set in train the packing process, not realising what an arduous, nerve-racking process this would be. Moving house, as most of you will know, is never much fun, but packing up to go abroad is a far more complex, nail-biting exercise.

Let me assure you that the move does not mean my relinquishing the editorship of the *Freethinker*. Thanks to the miracle of modern technology I will seamlessly carry on doing the job from Spain, beginning on October 1. The magazine will continue to be printed and distributed in the UK.

There is just one thing subscribers need to be aware of – a change of telephone number. I have set up a Skype account, which means that callers will not be charged extortionate rates if they need to contact me. It is **01273 78 2111**. My Skype identity is **barry.duke3**. The post box address in Brighton remains the same, and Peter Brietbart, who recently joined the *Freethinker* team and with whom I will be in constant contact, will regularly check the mailbox. But if you have internet access, I would ask you please to communicate with me via email, rather than by post.



BARRY DUKE
FREETHINKER
EDITOR

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Freethinker/GW Foote & Co Ltd
PO Box 234
Brighton BN1 4XD

Email: barry@freethinker.co.uk
Tel: 01273 782 111 Website:
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Ireland's Science Minister withdraws from anti-evolution book launch

In Dublin last month a book poo-hooing evolution was about to be launched by Ireland's Minister of State for Science, Technology and Enterprise, Conor Lenihan.

But after all hell broke loose on the internet, Lenihan pulled out of the launch of *The Origins of Specious Nonsense*, the creation of John J May, who states: "Charles Darwin and his modern 'disciples' – Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel C Dennet (*sic*), Christopher Hitchens *et al* – are the high priests of the highly improbable, foisting the impossible on the impressionable."

Lenihan, according to Michael Nugent of Atheist Ireland, had agreed to launch the book because the author is a friend of his. Said Nugent: "This is an abuse of his Ministerial position, and an attack by the Irish government on both scientists and science education."

He pointed out that last year Lenihan told a Science Foundation of Ireland summit that:



Connor Lenihan, right is shown a model of the human brain by Irish scientist John Lowry

"The relevance and value of science must continually be communicated to the general public, and how it is articulated is vital in defining how science is perceived. The task of communicating the message that 'science matters', that 'science delivers' and, above all, that investment in science in Ireland is value for money and an integral part of our economic development must be addressed by all across the scientific community."

Nugent added: "This is the type of argument that appears in the book to which Lenihan is giving the credibility of his Office – 'The Empire State building cannot be supported on a styrofoam coffee cup from Dunkin Donuts, nor a rocket go to the moon on a litre of petrol from Shell, nor the sea fit into a child's bucket on a Californian beach, yet there is more chance of all three happening (which never will) than for the awful soul-destroying fiction of evolution to be true. The frog never changed into a prince, the gods of Egypt are fantasies, Dracula never existed, the King was naked, and evolution is a demonstrable hoax just as surely as Santa Claus'."

Nugent concluded: "Of course, this is the same Conor Lenihan who five years ago described Turkish workers in Ireland as 'kebabs' during a Parliamentary debate. Lenihan was then Minister for Overseas Development and Human Rights; in the magical world of Irish politics, he was later appointed Minister for Immigration policy."

The book's author – "a leader and teacher in a Christian faith" – describes it thus: "*The Origin Of Specious Nonsense* is a plea for sanity and reason in a dangerous world further morally polluted by the corrupting hoax of evolution as tragically illustrated by the Columbine High School killers ten years ago in the USA. Those two deluded young men spoke on video about 'helping out the process of natural selection by eliminating the weak'."

He adds: "My book unambiguously demolishes the unscientific idea that we came from muck that somehow, someway, somewhere grew the astonishingly complicated chemicals and they somehow, someway, somewhere grew from slime to fish to animals – to man."

On the eve of the launch, May said he had asked Lenihan not to launch the book "because I am so embarrassed that the Minister for Science has been so 'insulted' and 'eviscerated' on a political website. 'He doesn't even believe in my central argument,' the author said.

Lenihan said while he "remained to be convinced" by Mr May's arguments, he would be attending the launch in a personal capacity as he believed "diversity of opinion is a good thing". But following May's request he has withdrawn completely from the launch.

Burn-a-Koran evangelical church in Florida besieged by protesters

POLICE in Florida last month sent reinforcements to separate angry activists gathered outside a church where Korans were to be burned on the ninth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the US, even though the church's controversial pastor had called off the event.

Signs in red letters stating that "Islam is of the Devil" were still posted outside the Dove World Outreach evangelical church, but a large sign announcing that some 200 Korans would be set ablaze on the anniversary was taken down.

After a back-and-forth lasting several days, the church's firebrand pastor, Terry Jones, said his church will not burn the Korans.

But the mere threat of torching the Muslim "holy" book triggered riots and protests around the world – and drew supporters and opponents to his tiny church in north-central Florida. To maintain order, police surrounded the church and flooded the streets with officers and patrol cars, checking all vehicles seeking to enter the area.

In the late afternoon a man pulled out a Koran and tried to burn it, but police snatched the book and took the man's lighter.

"I wanted to show my support to this church and make a symbolic Koran burning," said the man, who identified himself as Sebastian Bagby from Atlanta.

"Even if we had to cancel, this was a very good initiative, because people in the United States are afraid of Islam," said Luke Jones, 29, in charge during his father's absence. Like many church officials, Jones has a pistol slung from his waist.

A car rolled up with a picture of the 2001 terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on the window, and a statement that read: "In loving memory – Burn a Koran." Police stopped it from entering the area. Across the street protesters raised a sign that read "No Mosque at Ground Zero – Impeach Obama."



Roman Catholic Church crimes

to keep quiet. A subsequent official report, commissioned by the country's secular authorities, has established that this level of morality was the rule throughout the hierarchy, with the church taking it upon itself to 'forgive' the rapists and to lean upon their victims. Very belatedly, a few months ago, the Belgian police finally rose from their notorious torpor and raided some ecclesiastical offices in search of evidence that was being concealed. Joseph Ratzinger, who had not thus far found a voice in which to mention the doings of his Belgian underlings, promptly emitted a squeal of protest at the intervention of the law."

Hitchens said that Robertson's brief begins with a meticulous summary of the systematic fashion in which child-rape was covered up by collusion between local Catholic authorities and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, an office that under the last Pope was run by Ratzinger himself. (So flagrant was this obstruction of justice that many senior Catholic apologists have now started to blame the deceased pontiff in an effort to excuse his deputy and successor, all the while continuing to put forward Pope John Paul II as a candidate for sainthood!) The brief continues with a close examination of the Vatican's claim to be a state, and its related claim that statehood confers legal immunity on the pope, even in gross cases of abuse of human rights. Without undue difficulty, says Hitchens, Robertson shows both claims to be laughably void and based, furthermore, on a history of disgraceful collaboration with dictatorship and sheltering of wanted criminals.

Hitchens concludes: "Cardinal Newman himself was rather dubious about the late-19th-century proclamation of papal infallibility. He also asked to be buried in the same grave as his lifelong companion, Ambrose St John. The Catholic authorities have now rudely disinterred the bodies, finding nothing that had survived decay or could serve as a relic. This is grotesque enough, but not as grotesque as the air of persecuted innocence that they wear when confronted with their obscene offenses.

"Now at last there is a careful guide to legal redress, which can be taken up either by a victim or by a prosecutor and used to bring a man-made outfit, and its chief executive, within the rule of law. The sun and moon don't need to fall and the species doesn't have to die in agony in order to expiate this sin – a little application of simple earthly justice is all that is required. Will it

Continued from page 1

really continue to be withheld?"

On the same day Hitchen's piece was published, the humanist think-tank, the Institute of Ideas, accused fellow secularists of engaging in "A New Atheist witch-hunt – in stark contrast to their own professed views on tolerance".

