



BIRMINGHAM HUMANISTS

NEWS AND VIEWS

www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk

New Series

Number 23

September 2008

We are always pleased to welcome as new members those who believe we can live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs and who try to make sense of life using reason, experience and shared human values. Our group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association, The Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association & the National Secular Society.

PAST EVENTS

A big thank you to all those who helped to make this year's AGM one of the best attended for a long time. As usual the food brought by participants was excellent & varied and the venue very conducive to a convivial get-together. We are very fortunate as a group that Jane & William Wynne Willson have been prepared to offer us the use of their house and garden to host the 'Social cum A.G.M.' for the last 5 years. One of the plus points from this year's meeting is that we now have a full quota of committee members and the 2 new faces are already bringing a freshness to proceedings. A new sub-Committee has been meeting and Malik has been working very hard at redesigning our web-site. The new version is well under way and you will get details of it in the next "News & Views" if it is up and running then.

Thanks are also due to all who manned our stall at the Harborne Festival, battling to keep our literature on the table in the strong gusty wind. We took down the details of several interested passers-by who picked up our fliers and we e-mailed them a copy of the last "News & Views" but our membership does not appear to have grown towards the magic figure of 100! The general feeling seems to have been that the smaller Moseley Festival was better for us to get our message across. The 'reading & discussion' meeting at Percy's house went well, although apparently too much time was taken up with attendee's personal introductions for some people's liking.

With the dreadful lack of sunshine and record rainfall this August, perhaps it wasn't surprising that only a handful of people told Bill Green that they would be likely to attend his barbeque. In the event the forecast for the day was awful and the event was cancelled.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE!

The government of Sweden has announced it will be banning any religious activities in schools except for those directly related to religion classes. It is also directing that in religious education, religious ideas must not be taught as though they are objectively true. A columnist in the UK's far-left (?) Guardian newspaper has urged Britain to follow suit, implying that Britain's Catholic and Jewish schools are a terror threat.

Swedish Education Minister Jan Björklund told reporters that religious activity "can take place ... but only outside of coursework". He said that teaching should "not be influenced" by religious beliefs. The move by the government is being defended as a reaction to the rise of violent Islamic extremism that police have identified with many Muslim schools in Britain and Europe. "Pupils must be protected from every sort of fundamentalism," said Björklund, using the example of the origins of human life which, he said, must be taught from a "scientific" point of view not a religious one.

Björklund told reporters that the Intelligent Design theory would be banned from Swedish biology classes even as a proposed theory. The rules will make it illegal even for faith-based schools to teach that religious doctrines are objectively true on the grounds that this would be "proselytising". Prayer, including religious services or assemblies, will remain legal, as long as no teacher in a classroom teaches that there is any reality behind it. "Teaching in school must have a scientific basis," he said at a news conference.

Bill Green, who saw the above report and passed it on to me, wonders how many countries have also banned the teaching of ID and how many countries no longer have a state religion.

August's BHA News reported that 14/19 Jewish schools, 5/10 Islamic Schools and all 21 Evangelical schools in UK that responded to a More4 News survey said that they taught creationism. That is a minimum of 5,822 pupils being misled, at least 992 of whom are in publicly-funded state schools! And it will get worse as the Government delivers a new clutch of children to the evangelists, having ensured that there are increasing numbers of such schools. *The Times Ed. Supp.* revealed that it has been permitting the transfer of community schools into the hands of the Church at an increasing rate, often without the necessary tendering procedures that it created in the first place. In Northumbria alone, 7 schools have been changed to Church schools and it is happening in other parts of the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Ian Macdonald WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF BRITISHNESS?