Speaking to launch a series of religion-themed debates at this year's Battle of Ideas festival, Institute of Ideas Director Claire Fox said: "While many reacted with horror at France and Belgium with their intolerant ban on the burqa, the response of some secular campaigners shows that such demonisation of religious groups is alive and kicking in the UK."

The Institute argued: "Hysterical, oft-repeated arguments such as that the Pope is 'a leader of the world's largest paedophile ring' have more in common with contemporary heresy-hunting than the free-thinking spirit of Enlightenment secularism".

Fox added: "There are many reasons to criticise religious leaders, and plenty are coming from within the Church itself, but secularists really should take the opportunity to remind themselves of the Enlightenment values they claim to stand for – such as tolerance, freedom of thought and conscience and a human being as a rational subject – rather than focusing on what they hate about the Church and, by extension, Catholics."

Fox was speaking at the launch of a series of religion-themed debates at this year's Battle of Ideas festival, which aims to "create a more clear-thinking and rational debate on the role religion plays in a secular society".

The festival features a range of debates across the UK and beyond on the question of secular tolerance and religious freedom.

One Battle of Ideas debate to be held at the Royal College of Art, London, later this month will be "The Catholic Church: more sinned against than the sinner?" where humanist lawyer (and Catholic-born) John Fitzpatrick and US-based libertarian commentator Wendy Kaminer will be joined by humanist philosopher Peter Cave and Catholic commentator Austen Ivereigh.

We received the Institute's press release within hours of a British woman, Sue Cox – who was raped as a child by a priest – told ITV News how outraged she was by Ratzinger's visit. She said she had three reasons to oppose the state visit: "As an abuse victim; the proud mother of a gay son; and

a taxpayer". Cox was molested by the priest on the day before her Catholic confirmation at the age of 10 and, three years later, the same priest raped her, she revealed in an interview with the BBC last month. She told her mother, a staunch Catholic who was "priest-obsessed" and chose to ignore the episode.



Sue Cox, pictured as a devout young Catholic girl

That was 50 years ago. The priest in question has since died, and his order, the Sacred Heart Fathers, has paid Ms Cox £25,000 in compensation.

Cox's is just one of hundreds of claims in the UK – and thousands more around the world. Since 2001, the Vatican has considered sex-abuse allegations concerning some 3,000 priests and dating back half a century.

Cox, who started to self-harm after she was first molested by the priest, said she has been treated condescendingly by Church officials. She added that letters from Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster, offering to pray for her, were condescending and inadequate.

After she was abused, she also began drinking alcohol, becoming an alcoholic by the age of 15. It took half a century for Cox – who is now 63 and an award-winning therapist – to tell her story.

Another victim – Anne Lawrence, a Catholic who was abused as a child, and sought help from the Church only to be sexually abused by a priest – said the Church needed to establish an inquiry and work to redress survivors' grievances.

"That is the only way the Church itself can heal," said Ms Lawrence, who is now chair of Macsas (Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors).

The group held a meeting in London last month to write messages that abuse victims had hoped to present to the Pope during his visit.

But this request was turned down by the Church, which support groups say reflects the Church's refusal to publicly acknowledge abuse cases.

Ultra-Orthodox zealots are driving Israel towards theocracy

REPORTS emerging from Israel over the past month show a worrying slide by the country into a state of theocracy as the Government bends over backwards to accommodate the barmy wishes of ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Measures include the early end to Israeli summertime in mid-September to coincide with the start of Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement; the shutting down of the Interior Ministry's website on the Sabbath; and the launch of a gender apartheid light rail service in Jerusalem.

Several weeks ahead of everybody else, Israel put the clocks back by an hour – a move which outraged many Israelis who said this was a nonsensical move forced on them by a religious minority trying to make it easier for those who observe the fast on Yom Kippur.

Thousands of Israelis have already signed a petition against the move, arguing that the abrupt end to summer would cause more road accidents, give parents less playtime with their children, and lead to depression.

Ha'aretz, an Israeli newspaper, slammed the early clock change. It pointed out that "the conventional explanation is that observant Jews can sleep an hour longer in the morning, and so will experience one hour less of hunger pangs. But that is contemptible gimmickry. The whole point of the fast is to mortify the soul."

The synchronisation of the change with Yom Kippur was introduced in 2005 at the behest of religious politicians. But the move means that Israel is weeks out of line with other countries, which keep daylight saving time until late October. Politicians are also lending their weight to those in favour of changing the law.

Nitzan Horowitz, a member of the left-wing Meretz party, plans to introduce a Bill after the Jewish holidays proposing to extend daylight saving hours to the last weekend before 1 November.

"It is unfortunate that this year, too, because of religious coercion – and it is impossible to understand the connection between religion and this issue – daylight saving time will end before autumn begins," Horowitz told *The Jerusalem Post*.

In the same week as the clocks changed, Interior Minister Eli Yishai ordered his ministry's computer department to reprogramme its online payment service so that people will no longer be able to pay the ministry over the



Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai

internet on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays.

The ministry accepts online payments for a wide variety of services, including renewing a passport or visa, replacing a lost identity card and applying for a permit to hire a foreign worker. Until Yishai issued his new directive last week, such payments could be made seven days a week.

Assaf Zentner, a high-tech worker who typically works very long hours, said he resents the new policy. "People who work hard throughout the week rely on the weekend to take care of [personal] business, and the internet is part of this," he said, accusing Yishai of being "stuck in the Middle Ages".

Liat Azarya, who also said she relied on weekends to tend to such tasks, termed the decision "pure [religious] coercion".

"If we were causing someone to work I'd understand it," she said. "But that's precisely

why the internet is good for this purpose."

Yishai is not the first to introduce this prohibition: The National Insurance Institute website also does not accept payments on the sabbath and Jewish holidays.

Earlier this summer the authorities in Jerusalem announced the introduction of a light rail service that would have separate cars for men and women in deference to the city's ultra-Orthodox Jewish population.

CityPass CEO Yair Naveh said that he supports segregated cars on the train. He said: "The train was built to serve everyone. [But] I think it is required to create alternatives for everyone, and that option exists because of the train's division into cars. It is not a problem to declare every third or fourth car a mehadrin (kosher) car."

Rachel Azariya, a member of the Jerusalem city council and one of the opponents of the existing mehadrin bus lines in Jerusalem (on which men sit in the front of the bus and women sit only in the back), criticised Naveh's declaration, saying that: "Naveh is apparently unaware of the high court ruling forbidding further segregation. Naveh was appointed to run a project – that doesn't mean that he can tell people where to sit and where not to sit, nor does it mean that he knows anything about values and democracy."

Jewish singer receives 39 lashes for performing in front of a mixed audience

A SINGER was sentenced in August by a religious court in Jerusalem to 39 lashes for performing in front of a mixed audience.

Erez Yecheil, was beaten 39 times to make him "repent," after a ruling by a rabbinical court.

Rabbi Amnon Yitzhak, founder of the Shofar organisation aimed at bringing Jews "back to religion", has made it his recent mission to fight off the "evil" of men and women mixing at musical performances, and his "judicial panel," comprising himself, Rabbi Ben Zion Mutsafi and a third "judge", sentenced Yecheil to 39 lashes in order to "rid him of his sins."

In a video clip of the court Ben Zion said that those who lead others into sin, such as artists who make men and women attend performances or dance together, have no place in the world to come.

He displayed a leather strip he said was made by his father from ass and bull skin, with which Yecheil was beaten.

Yecheil, who said, "I accept upon myself the lashing for my sins," was ordered to stand by a wooden pole with his head facing north ("from whence the evil inclination comes"). His hands tied with an azure-coloured rope ("a symbol of mercy"), and the sentence was then carried out.

More than 10,000 rallied in London



The message could not have been clearer: 'P'

BRITONS turned out in their thousands on September 18, 2010, to express their outrage over the Pope State costly state visit to the UK – a visit that even left many British Catholics cold.

Why such antipathy? Well, the signatories to a letter published in the *Guardian* on the eve of Ratzinger's visit, put it in a nutshell.

We, the undersigned, share the view that Pope Ratzinger should not be given the honour of a state visit to this country. We believe that the pope, as a citizen of Europe and the leader of a religion with many adherents in the UK, is of course free to enter and tour our country. However, as well as a religious leader, the pope is a head of state, and the state and organisation of which he is head has been responsible for:

- Opposing the distribution of condoms and so increasing large families in poor countries and the spread of Aids
- Promoting segregated education

- Denying abortion to even the most vulnerable women
- Opposing equal rights for lesbians, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- Failing to address the many cases of abuse of children within its own organisation.
- The state of which the Pope is head has also resisted signing many major human rights treaties and has formed its own treaties ("concordats") with many states which negatively affect the human rights of citizens of those states. In any case, we reject the masquerading of the Holy See as a state and the pope as a head of state as merely a convenient fiction to amplify the international influence of the Vatican.

The signatories were Stephen Fry, Professor Richard Dawkins, Professor Susan Blackmore, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman, Ed Byrne, Baroness Blackstone, Ken Follett, Professor AC Grayling, Stewart Lee, Baroness Massey, Claire Rayner, Adele Anderson, John Austin MP,

Lord Avebury, Sian Berry, Professor Simon Blackburn, Sir David Blatherwick, Sir Tom Blundell, Dr Helena Cronin, Dylan Evans, Hermione Eyre, Lord Foulkes, Professor Chris French, Natalie Haynes, Johann Hari, Jon Holmes, Lord Hughes, Robin Ince, Dr Michael Irwin, Professor Steve Jones, Sir Harold Kroto, Professor John Lee, Zoe Margolis, Jonathan Meades, Sir Jonathan Miller, Diane Munday, Maryam Namazie, David Nobbs, Professor Richard Norman, Lord O'Neill, Simon Price, Paul Rose, Martin Rowson, Michael Rubenstein, Joan Smith, Dr Harry Stopes-Roe, Professor Raymond Tallis, Lord Taverne, Peter Tatchell, Baroness Turner, Professor Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC FBA, Ann Marie Waters, Professor Wolpert, and Jane Wynne Willson.

And here are some statistics to back their case:

- More than half of the Catholic clergy jailed for child abuse in

London to protest against Pope's visit



Protesters: 'Ratzinger, you are not wanted in Britain'

England and Wales following the 2001 Nolan Report were still in the priesthood.

According to a Channel 4 report, at least 14 of the 22 priests who served a year or more appear in the latest church yearbook. The church said that of the 14, six applications for dismissal were being processed and another three had been rejected by Rome or had not been pursued because of ill health.

- A BBC poll of British Catholics said that almost half wanted the Vatican to drop the celibacy requirement for priests.
- A Populus poll for *The Times* revealed that two-thirds of respondents were unhappy with the Pope's visit. An overwhelming majority believed the church to be judgmental and intolerant.
- More than 80 per cent felt the church had been dishonest about the abuse of children.
- Women were particularly unhappy about the cost of the visit, estimated



The top three photos on this page were taken by Robert Stovold, pictured above, one of a sizeable contingent of Brighton atheists who travelled to London for the rally

at between £15 million and £25 million, excluding policing and security costs. Fifty-seven per cent said they did not feel strongly about the visit but objected to the taxpayer paying for it.

- The poll showed 73 per cent believed the church should drop its opposition to abortion, 79 per cent felt contraception should be supported and 72 per cent backed women priests.

THE 'RELIGION OF PEACE'

Three reflections on Islam

The threatened incineration of Korans, growing outrage over the planned mosque at Ground Zero in New York, and the banning of burqas in some European countries has thrown Islam into sharp focus in recent weeks. This prompted three *Freethinker* contributors – **JACK HASTIE**, **JAMES MERRYWEATHER** and **ASAD ABBAS** – to pen their thoughts on a religion that seldom fails to ignite passions throughout the world

Islam and treason

ANY society, even the most ethnically and culturally homogeneous, must contain within its population a wide range of opinions and values; from those, for example, of Michael Foot to those of Margaret Thatcher, from *Eurotrash* to Mary Whitehouse, from Richard Dawkins to Cormac Murphy O'Connor. Except in abnormal circumstances – Fascists in the 'thirties and early 'forties, Communists during the Cold War – the silent majority in liberal democracies tolerates such differences easily as matters of personal opinion, and accepts as harmless oddballs vegans, Druids, and practitioners of Wicca.

But some affiliations have emotional roots that run deep and are not based on rational personal evaluation.

For three centuries we Britishers have had an identity problem involving such affiliations. The English were, until relatively recently, blissfully unaware of it; they simply assumed that "English" and "British" were synonymous. The Scots, Welsh and Irish did have a problem; they were adamant that they weren't English, but were unclear to what extent they were still Scots etc and/or British. Scots soldiered for the Union Jack, but played football for Scotland.

Now with the entry of the UK into the EU we must also ask to what extent we have become Europeans. Are we Scots/English/Irish etc, or Brits, or Euros? Do we make financial sacrifices to bail out Greece? Do we welcome Polish immigrant workers? On a sporting level, can the same person support Wales at rugby, Britain in the Olympic Games and Europe in the Ryder Cup?

Norman Tebbit famously proposed the "cricket test": "When the West Indies or Pakistan come touring who do you sup-

port?" And Barnsley born and bred Mick McCarthy played international football for the Republic of Ireland. This made me think: if I emigrated to Australia and a Scottish team came visiting wouldn't I at least wave the St Andrew's Flag? Would that make me a bad Aussie?

One thing, however, is clear; there is no inherent contradiction among these different levels of emotional commitment. Someone might choose to be Irish, British and European. Or he might not; he might choose with Sinn Fein to be Irish but not British, or with UKIP to be British but not European. But there is no absolute incompatibility among these competing loyalties. It is possible for an Ian Paisley to be proud of being both Irish and British.

However, in certain circumstances, at least in theory, a combination of ideology and traditional community solidarity might bring about a meeting of oil and water which could not mix.

From the middle of the 16th century, from the reigns of Mary, Queen of Scots and Mary Tudor, to the collapse of the second Jacobite Rebellion in 1746, it was difficult not to equate Roman Catholicism with treason in Britain. Catholic monarchs from the two Marys to James VII and II attempted to impose by force a religion which the majority in Scotland and England had decisively rejected. Their supporters also tended to favour a return to absolute monarchy while the powers of the king were being steadily eroded in both countries. To achieve their ends Catholics were prepared not only to plot the assassination of heads of government, as did Ridolfi and Babbington in the reign of Elizabeth Tudor and Guy Fawkes in that of James I, and to undertake open armed rebellion (in 1569, 1715 and 1745), but to invoke the support of foreign

Catholic absolute monarchs, Philip II of Spain and Louis XIV and XV of France.

One consequence of this was the passing of the English Act of Settlement in 1701 which barred from the throne



Catholics and anyone married to a Catholic. Today the fact that this is still on the statute book is correctly held up as a disgraceful example of religious discrimination, but at the time it was a prudent precaution.

Three hundred years later Britain has to ask whether it is possible not to equate Islam with treason. British Catholics nowadays are good citizens. Why not British Muslims? Obviously the answer depends on which variety of Islam we are dealing with. Islam exhibits almost as much diversity as Christianity. Would an ordinary Muslim be aware of the difference between Quakerism and Catholicism? Would he distinguish the beliefs of Unitarians from those of Jehovah's Witnesses? So it would be stereotyping of the worst sort to conclude that the proprietor of your local convenience store is an active supporter of Al-Qaeda.



A more recent historical parallel may be with the internment of Italian cafe owners during the Second World War when Britain was at war with Italy, as presumably it is today with Al Qaeda. Most of those interned were as harmless as your Pakistani grocer.