Some time ago John invited us to offer our answers to the above question and I felt I should have a try at it even though I am far from convinced I know the answer. First of all my parents were both Scottish but I was born in England. The family moved north again to St Andrews when I was barely five and I therefore had a Scottish education. With a name like Ian Ronald Macdonald it wouldn't be hard to guess that I was a Scot but I regard the kind of narrow-minded nationalism which has its aim to break away from the union represented by the United Kingdom as just one degree less fatuous than religion. I am British and mightily pleased that chance has been responsible for me being so. I don't blame others for thinking likewise about their country wherever they were born. If I had been born elsewhere but circumstances led to me coming to this country and being accepted as a British citizen, then my allegiance would be to my adopted country.

If proof of my patriotism was required I could point to the fact that, as a schoolboy at the time of the Battle of Britain, my singular ambition was to become a fighter pilot and I did join the RAF as soon as I could, although it was some years after the end of the war. But the patriot who says with no qualification or exception "My country does everything better than it is done elsewhere" either hasn't been anywhere else or goes around with his eyes shut. Thankfully the growth of tourism has meant that this has become a less frequent attitude. Yes the British have a great record of inventing things which have changed the world but even some of our erstwhile colonies have run ahead of us in so many ways. When I worked in Singapore Mr Lee Kuan Yew voiced what I felt was totally justified criticism of what was happening in Britain at the time. The truth of what he said was obvious but from a false understanding of patriotism our Embassy tried to deny it. On a recent visit to Malta I learned that there is virtually no waiting time for operations and 6th year pupils and undergraduates are actually paid by the government to continue their education!

So what are the things which make me glad to be British? I suppose the political system must be included, if only because in spite of its many shortcomings, it seems better than most of the others. Secondly, having experienced the level of corruption in so many other countries, Singapore excepted, I am ready to grant that here it still represents more the exception rather than the rule. Though the injustices associated with Royalty, the Church and governments throughout our history were horrendous, the power of all three has been so curtailed that we now enjoy a much more civilized existence. In my younger days I was proud to believe that 'my word is my bond' applied not only to City institutions but also more generally among business, commerce and the general public. Sadly only a naïve fool could believe that any more, but again perhaps the trend is universal. I also swallowed the notion that our judiciary could be relied on to deal appropriately with criminals, but again that assumption has been seriously undermined. At least I remain tentatively confident that I can continue to express my views on religion and most other subjects without being thrown into jail, though if the government continues to bend to the wishes of the fundamentalists even that confidence could be shattered.

This country has absorbed large numbers of people from many other countries in its history and most of us know full well that those who have found work have significantly benefited this country. It has required a degree of tolerance, however, which other countries might admire but which threatens to evaporate if the numbers involved cannot be kept in check. I have just finished reading a book called 'Time to Emigrate' by George Walden and the fact that so many Britons have either already moved out or are contemplating doing so demonstrates that many of the reasons they would previously have given to be proud to be British no longer have the same force. Perhaps many of these people will grow to be equally disillusioned with their new home for the same or different reasons. What is clear is that 'Shangri-La' is a fantasy land and always will be: we need to take stock of what Britain means to us individually, recognising that unless we can learn to adapt we are closing the door to a happy life.

From Ann Sargent E MAILS & COSTS

Although I scribbled myself a note at the A.G.M I cannot remember whether you were referring to the Newsletter or the last minute reminders about individual meetings when you urged everyone to send their e mail addresses. Personally I do not have and do not intend to obtain a computer. I did once have a lovely free e mail address which I could use at the local library or other peoples' computers, but I didn't use it frequently enough so it was euthanised by the provider.

The more people urge me to 'go online' (I have declined offers of two computers), the more I am tempted to replace my Parker pen with a Mont Blanc. I must admit though that writing letters is dear. I have recently had to sacrifice my previous luxuriously heavy paper for this cheaper brand. I had always thought that the local subscription covered the mailings. However, I am quite happy to pay for Royal Mailed Newsletters. Remind me how often we receive them and the cost and I will send it. I don't need the extra reminders. I put all the meetings on my year planner as soon as I receive the programme and put codes on the programme according to the strength of my inclination - or not - to attend.