But, if the examples of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan are in any way relevant, mainstream traditional Islam in both its Sunni and Shi'a divisions does appear to define a society which is incompatible with the secular, liberal democratic environment in which we, in Britain and Western Europe generally, have chosen to live.

Have chosen. Note the tense! Europe was not always secular or tolerant. 17th-century Scottish Calvinism in particular was not unlike Al-Qaeda's Wahhabi brand of Islam without the suicide bombers.

But, then history happened; the civil wars, persecutions and revolutions of the 17th century; the 18th-century Enlightenment; the growth of liberal philosophy and representative government in the 19th century and the increasing secularisation of society in the 20th. British society is not where it is today by accident but by dint of hundreds of years of conflict, bloodshed and agonising choice. If we reject what Islam seems to stand for, it is not out of bigotry or whim. We have been there; and we have deliberately chosen to leave.

What then in traditional Islam, as interpreted in Riyadh and Teheran, is incompatible with our contemporary British values which have been defined over centuries?

It is easy to go for the headline grabbers: the subjection of women, arranged marriages, hijab and all; female genital mutilation; homophobia; the inhumane halal slaughter of food animals; Koranic corporal and capital punishments. More fundamental is the entire socio-theological philosophy behind sharia law and its provisions relating to a raft of subjects, including business finance, inheritance, marriage and divorce, and judicial procedures.

Perhaps most fundamental of all is the Muslim insistence on the sovereignty of the Koran which must transcend our constitutional doctrine of the sovereignty of the monarch, override the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and oblige us to abandon the right to ridicule the ridiculous and accept a priestly censorship enforced by fatwas and death threats.

Put like that, Islam is incompatible with secular, liberal democracy. But perhaps our

British Muslim community will turn liberal and abandon the fire and brimstone, much as milk-and-water, broad-church Christians have done. If so, toothless British Muslims will be as good citizens as toothless British Catholics.

This will, however, involve their acceptance of sexual equality and the right of others to criticise the Koran and publish cartoons of Mohammed.

If they are unwilling to do this they will still have what we might call "the Amish option". The Old Order Amish in America reject almost everything that has been invented or discovered since the 17th century. But they so tuck themselves away in remote rural villages that they are able to avoid contact with almost all those works of Satan.

Scottish "Wee Free" Presbyterians, clinging to windswept islands in the furthest west, also manage to preserve an outmoded, Sabbatarian way of life in comparative isolation. Even more widely distributed groups like the Mormons manage to stay on the right side of the law by not, for the present, practising customs such as plural marriage (polygamy) in which they continue to believe. There is, then, an option to be a good Muslim citizen while watching the infidel world around you go to Hell.

This is something which, ultimately, the British Muslim community itself must address. But our domestic social and educational policies should pursue, as a priority, remedial measures, probably extending to positive discrimination, designed to nudge that community towards liberal or at least "Amish" accommodations with our society.

But if a significant number of Muslims in Britain have a sense of mission like Guy Fawkes or the London Bombers and enough of their co-religionists are prepared to offer safe houses and perjury in their support; if they have foreign paymasters and foreign training bases as did the post-Reformation Catholic activists; and if they are prepared to receive the fatwas of Iranian ayatollahs as 16th-century English Catholics received the Papal Bull of 1570, which effectively called on them to depose Queen Elizabeth, then the rest of us will have to redefine the meanings of citizenship and treason, and grapple with the problem of how to preserve liberal democracy in the face of a sizeable, aggressive, illiberal anti-democratic fifth column.

In that worst-case scenario we will assuredly reject out of hand three of the historical precedents set by communities

Three reflections on Islam

who, rightly or wrongly, felt themselves to be similarly threatened: genocide (as of German Jews, Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians); wholesale expulsion (as of the Muslim Moriscos from 16th-century Spain); confinement in reservations (South African Bantustans; Medieval Jewish ghettos).

But we will have to do something to protect our society, not only from Muslim fundamentalism, but also from the inevitable and equally illiberal BNP and Defence Leagues backlash.

— Jack Hastie

Encounters with the burqa and some social consequences

ONE sunny Saturday I found myself standing thoroughly perplexed in the middle of Ness Bridge in Inverness. I was walking into town when I encountered two Asian women, the older of them propelling a child across the bridge in a pushchair. On reflection, I should think they were mother and daughter: grandmother and mother of the child. What gave me a profound jolt was my automatic reaction to an unexpected smile, gently beamed at me by the younger woman, definitely aimed in my direction. It was brief, but unequivocal, uncomplicated and warm, offered in simple acknowledgement of my presence with no motive apparent other than temporary person-to-person connection.

What really shocked me was the realisation that I automatically switched off that connection, effectively rejecting a sincere, undemanding salutation. Soon it dawned on me why: previous encounters with Islam in Yorkshire.

A few weeks earlier I had visited Bradford, a pilgrimage to my favourite feeding station, The Karachi, which is the most basic Pakistani “caff” where the food is fabulous. A friend introduced me to its delights around thirty years ago when I feel certain it was known as The Karachi Social Club and the juke box (long gone) included in its collection an imported pop song that went, “The she I love is a pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty”,

sung by a chap with a Peter Sellars “Goodness gracious me” accent.

I was there with a daughter and five-year-old grandson. My daughters have been brought up to love Karachi food and this was to be Toby’s first, not an outrageous success since he exhibited irrational fear of food he’d never tried and had to be ordered omelette and chips to stop him spoiling everybody else’s pleasure with a self-obsessed outburst of anguish. However, before we visited the holy of holies there was shopping to be done.

As we queued to pay at a household goods store we found ourselves adjacent to two Asian women in headscarves with a little boy, very much like ourselves: grandparent, parent and child. We all stood patiently while a woman argued with the teenager on the checkout over a too-well-used return item. Both of the little boys were getting bored with inactivity and had to be reined in by their mothers. Having had nothing to do, other than regularly admonish the children, recognition of our common situation dawned on both family groups and a little light interaction seemed imminent.

Suddenly, the Asian women both withdrew from our-ever-so slight interaction. They severed the connection that had so naturally arisen between us and turned away just enough to show they wanted no more part in it. They had so nearly fallen into the trap of being nice to a group of other people that included a man!

These women had visible faces and discernible personalities. I had been astonished to encounter women (I presume) walking through Bradford in full burqa with an opaque grill, not even an eye slit. I have been visiting the city for several decades and Pakistanis have always been part of the scene, but this was new and disturbingly sinister. What unsettled me was that there was absolutely no indication, other than the general outline, of a human inside the black shroud, unlike when I first witnessed the phenomenon in Turkey. There, occupants’ personalities were still evident despite the covers. The cable car in which we travelled to the top of Uludag (with a silent ‘g’) mountain also carried a rotund wealthy Turk with his harem, all of



them covered head to toe, who were chattering and giggling, and squealed charmingly as if on a fairground ride each time the car lurched over a pylon. At the top of the mountain, among trees and public barbecues, we were most amused to see a young woman lift her veil to insert

an ice cream! There was life in these almost invisible women, but none apparent in their dour Bradford equivalents. In Turkey I felt comfortable, but at home the burqa was very unnerving.

My Ness Bridge perplexity was the result of a mismatch of the exclusion behaviour I had witnessed in Bradford followed by the complete opposite in Inverness. I wish I had had the presence of mind simply to smile back – no more.

— James Merryweather

Islamophobic? There's no need to apologise

WE ALL know that the label Islamophobic is bandied about freely and quite deliberately in order to make the person to whom it is being applied feel guilty as the not-so-subtle implication is that he or she is prejudiced against Muslims and is, therefore, a racist.

I think that Islamists are pastmasters at exploiting the guilt feelings of people who are conscious of and care about the raw deal that Muslims do sometimes get.

In his excellent book, *The Islamist*, Ed Husain describes how, in colleges and universities, Hizbut Tahrir, an organisation to which he once belonged, employ a strategy which not only tries to make the authorities feel guilty, but at the same time produces feelings of persecution among the Muslim students.