Ed: Members without computers and e mail addresses can rest assured that the membership fee covers the cost of printing and posting "News & Views" and that the Committee are not trying to force everyone to get a computer or e mail address. My wife would willingly get rid of our computer and visit the library weekly to check her e mails! My son & I, however, don't think we could live without the Internet nowadays. We're all thankfully different.

DOWN UNDER IN EVESHAM

A report on a Humanist wedding from Abe Alpren

All humanist weddings are a joy to officiate at, but inevitably some are destined to stay in the memory longer than others. It can be the all-encompassing infectious happiness of the bride and groom. It can be the choice of venue – and let's face it, one of the great perks of a humanist celebration is that it can take place in some wonderful surroundings. It can be that rarest commodity of all: a glorious summers' day.

Thus: the wedding of Amy and Kai Blair at Wood Norton Hall in Evesham on Saturday 26th July. And for their celebrant – a one-time 'Ten pound Pom', with fond memories of a 'fifties spent largely working and travelling around Australia - the added bonus that the happy couple had flown over from Cairns in Northern Queensland to tie the knot in the bride's home town.

I'd been recommended to Amy's parents David and Elizabeth by Roy Saich and George Broadhead of the Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists, for whom I've acted on many similar occasions in the past. Because of the distances involved, and although the ceremony had been confirmed as long ago as February, I only got to meet Amy less than two weeks before the big day. A raven haired, dark eyed vivacious young lady with a bubbly, outgoing personality it was clear from the outset that her husband to be was a very lucky man.

Kai also proved to be someone out of the ordinary: by his own admission, a 'cowboy' – but rather than the Del Trotter variety, instead one of far more exotically Polynesian extraction and a ranch-owner with an 1800 square kilometre spread on which he'd built quite a reputation for raising bulls for rodeos; increasingly popular throughout Australia. It was at one such event that he and Amy first met five years ago. Whether he'd had to demonstrate any skills with a lasso to capture her attention, I never asked and he didn't say. Somehow though, judging by the mutual love and affection with which they exchanged rings and made their vows it's my guess that rope tricks hadn't ever been necessary.

Amy and Kai had set their hearts on an outdoor ceremony in the grounds of Wood Norton Hall - a Grade 11 listed building - where 101 years ago a French royal wedding had taken place. Just for once the weather did all that could have been asked of it. July 26th will very likely be remembered as the one genuine summer Saturday of 2008, and indeed the temperature soaring up to the mid-thirties must have made the couple - if not their 80+ guests - feel right at home.

Amy was a dazzlingly beautiful bride in her vivid crimson dress and Kai every inch the Aussie cattleman wearing his traditional black bush hat. Thanks to the Wood Norton Hall wedding co-ordinator Elizabeth O'Grady and her accomplished team, the ceremony went smoothly from start to finish: all in all a perfect day on which to begin the marriage of a perfectly matched couple.

HUMANISM and RELIGION

The interesting views of Britta Burtles, published in the latest Newsletter from Hampstead Humanist Society, are so relevant to our recent "Religion vs Humanism" debate that I felt they needed to be reproduced so that all Birmingham Humanists can see that others besides our Danny have views which are perhaps not 'mainstream' Humanism (whatever that is!)

There are alarming signs in our society of a developing polarisation between believers and non-believers. However, we could reverse this trend.

Various religions have been the cause of so much friction, hostility, conflict and war that it is understandable that the word seems like a red rag to many humanists.

And yet, there is another way of looking at this divisive word. Its origin is the Latin word 'religare' which basically means 'binding together'. All humans sit in the same boat, Earth, and are thus bound together by an existence in the physical universe. We do not only depend on the natural laws of this planet, but also upon each other for protection, support, encouragement and help, care, love, and understanding. Looking at the word **religion** from this basic point of view, it not only loses its dread, but denotes what we need and want from each other and how we are all linked together.

It is the reason why I consider myself to be a religious humanist. I believe, if we decided to look upon this word from that basic standpoint, the chasm that is opening up between believers and us non-believers could be narrowed considerably.

If we decided to think, say and declare (e.g. on forms to be completed): "My religion is Humanism" then the others would not consider us with such consternation and alarm. In today's climate of demand of acceptance and tolerance of all religions, ours would simply be one of many.

I believe, if we adopted this attitude, we would help our cause a lot. We would reduce friction. We would be better understood and respected by our neighbours and assisted by the authorities. If we don't, we might have to face more conflict, personal difficulties and slower growth of Humanism.

When we call Humanism a religion, we are in accord with the basic meaning of the word (outlined above), as we are in fact doing something to reduce conflict between the others and us. Believing in the strength and goodwill of human beings, we are, with determination, awareness and action, reducing the gap between believers and disbelievers. By adopting the word religion we are proving our goodwill towards the others.

After all, our religion, Humanism, like theirs, is made up of beliefs. We do believe, don't we, in basic human rights, in tolerance and in the ethical treatment of all fellow human beings, - to name a few. And we have faith in the ability of humans to learn and to improve, to mature and to become wiser. Admitting that we have a religion, called Humanism, reunites us with the rest of the world, and that can't be bad.

FOR OUR MEMBERS WHO DON'T RECEIVE "BHA NEWS"

We got the following mention in the "Groups Round-Up" section headed '**Busy in Birmingham**' *Birmingham Humanists have recently mailed all 120 Secondary Schools, VI Form Colleges & Independent Schools in Birmingham, Sandwell and Solihull LEA's to tell them about the new "Humanism For Schools" website and offer a speaker to come to talk to their pupils. This also enabled them to ensure that every local Head of Religious Studies / Philosophy has now received a complimentary copy of "Humanist Perspectives 2". Around 60 schools have also taken a free copy of "The God Delusion", made possible through the legacy of one of their members, Anne White, who was a Head Teacher for many years.*

P.S. As a local group we receive several free copies of BHA News, which Tova sends to enquirers but we could supply a copy to any of our members who are interested. However, you should really join the BHA and get your own!!

DOES SCIENCE MAKE BELIEF IN GOD OBSOLETE?

The John Templeton Foundation seeks to encourage open-minded dialogue between scientists and theologians and serves as a philanthropic catalyst for 'research on what scientists and philosophers call the Big Questions'. They have just produced an interesting 44 page booklet with the above title, which is available **free of charge** if you e mail bigquestions@templeton.org or write to the Foundation at 300 Conshohocken State Road, Suite 500, West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania 19428 USA.

I recommend it to all "News & Views" readers because, in spite of the organisation being largely funded by religious philanthropists, the 13 famous people selected to give their responses provide a surprisingly well balanced read. Although the headline figures are 2 'Yes', 2 'Yes & No' and 9 'No' there is a lot more qualification in their short essays. For example:-

Steven Pinker (Professor of Psychology at Harvard) says "Yes, if by "science" we mean the entire enterprise of secular reason and knowledge....."

Cardinal Schonborn (Archbishop of Vienna) says "No, and yes." (Ed !!!!!)

Christopher Hitchens (author & columnist) says "No, but it should."

Michael Shermer (publisher of *Skeptic* magazine et al) says "It depends. The answer turns on whether one emphasizes *belief* or *God*."

Mary Midgley (philosopher & author of *Evolution as a Religion*) says "Of course not! Belief – or disbelief – in God is not a scientific opinion, a judgment about physical facts in the world."

Robert Sapolsky (Professor of Biology at Stanford University) says "No. Despite the fact that I'm an atheist, I recognise that belief offers something that science does not."

Victor Stenger (Professor of Physics & Astronomy at Hawaii) says "Yes. Once upon a time..."

Sstuart Kauffman (Director of Institute for Biocomplexity) says "No, but only if we continue to develop new notions of God, such as ..."