They ask for facilities for prayers, gatherings etc, and if those requests are readily met they then increase the demands deliberately to such an unreasonable level

that they know the authorities will have to reject them. Once that happens, they accuse the authorities of racism and Islamophobia and at the same time point out to the students that the treatment which is being meted out to them is but a very small example of the way Muslims are being treated the world over; citing the examples of Iraq, Palestine etc.

I think that this free use of the word Islamophobic is meant to achieve the same two ends. It is intended to make liberal people like Polly Toynbee (who in 2004 was declared Islamophobe of the Year by the Islamic Human Rights Commission) experience feelings of guilt, and is also meant to make Muslims feel persecuted. By thus silencing liberal opinion the Islamists try to achieve their desired aim of stifling any criticism of Islam – at least from that quarter.

As an ex-Muslim I am quite happy to be described as Islamophobic; and all the ex-Muslims I know, I am sure, will say the same. We surely know more than anyone else that, when it comes to Islam, we have so much to be phobic about! We are not, however, *Muslimophobic*. We couldn't be when we are all aware that those who are nearest and dearest to us are Muslims.

My point is that we should not at all recoil from being called Islamophobic. We

should readily accept the label, but should hasten to point out that it does not mean that we are Muslimophobic, and prove it by our conduct. And we should try to give currency to the word Muslimphobia and make the distinction between Islamophobia and Muslimphobia widely known and appreciated.

This should also help in exposing the BNP for what they are. At present they, like Polly Toynbee, are labelled Islamophobic but they are not. They are Muslimophobic.

In an excellent pamphlet which the National Secular Society has produced on the subject, it is acknowledged that many Muslims face discrimination and bigotry and may be victims of racism, and it is correctly stated that Islamophobia is not an appropriate description of this problem. It is suggested that the expression anti-Muslim bigotry is a more suitable alternative, or where race is really the issue, just racism.

I think that I am proposing the term Muslimphobia as a synonym for anti-Muslim bigotry because it rolls off the tongue more easily but, more importantly, since the word phobia is commonly being used and not bigotry, then it would serve a useful purpose if it is made quite clear that in some cases the appropriate word is Islamophobia and in others Muslimphobia.

We saw during the last election campaign how the BNP specifically employed Muslimphobia in addition to their usual racism. They targeted those constituencies which

have sizeable Muslim populations and tried to make people fear a future in which they claimed Muslims and Islamic values will dominate.

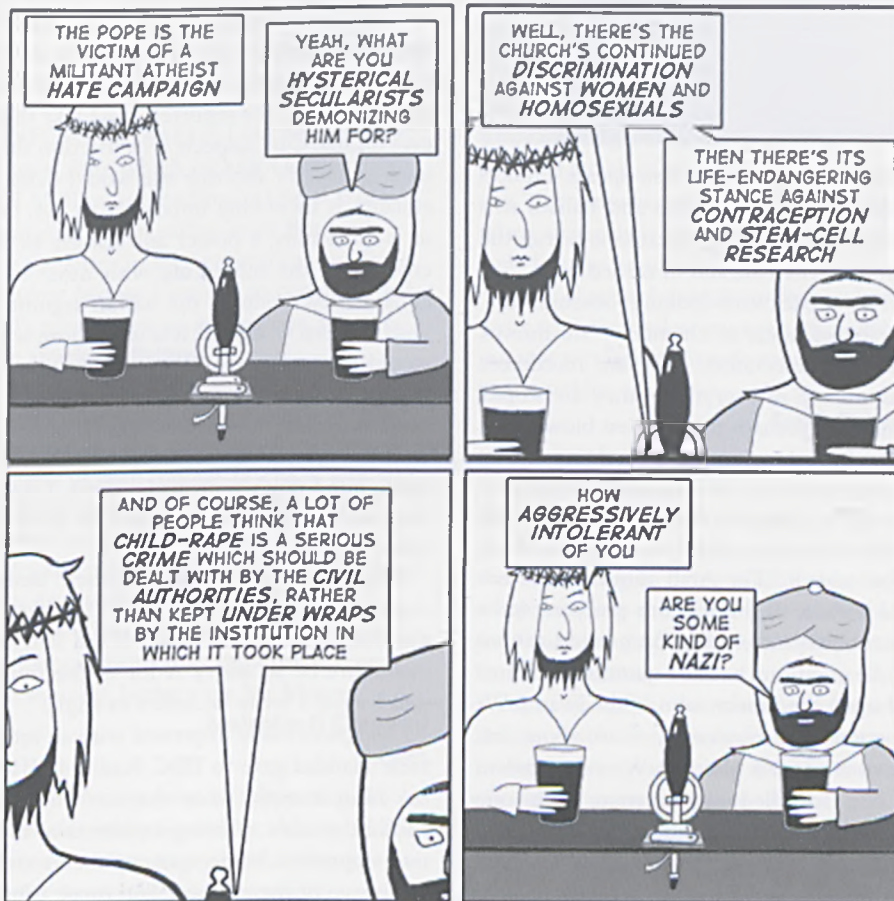
As the target here was not other Asians like Hindus or Sikhs but only Muslims, racism does not cover this situation. I think that the BNP should be accused of both racism and Muslimphobia, whereas journalists who whip up the fear of Muslims by talking about Eurabia are clearly only being Muslimphobic.

The NSS pamphlet to which I referred, points out "While people should be protected from persecution and discrimination, ideas are fair game. Like Christianity, or Buddhism, or Scientology, Islam is just a set of ideas ... It should be considered no worse questioning an Islamic idea than it is critiquing a political party's election manifesto".

I think that we protect Muslims by categorically stating that Muslimphobia is unacceptable but at the same time by accepting the label of Islamophobic, clearly stating that we will criticise Islam, as we may criticise any other ideology, because we think that there is so much in Islam which *should* be criticised. The message we will thus give to Islamists is that we see through their game; that we will not let them deter us from criticising Islam by making us feel guilty because we know that being Islamophobic is not the same as being Muslimphobic and we are not Muslimphobic.

– Asad Abbas

Jesus & Mo



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Ethics and the dark side of science

IN the 2010 Conway Memorial Lecture, to be held at the Conway Hall, London on October 28 at 6pm, Professor Jonathan Glover will explore the ethics of scientific research and endeavour to understand if it is necessary to decide what the responsibilities of individual scientists are, or ought to be with regard to the moral consequences of their work.

Given that we live in a world in which nation states and other groups develop weapons with appalling possibilities, he asks: "should scientists never take part, or can the defensive development of such weapons sometimes be the lesser evil?"

Jonathan Glover is the Director of the Centre for Medical Law & Ethics at King's College London and Distinguished Research Fellow at the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, University of Oxford. He has written several books, including *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* and *Causing Death and Saving Lives*.

Entry is free.

Joumana Haddad: Lebanon's most hated woman

CHRISTINE O'FARRELL has been following the publicity this flamboyant writer received during her recent visit to Britain

JOUMANA Haddad is precisely the sort of woman who arouses dust clouds of fury among many Arab men. Leaving aside her scornful approach to religion – ALL religion – and her gutsy refusal to kowtow to the social mores dictated by Islam for the majority of its women, Haddad is the publisher of *Jasad*, a glossy quarterly magazine dedicated to all matters corporeal.

It contains serious reportage about polygamy, virginity and forced marriage, but also erotic stories and personal testimony, all of which are published under her real name.

The first year that Joumana Haddad took her new magazine to the Beirut book fair, according to a report in the *Guardian* in August, “her posters were torn down, there were bitter complaints to the director, and Hezbollah, whose stall was directly opposite hers, tried to close her down.”

**These backward looking
obscurantists – Arab
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Haddad has many other critics, not all of them so gentlemanly. They hack into her website and fill her inbox with threats of rape and murder and stoning, call her debauched, immoral, criminal and wicked, a bleak litany she appears to accept as an unavoidable consequence of what she does.