Keith Ward (Church of England priest) says "No. Far from making belief in God obsolete, some interpretations of modern science provide positive reinforcement for belief in God."

If you don't want to help deplete their funds by asking for one or more copies, then you could always check out www.templeton.org to see what else they are doing!

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists have achieved something I have failed to bring about in spite of approaching the local press on more than one occasion. They are able to present their views (fairly frequently) in a "Thought For The Week" slot printed in a local paper. If any of our members can achieve this in one of the Birmingham, Solihull or Black Country papers they would be doing our group a great service in terms of publicity as well as bringing about a greater awareness of Humanism in general. Here is Brian Nicol's latest piece which was published, albeit as an edited version, in the Kenilworth Weekly News:-

We live in difficult moral times. Everyday seems to bring some new ethical dilemma for us to ponder. What should we think about the proposal to lower the time limit for abortions or the creation of hybrid embryos? How about 'saviour siblings'? While each proposal requires separate consideration, most people have some foundation moral philosophy against which decisions can be reached. For some religion will provide the answers by listening to preachers or studying a holy book.

How about non-believers, how do they set about making moral judgements?

For Humanists the sole criterion of morality is the happiness and welfare of all human beings. Things that add to human happiness in the short and long run are good and things that detract from it are bad. So when ethical judgements are to be made the question is "what course of action is likely to enhance human welfare and what might diminish it?" Focussing on this goal can make moral questions easier to decide. For example, embryo research promises great benefits with negligible downside. Other issues can be more difficult. On abortion the primary concern must be an actual human being rather than that of a yet-to-be born, although babies in the womb who will be brought to term have an individual right to protection. Other moral decisions such as famine relief or the protection of human rights of the victims of man made or natural disasters should be straightforward but can be complicated by the likely downside of opposed intervention. In other words the right moral action has to be judged in each case after an assessment of likely outcomes using all the available evidence.

It is difficult of course for everyone to assess the situation thoroughly and come up with an answer for every moral dilemma. However, we do not start from scratch every time. In addition to our moral starting point, we have our experience and the opinions of those commentators that we respect to help us make up our minds. Humanists also have the comforting thought that morality based on rational considerations, tested over time and in tune with our own culture and the current state of scientific and moral thought has the best chance of general acceptance as perhaps the recent votes in the House of Commons demonstrated.

A CHARTER FOR DIGNITY AT THE END OF LIFE

In June "Dignity in dying" released their Charter which sets out what needs to be in place to make dying with dignity a reality. It received a lot of positive national and local press coverage and was highlighted by the BBC but for those who have not seen it, the 10 key points in the Charter are summarised below:-

- 1) Everyone should have the opportunity to create an End-of-Life Care Plan.
- 2) Health professionals should have a duty of care to consider these plans.
- 3) Government should promote awareness of Advance Decisions. (*Ed: used to be 'Living Wills'*)
- 4) Advance Decisions should be recorded on a national health register.
- 5) Parliament must give terminally ill, mentally competent adults the right to an assisted death.
- 6) More resources should be made available to palliative care.
- 7) The postcode lottery in accessing palliative care should end.
- 8) A Carers' Benefit should be introduced for all those providing 35 or more hours care each week.
- 9) Health and social care professionals should have access to training on end-of-life issues.
- 10) Bereaved people should have easy access to professional advice.

Surveys suggest that the call for assisted dying to become legal is supported by around 80% of the population and may become slightly easier after October which is when campaigner Debbie Purdy is to have her case heard by a Judicial Review. She is the 45 years old MS sufferer who went to court because she wants to be able to travel to Dignitas in Switzerland with her husband, when the time is right, without the worry that he might be prosecuted for assisting her death on his return to the UK. The Dignitas clinic, which opened in 1998, has so far (June 2008) helped 868 people to end their lives and 92 of these were from the UK.