The only threat she admits to being seriously rattled by was a promise to throw acid at her – that caused nightmares, and when, not long after, she suspected she was being followed, she didn't drive her own car, or even leave her home in a seaside suburb of Beirut for weeks.

The threats, said Aida Edemariam of the *Guardian*, aren't likely to end any time soon: Haddad's latest project, *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of An Angry Arab Woman*, began as a furious response to a passing comment by a Swedish journalist interviewing her

about *Jasad* (“Most of us in the West,” said that hapless lady, “are not familiar with the possibility of liberated Arab women like you existing”) and expanded into a vivid assertion of individuality, free speech, free choice and dignity against religious bigotry, prejudice and the herd instinct both within and outside the Arab world, and within and outside Islam; Haddad herself comes from a Catholic family, and she criticises Christians as well as Muslims. Written in forthright,



aphoristic English (she also speaks French, Arabic, Armenian, Spanish and Italian) it is often frankly thrilling, because it carries the frisson of true risk, and of earned fury:

“These backward-looking obscurantists” – Arab defenders of chastity – “are thieves. They are desecrators. They are murderers. And, on top of everything, they are stupid. And this is perhaps the cruellest blow.

“We have done, and keep on doing, almost everything we can to encourage intolerance towards us. Being an Arab today means you need to be a hypocrite.”

She added: “The Arab mind is in crisis. And because of this it wants everyone to be in crisis with it ... The Arab mind cannot handle questions, because questions can hurt and upset the murky calm of the swamp. We constantly and obsessively think about sex, but dare not talk about it. We rid ourselves of one so-called abomination with one hand, then practise intellectual debauchery, which is much worse, with the other.”

I Killed Scheherazade has already been translated into six languages – but not, yet, into

Arabic. Haddad intends to write that version herself, and rather than tone it down, she plans to make it an even stronger attack on the world she comes from, and on her gender: not for her the idea of Arab women as a mass of silent suffering – rather, she sees a collection of individuals, many of whom “indulge in being a victim, especially when [they're] living a comfortable life, like many women in Saudi Arabia”, or are content, like many Lebanese women, with only superficial emancipation. There are those, for example in Afghanistan, “who can do nothing about it for the time being”, but many more who must take some responsibility for their own erasure. “It's really important for me to say that. Because I frankly don't feel that many women are doing enough to change their state.”

When Haddad met Aida Edemariam she was wearing an electric blue mini-dress, neon pink nails, aggressive heels, vivid make-up and cascading hair. “The waiters at the Lebanese restaurant in west London where we met,” wrote the reporter “can't take their eyes off her. One suspects it's a reaction she's used to, but it's also one she would defend: equality is incredibly important to her, but so is femininity, a power and danger to be enjoyed to the hilt, along with more cerebral achievements. If she has an argument with western feminism, it is with those who would downplay this. “I would never want to look like a man or act like a man. I don't need to. I mean, I love men, and I love being with them, and I love communicating with them, but I don't want to be them. I don't want to feel like I have to be like them in order to be heard!”

Why doesn't she leave altogether? Beirut seems to elicit such anger and loathing – but that's part of the point. If she left, she “wouldn't be so angry. A lot of the things that I write I write because I'm angry.”

I was particularly impressed with an interview Haddad gave to BBC Radio 4's *Women's Hour* recently, when she accused many Muslim women of being architects of their own oppression by bringing up their sons in the image of their fathers, and inculcating a sense of inferiority in their daughters.

points of view...

A DIG IN THE POST BAG – LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

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MUD-SLINGING? WHAT MUD-SLINGING?

I AGREE with Graham Moore that *Freethinker* correspondents should “limit themselves to rational, fact-based arguments rather than indulge their personal animosities in print” (*Points of View*, September). But I reject emphatically his accusation of “petty mud-slinging” in my letter in August.

Mr Moore’s pot-shot fell short of the mark. Certainly I was critical of “Diesel Balaam” and his feisty libertarianism. But in what respect was my August letter not factual? What was irrational about criticising Mr Balaam’s continual carping and abusing liberals? Should criticism of any correspondent’s published statements be dismissed as personal animosity?

Bill McIlroy
Hove

UNFORTUNATELY, I did not see the August issue which included a letter from Bill McIlroy responding to Diesel Balaam’s comments in an earlier issue. But reading the letter in the September issue from Graeme Moore I was led to conclude that Bill’s missive was an *ad-hominem*, vituperative attack on Balaam.

So I was very surprised when I did acquire a copy of the August issue to find that his letter was a restrained and rather politely written tongue-in-cheek response to Balaam, not the “petty mudslinging” claimed by Mr Moore.

Yes, the main purpose of *Points of View* is to discuss and comment on substantive issues, but lively responses to personal criticism is sometimes appropriate – and entertaining! Lighten up, Mr Moore.

Malcolm G Cornwall
Lewes

THIS, in twenty years of supporting the *Freethinker*, is my first letter; although I do write very often to my local newspaper on secular topics and religious points.

Like Graeme Moore (*Points of View*,

September) along with the majority of freethinkers I think that rational based argument is much more advantageous than personal animosity.

It is therefore a surprise to me that he accuses Bill McIlroy of resorting to “petty mudslinging”. I cannot think of anything more incorrect.

I don’t know of any other freethinker who has accomplished more support and well-being to the National Secular Society than Bill.

I have no idea if Graeme Moore has any knowledge of Bill McIlroy’s unstinting work over a vast number of years – author, editor of this magazine, writer of secular topics, organiser, and much work at local level.

I know he will be much taken aback by my letter, he being a very modest person. The last thing Bill would engage in is personal attack of any kind. As he always says “anyone who resorts to personal attacks when airing their viewpoint has immediately lost the argument”.

In conclusion, I urge more freethinkers to write to their local newspapers, thus ensuring that secularism is made more apparent to the public.

Frank Pidgeon
Worthing

THE attack on Bill McIlroy in the September *Freethinker* is quite unjustified. Bill was responding to being called cowardly, condescending and whining. If there was any “mud-slinging” then it was perpetrated by Diesel Balaam.

Whilst I accept the point made by Diesel Balaam that some liberals are well-intentioned but misguided, that is far from being the case in many instances.

Charles Kingsley and the Christian Socialists were (despite the name) 19th-century liberals who were alarmed by the radicalism of the Chartists. The Beveridge Report was

a hard-headed, logical, liberal response to the radicalism that had emerged during the war. Workers were not prepared to accept a return to the poverty of the 1930s. By ameliorating some of the worst effects of capitalism and averting the perceived threat of revolution, the system could continue. Liberals are capitalists with a conscience. They dislike the misery that capitalism causes, but do not want an alternative. Their reforms are palliatives and fail to solve the world’s problems, but there is nothing “wishy-washy” in their thinking, which has been successful in keeping more radical voices in check.

Carl Pinel
Chapel-en-le-Frith

MY first point is that the *Freethinker* is for free thought. I believe that if we are to put forward rational arguments, let us use personal views without being disrespectful of others with opposing views.

We need compromise. After all, we are all on the same path to make the world a better place for future generations; let us agree to disagree without being personal towards other contributors, as we get nowhere.

Elaine Kilshaw
Brighton & Hove Humanist Society

I AM sure I am not the only one who despairs of the crabby old men who clutter up the letters page of the *Freethinker* with their impotent fulminations.

The August letters page was a case in point – a very poor advert for secular humanism indeed! Both Graham Livingstone and Bill McIlroy insist on having the last word, even when their ill-tempered, self-aggrandising ramblings have been comprehensively shredded by those of us who take a more balanced, rational and rounded view of the world.

No matter. Let the tub-thumping lefties and sniping, lost-the-plot pensioners have the last word. They will influence absolutely nothing. As a positive counterpoint to Graham Livingstone’s repetitive, one-sided dogma and Bill McIlroy’s snide irascibility,

points of view...