There are 694 members of Dignitas presently living in the UK and they, like most of our members, would probably be dismayed by the attitude of certain MP's. Lisa Cook, who has the gene for Huntingdon's Disease, wrote 3 times to her MP trying to get his support for a change in the law. Unfortunately, Barry Sherman, who voted for the war in Iraq and keeping the current abortion law, replied that he couldn't support her campaign saying, "I appreciate that this may be difficult to accept for those affected by terminal illness, but the sacrosanct nature of life is a fundamental pillar of the Christian faith which I do not believe can be compromised." Lisa used this rebuff to good effect by reporting it to the local newspaper saying, "I fully respect the right of people, including MP's, to hold religious views. However, I do not think they should impose their views on their constituents!" The paper's editor and 88% of readers who responded agreed with her.

The sanctity of life argument has reached its nadir in Italy where a father has just won the right to remove a feeding tube from his 37 year old daughter who has been in a coma for 16 (yes sixteen!!) years. The appeals court in Milan decided that the coma was irreversible and that the decision should be based on the patient's own wishes, as recalled by family and friends but the prosecution, which has 60 days to appeal, opposed this, saying it "opened the door to euthanasia". Yet all the evidence suggests that the option to choose an assisted death makes euthanasia less likely! In Oregon in the USA, where assisted dying is legal, only 1 in 20 people who make a request to have help to die when the time comes actually go on to have an assisted death. Knowing they have the option of choice allows the majority of people to keep going. The present situation in the UK is forcing people like Debbie to consider dying before she is ready. If you feel the law should be changed so that people know that, should their suffering become unbearable, they can choose an assisted death then please consider writing to the press or your M.P. You can also help by joining "Dignity in Dying" (tel 0870 777 7868 for details) who produce an interesting newsletter 4 times/year.

(Members might be interested to know that publications such as "Departing Drugs" and "Five Last Acts (the safe & dignified ways that people use to end their own lives when faced with unbearable and unrelievable suffering)" can be obtained from 'Exit'. For more information contact the Editor.)

ISLAMIC INTEGRATION?

How many readers know of the existence of a 'Muslim Green Pages' telephone directory? Created as a company, largely through funds from the Islam Channel and Islam Radio, over 100,000 copies have been printed and distributed for free across the UK and Ireland. Good business sense no doubt, but hardly conducive to integration as they state on the first page "We believe (Insha'Allah) that the Muslim Green Pages *will inevitably* become the *sole* point of reference for the majority of UK Muslim and 'Muslim Friendly' Businesses." (my italics) Their slogan "Think green, Buy green, GO GREEN" has a completely different agenda to what most UK citizens might understand!

THE DOWNSIDE OF DISESTABLISHMENT?

As a secularist I am in favour of the separation of Church and State in all countries of the world and, in the UK, that would involve the disestablishment of the Church of England. An article in the most recent "Freethinker" reports that "The Economist" magazine also feels this way but, apparently, not with the same aim in mind. I am now wondering if indeed disestablishment would be a 100% 'good thing'.

Writing about the argument between liberal and conservative wings of the worldwide Anglican Communion over clerical homosexuality, "The Economist" wrote :-

"As a secular newspaper that supports gay marriage and believes in a firm line between Church and State.....two things stand out. First, schism might not be a bad thing. And disestablishment would be a very good thing. The first point is simple realism. Too many angels have danced on too many pins as prelates struggle to embrace mutually incompatible beliefs."

It then went on to say "Establishment brings fewer material advantages to the Church of England these days than the Lutherans, for example, enjoy in much of Scandinavia. And a creeping disestablishment is under way. Yet centuries of crowning kings, burying princesses, celebrating a nation's victories, running a lot of it's state-funded schools and getting Parliament to cast an eye over the decisions of its ruling General Synod have made the C of E what it is. It prides itself on keeping the door open to all comers, though few pop in. It stresses inclusiveness and stands up for a public space for all faiths. Admirable stuff – but its numbers are falling. Compare that with churches in America, or Africa. No theocrats they, but fishers of men in competitive waters. Their messages must be more sharply defined to win souls. But by keeping the focus soft, as an established church must, the C of E, which dominates this least authoritarian of associations, has blunted the contest of ideas and distorted debate within the Communion (and its own ranks). Time, surely, for all sides to fight their corner, free from the shackles of the state."

So would disestablishment have the undesirable consequence of enabling the Church of England to re-brand itself, so that it's pews would start to refill once more?

RECENT TELEVISION

Did any members watch the "God on Trial" programme earlier this month on BBC2? Ian Macdonald did and comments "The arguments on both sides as to whether God was good or evil were put over fairly and passionately by excellent actors and they put up a very moving performance. The three prisoners in the Auschwitz hut facing imminent death in the gas chamber, arrived eventually at the verdict of 'guilty'; one which I think we would certainly agree with if we believed God existed at all. The surprising thing, however, is that the most obvious conclusion - that there was no God - was one which was not raised at all in the one-off drama."

Apparently on the 2nd September, Channel 5 aired a programme discussing a family tomb discovered outside Jerusalem which contained the funeral remains of people with names such as Jesus, son of Joseph, Mary and others including a small boy who could have been part of the same family. All kinds of experts were brought in to interpret the findings, including a statistician who was asked to state whether the occurrence of those names in one place had statistical significance. As the discovery was made in 1982. it made Ian wonder why it has taken so long for it to be given this degree of publicity. Ian commented "Needless to say, if this turned out to be true it would demolish the Bible story of Jesus being single and being resurrected with untold repercussions on the Christian churches." So perhaps it's not really surprising it received so little publicity after all!

A WARNING FROM THE EDITOR

Any members receiving e mails from Robert Kambale, Principal of Lihine Humanist Vocational Institute – beware! It was "started in 2003 by a group of 9 teachers who had served in several christian and islamic school in the democratic republic of Congo. These teachers were chased from their schools because of being anti christian/anti Islam and trying to teach students skeptical ideas of humanism and rationalism." They sent one to me (calling me Mr Tova Jones!) listing all the worthy projects they are doing as Humanist /atheists. Then I received a second e mail asking for financial assistance. It looked a real 'scam' so I checked with the BHA and it appears they have not bothered to contact them nor IHEU for help – just e mailing individual Humanists. Even if it were not a scam, I don't think our female members would want us to support them for the reason they wanted to set up a tailoring course was stated as "we are trying to imagine that most of our students especially those in the vocational unit are married and we have realised that they live their spouses,wives at home iddle." Leaving spouses at home idle surely never happens in Africa!!

JOKE SLOT

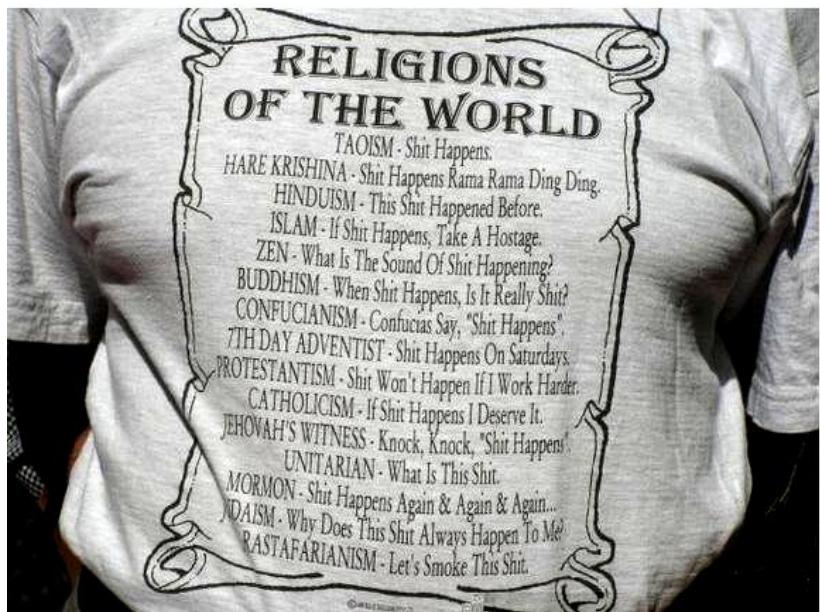
Below from an anonymous member back in 1996

Question: What is the difference between a Philosopher, a Metaphysician and a Theologian?