I would like to propose the novel idea that we all, each one of us, focus our energies and talents on resisting and counteracting the baleful influence of religion in all our lives, rather than use them to attack other secularists who just happen to have a slightly different approach and motivation than we do.

Diesel Balaam
London

HISTORICITY OF JESUS

Robert Morrell (*Points of View*, September) puts himself above the “learned authorities” I mentioned in my book who believe that Tacitus’ reference to “Christus” is evidence for the historicity of Jesus. Of course he can do that, but he cannot expect us to take him seriously. In any case, what if Tacitus’ record did arise from “hearsay”, as he claims? That does not necessarily mean that Jesus did not exist; what Tacitus heard could be reliable and one has to allow that he must have checked his source.

I do not assert that Suetonius’ reference to a tumult among the Roman Jews caused by one “Chrestus” is evidence for the historicity of Jesus, nor do I claim to be “better informed”. But I do draw attention to those who believe that this was a misspelling of ‘Christus’ (perhaps made because “Chrestus” was a common name) and that it does constitute such evidence.

I have no argument with the idea that Jesus was a Nazarene and that this sect disappeared in the Jewish War (66-70), leaving Paul a clear field to turn Jesus into a universal saviour god. After all that is one of the themes of my book. But if that is Mr Morrell’s belief, why is he challenging the historicity of Jesus?

Regarding the burden of proof, I refer Robert Stovold (*Points of View*, same issue) to the Wikipedia page that describes the philosophical burden of proof (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophic_burden_of_proof) and I trust that he accepts that this burden is often asymmetrical and typically falls more heavily on the party that makes either an ontologically positive claim, or makes a claim more extraordinary, ie is farther removed from conventionally accepted facts.

So which is more extraordinary: that Jesus existed or that he did not? Because

the conventionally accepted view is that he existed, the burden of proof must be on those who claim otherwise.

I fail to see how this confuses practice with principle. The burden of proof has nothing to do with how one approaches a problem. Nor is it helpful to confuse this issue by making it a debate about the alleged divinity of Jesus or any other aspect of the gospel.

I take the editor’s claim that Christianity “rests on a bedrock of lies” (“Free-thinking Aloud”, same issue) as a bungled attempt to express the idea that it is founded on untruths. However, a “lie” is “an intentionally false statement” and we do not have evidence that anyone deliberately lied about the “bedrock” (the story of the Resurrection?). It is a mistake to presume that if someone tells you something that you know or believe to be untrue then that person is lying. Christians do not lie when they tell you what they believe about their faith, even though they are probably mistaken.

Wikipedia has a page dedicated to the question of Jesus’ historicity (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Jesus).

Steuart Campbell
Edinburgh

FREEWILL

MAY I reply to the letters of David James and John Gibson in the August *Freethinker* on the above subject. David James’ only point is that our decision to act depends not solely on our nature, but also on “surrounding circumstances”; this is a proposition I myself have propounded until now, but I find it is not that simple, for, however compelling these surrounding circumstances may be (eg even being subjected to torture), they can be overruled. Whether they are or not is determined by the person’s nature.

John Gibson raises the point of the paedophile priests, saying they could have behaved differently. The only way this could have happened is if they had had a sense of guilt, of abhorrence at such behaviour, that was stronger than their paedophilic compulsion; ie if their nature had been different.

The question of the Pope’s reaction to the priest’s behaviour is not quite so obvious, but it is basically the same. If the Pope himself had by nature a revulsion of pae-

dophilia and a disposition to condemn and punish the priests, then, since he did not do that, it was overruled either by stronger natural dispositions (such as preserving the reputation and survival of his church), or eg by pressures from others.

However, it is clear that in either case his nature was such that he allowed these other considerations to prevail. In other words, whatever the circumstances, it is his nature that determines his decision.

In fact this is always true for any decision that anyone ever makes – it is a person’s nature (at the time of the decision) which determines that decision – he could never do other than what he does.

John Gibson’s point about “hot air” is a complete nonsequitur; as is his claim that Barbara Smoker’s raising the issue “implies that we do have a choice”.

Announcing his belief that determinism is incompatible with morality, etc, is a mere statement of opinion bereft of any argument. He says no one has been able to demonstrate the truth of determinism; it is not only self-evidently, but also logically true; ie our nature is determined (at any point in time) by our genome and our nurture; also, as we have shown, our decisions (and this applies to all our behaviour) are determined by, and only by, our nature. This, surely, is sufficient “demonstration of the truth of determinism”.

The question we have raised is not a trivial academic one – it has to be resolved so that, eg, we can decide how to treat those who have offended – the questions of blame, responsibility, etc ... but that is a separate matter.

Owen O’Neil
West Sussex

PEOPLE are free to choose, but their choices (options) are conditioned by their mind-set and by what is available.

If we go to a restaurant we have a menu from which we can choose, but our choices are limited by the number of dishes available, and we cannot eat everything – we may be vegetarians; we may be religious and certain foods are prohibited; we may be on a diet; we may not like certain foods and drinks and so on.

If we have a word-processor or computer, or go shopping, the same conditions apply; we are limited by the menu.

The brain/mind is conditioned in this way. In every field choice is limited. While



the options are many, developed over thousands of years, the choice is limited by availability, by inhibitions, preferences, beliefs and allegiances, our biological inheritance and social mores.

W K Harper
Stoke-on-Trent

AID FOR PAKISTAN

GIVEN the general assumption that Pakistan's intelligence system appears to be as well disposed to the Taliban as to the forces fighting it in Afghanistan and, now, your report in May of Pakistan's success, after many an attempt, in getting the UN to adopt a non-binding resolution to combat "defamation of religious hatred in general and against Islam and Muslims in particular", isn't there a case for remembering the old saying about charity beginning at home? Or at least for keeping the charitable instincts strictly for those countries in which the ideological commitment is to the kind of freedoms which do not depend on heads being chopped off if there be a failure to convert?

In normal times, even in those little countries which are allegedly well-disposed to the West, eg Kuwait, there is no love lost between the believers and the rest.

Keith Bell
Wrexham

ORDINATION OF WOMEN

IT was interesting to read of the Church of England's possible difficulties over the ordination of women (*Freethinker*, September). With any luck the church will split three ways; one made up mainly of blacks who disallow gays, one for the elderly who disallow women bishops, and one left as a rump.

Women have always been useful to the churches as breeders, virgins, messengers, whatever. The difficulty is that power from male to male is passed by anointing and the laying on of male hands to other males. This goes back to Christ laying hands on St Peter, the first pope. Catholics and Protestants have different interpretations of where Christ put his hands; on a rock or on Peter the man.

A whole belief system started up; Father gods and saints, and Father Xmas, even kindly spirits such as Brownies. I got expelled from a convent boarding school about 67 years ago for telling other girls that Father Xmas did not exist and for other sins ... Fortunately there was a Protestant underground movement in the school and I recovered quite well. It is useful to see how kindly spirits, saints and so on modify that jealous god who "visits the sins of the fathers unto the children" to the fourth generation or so.

My Somali ladies class told me there are even some female healers who may be helpful and comforting in some circumstances in Islam, though I don't know whether they are of any use when it comes to stoning to death or female genital mutilation.

Brenda Able
Croydon

'LYING' CATHOLIC CHURCH

RE Geoffrey Berg's article in September *Freethinker*. The Catholic Church owes both its origin and its continued existence to a strategy of habitual lying. Telling it to stop lying would be as effective as telling the tide not to rise. But I am frustrated and appalled when persons who know as well as I do that Catholic hierarchs are liars blithely parrot church propaganda as if it were verified fact.

There are not, as Mr Berg states, "over a billion Catholics". If we assume that cult membership over the past decade has risen in reasonable proportion to the growth of the total population, then there are between 1.0 billion and 1.2 billion Christians, including between 0.65 billion and 0.75 billion Catholics. Let the Vatican do its own lying. We should not be doing it for them.

Mr Berg's reference to Jesus as "Christ" is tantamount to conceding that he was the prophesied fairy-tale character he believed himself to be. That would be a non-issue if Mr Berg thinks there was not a historical preacher at the core of the Christian fairy tales. But if he agrees with the most respected biblical scholars that there was a Jesus of history, he cannot possibly believe that the loser of a ten-minute war was "Yahweh's Anointed".

William Harwood
Canada

THEY were going to ban barbecues, tents and other potentially dangerous objects at the Pope's open-air meetings during his visit to the UK for reasons of safety. Pity they didn't ban priests too, as they pose a much greater risk - especially to children.

Fabian Acker
London

GROUND ZERO MOSQUE

I WAS disappointed to see the unbalanced nature of your coverage of the US controversy about building a cultural centre, including a mosque, a short distance from Ground Zero. You quote at length from opponents without devoting much space to the arguments for tolerance of religion, however much we disagree with it, which surely is a major part of our belief as secularists. Many of the people who oppose the building are those, like Sarah Palin and the religious right, with whom we have very

little in common.

As President Obama put so well: "As a citizen, and as president, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as anyone else in this country. That includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and ordinances. This is America and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakable. Al-Qaeda's cause is not Islam - it is a gross distortion of Islam. These are not religious leaders. These are terrorists who murder innocent men, women and children."

He said the First Amendment of the US Constitution had established the freedom of religion and that right has been upheld ever since. Also Al-Qaeda also was not synonymous with Islam, Mr Obama said.

Martin Wright
Sale

DARWIN'S DEATHBED

THE story of Darwin's deathbed conversion ("Freethinking Allowed", September) was believed for a time by no less a thinker than the late Antony Flew. He stated this as a fact in a letter to *The Skeptic* (see my piece in the *Freethinker*, November 2006). He got it from a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* from Prebendary Dr Victor Pearce, who collected it in turn from a very silly religious tract, *The Life and Death of Charles Darwin*. Lady Hope, who as you say originated the story, had that as her real name, being the widow of Admiral Sir John Hope.

Donald Room
London

ISRAEL'S 'SELF-DEFENCE'

WHAT a blatant anti-Semite is your correspondent Graham Livingstone, who pretends to be a freethinker. He well knows that Israel has never instigated violence save in self-defence. It seeks only to be left in peace. But it is constantly being plagued by other nations seeking to destroy it. No other people in the world have to tolerate this.

I rest my case.

Derek Wilkes
London

PRINCE CHARLES

IF Prince Charles does become King of England instead of Britain, since by then Scotland will have seceded and the union broken up, as you presumably intend to imply (*Points of View*, August), he will be the first George to reign over England as opposed to Britain. He could, however, take the title Charles III of England.

Jack Hastie
Scotland

the freethinker

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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

Birmingham Humanists:

w 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*. Wed, Nov 3, 8pm. Valerie Mainstone: *50
Years of the "Ungodly" Pill*

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

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

w www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com

Central London Humanist Group: **i** Chair: Alan Palmer.
Sec: Josh Kutchinsky. **e** info@centrallondonhumanists.org.

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

Chiltern Humanists: Enquiries: 01296 623730.

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

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

Devon Humanists:

e info@devonhumanists.org.uk

w www.devonhumanists.org.uk

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

w www.dorsethumanists.co.uk

East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:

i Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

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

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

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

w www.farnham-humanists.org.uk

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):

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

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

Greater Manchester Humanist Group: **i** John Coss:
0161 4303463. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday,
7.30pm) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.
Oct 13, Penelope Blatchford: *An Expectation of God*.

Hampstead Humanist Society: **i** NI Barnes,
10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP. Tel:
0207 328 4431 **w** www.hampstead.humanist.org.uk

Harrow Humanist Society: Meets the second Wednesday
of the month at 8pm (except Jan, July and August) at the
HAYS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. October 13: *Who Has
Faith in Faith Schools*. Speaker: James Gray, Faith Schools and
Education Officer, British Humanist Association

i Secretary on 0208 907-6124

w www.harrow.humanist.org.uk

e Mike Savage at mfsavagemba@hotmail.com

Humanists of Havering: **i** Natalie Kehr 01708 442161

e humanist@kehr.co.uk

Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern

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

w www.nirelandhumanists.net

Humanist Association Dorset: Information and pro-
gramme 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.

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

Local Scottish Groups:

Aberdeen: 07010 704778, aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk. **Dundee:** 07017 404778, [dundee@humanism-
scotland.org.uk](mailto:dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

Edinburgh: 07010 704775, [edinburgh@
humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk) **Glasgow:** 07010 704776, [glas-
gow@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk) **Highland:** 07017 404779,
highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk.

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

Isle of Man Freethinkers: **i** Jeff Garland, 01624 664796.

Email: jefgarland@wm.im **w** www.iomfreethinkers.org

Humanists4Science: A group of humanists interested in
science who discuss, and promote, both.

w <http://humanists4science.blogspot.com/>

Discussion group: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/
humanists4science/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/humanists4science/)

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

Jersey Humanists: Contact: Reginald Le Sueur, La Petella,
Rue des Vignes, St Peter, Jersey, JE3 7BE. Tel 01534 744780

e Jerseyhumanists@gmail.com. **w** [http://groups.yahoo.
com/group/Jersey-Humanists/](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 **i** Ian Abbott,
Wavecrest, Hackensall Rd, Knott End-on-Sea, Poulton-le-Fylde,
Lancashire FY6 0AZ 01253 812308 **e** ian@ianzere.demon.co.uk

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

w www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk

Lewisham Humanist Group: **i** Denis Cobell: 020 8690
4645. The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford SE6. Meetings on
third Thurs, 7.30pm. Oct 21, Chris French: *The Psychology of
Anomalous Experiences*

w www.lewisham.humanist.org.uk

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

w www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/

e lhghumanist@googlemail.com. Meetings on the second
Wednesday of each month.

Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens: **i** Edwin Salter Tel:
07818870215.

Marches Secularists: **w** www.MarchesSecularists.org

e Secretary@MarchesSecularists.org

Mid-Wales Humanists: **i** Maureen Lofmark, 01570
422648 **e** mlofmark@btinternet.com

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

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

North East Humanists (Teesside Group):

i C McEwan on 01642 817541.

North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):

i the Secretary on 01434 632936.

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

e enquiries@nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

w www.nlondonhumanists.fsnet.co.uk

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

Oxford Humanists: Chair: John White, 77 High St, Chal-
grove OX44 7SS, 01865 891876.

e jdwhite@talk21.com

Peterborough Humanists: **i** Edwin Salter Tel:
07818870215.

Sheffield Humanist Society: **i** 0114 2309754. University
Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield. Wed, Oct 6, 8pm: Public Meeting

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

Somerset: Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in
Yeovil from Edward Gwinell on 01935 473263 or

e edward.gwinell@talktalk.net

South Place Ethical Society. Weekly talks/meetings,
Sundays 11am at Conway Hall Reockway Room, Conway Hall,
25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8031/4

e programme@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 **e** mail@suffolkhands.org.uk

Sutton Humanists: **i** Alan Grandy: 0208 337 9214. **w**
www.suttonhumanists.co.uk

Watford Area Humanists: Meet on the third Tuesday of
each month (except August and December) at 7.30 pm at
Watford Town and Country Club, Watford. **i** 01923-252013
e john.dowdle@watford.humanist.org.uk **w** [www.watford.
humanists.org.uk](http://www.watford.humanists.org.uk)

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

w www.wmhumanists.co.uk **e** rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk.

Meetings on the 2nd Tues of the month at Ludlow, Oct to June.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group: **i** 01792 206108 or
01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands,
Swansea SA2 0JY.

Listing & Event Deadlines

Please send your listings and events notices to:

Listings, the *Freethinker*,

PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD or preferably by
email to barry@freethinker.co.uk

Notices must be received by the 15th of the
month preceding publication.