Ans. A Philosopher is a blindfold man in a dark room looking for a black cat. A Metaphysician is a blindfold man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there.

However, a Theologian is a blindfold man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there – and finding it!

And I know we shouldn't always be making fun of religions but I couldn't resist including the one on the right!



A WARM WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER VICTORIA DENNING

& a big 'thank you' to all who have already sent their latest membership subscription to Tova .
If you have not yet rejoined and intend to do so, please send her your £10 (one year) or £27 (three year) fees to her as soon as possible.

A CHAIN OF LOVE

Committee member Jane Wynne Willson is best known in Humanist circles as the author of the three BHA ceremony books, '*New Arrivals*', '*Sharing the Future*', and '*Funerals Without God*'. Now she has turned her hand to writing an account of the seven children of the Rev. John Llewelyn Davies and Mary Crompton, who were all born between 1860 and 1870. One of the sons was Arthur Llewelyn Davies, father of the five orphaned brothers adopted by J M Barrie, who were the inspiration for *Peter Pan*. Another was Jane's own grandfather and all seven were in different ways remarkable people. Brought up in a Christian family, it is perhaps surprising that they all veered towards agnosticism and atheism. However, on their mother's side, there were some influential 'Positivists', the Humanists or Rationalists of the day. Their father was a follower of F.D.Maurice, the founder of Christian Socialism, and he became involved with many radical campaigns, as did their children. For example Margaret, the only girl in the family, was the Secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild for over 30 years, during which time the membership grew from 1,110 to 52,000 and working women were, for the first time, given the confidence to demand basic rights for themselves and their children.

Details of the book, which is called '*The Chain of Love*' (their mother's affectionate name for her children) are available on the Wynne Willsons' new website: www.garlandpublications.co.uk or from 28 Garland Way, Northfield, B31 2BT; tel: 0121 475 6508

ARCHIVE MATERIAL.

At our May meeting Tony Brierley mentioned that the BHA had appealed for historical material in their latest Newsletter and that he had sent them some of the early documents that he had kept. Perhaps I could appeal to members to try and think what old Birmingham Humanist Group / Birmingham Humanists material they might have stored away somewhere. Are there old AGM agendas and minutes that you might have kept that the present committee don't have copies of? Are there any Committee minutes that our present Secretary does not hold? Are there old membership lists, accounts or balance sheets out there? Trevor Lock has already kindly given me some interesting documents from the time when he was Treasurer.

The earliest Birmingham Humanist Group newsletter that I personally have is one for Jan /Feb 1987 which was hand-written by Jane Wynne Willson. I hold a complete set of Danny Collman's A5 series from Issue 1 (Sept 1998) to Issue 22 (Nov/Dec 2002) but I am still trying to acquire a photocopy of New Series Number 1 produced by Adrian Bailey in Jan/Feb 2003. Between Feb '87 and Sept '98 my collection of Newsletters is intermittent. Please can anyone help to fill these gaps for the 'archives'?

It is hoped to produce the next issue in December. Please send any articles, letters, news or suggestions to the editor, John Edwards, at 157 Welford Road, Shirley, Solihull B90 3HT or via e mail to jaejed@hotmail.com

Contributors note that material in "News & Views" may be utilised by other Humanist groups, with acknowledgements as to the source. Anyone objecting to this should let me know when they submit items.