



NEWS & VIEWS



www.birminghamhumanists.org.uk

New Series

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Humanists are a large and growing population of ethically concerned but non-religious people. 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 select group of 10 met at noon for a meal at the Thai Orchid restaurant in the city centre on the 3rd Sunday in January. The food was excellently prepared and varied and we were able to eat as much as we wanted from the buffet for £12.95.

Peter Griffith's talk on Darwin & the evidence for evolution was well attended and very interesting. Just as well we humans have evolved mechanisms to maintain a constant body temperature as the heating at the Friends refused to work properly! Regrettably I had to miss the Womens' Day meeting and have received no reports on how Yvonne Washborne's talk went. However, I did receive a report from John Markey on a recent Coventry & Warws Humanists' meeting he attended and 'thoroughly enjoyed' and this is included on the next page.



S.A.C.R.E. UPDATE

I attended my 3rd Birmingham SACRE meeting in February and heard that they have set up a working party to discuss Humanism its possible representation on one of the 4 sub-committees. This may lead to me, or a Humanist rep on another SACRE, giving a short presentation on our beliefs, what we have done in schools so far and why we should have a say in the teaching of RE in the city. To date all I have been allowed to say as an 'observer' is my name and tell them that I am a member of Birmingham Humanists!

For those interested in learning more on the work of Birmingham SACRE and the 'new' syllabus it has devised, there is lots of information online at www.birmingham-asc.org.uk

The website administrator John McAdam recently informed me of several developments and additions to this site over the last few months. They have added an 'Inspirations' section, asking "What has inspired you in terms of the Dispositions?" (see www.birmingham-asc.org.uk/inspire)

A film, "Learning from Faith : Early Years", has recently been produced, & this sets out to put the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for RE in context for the very young. More details can found at www.birmingham-asc.org.uk/dvd while news items, information, and resources have also been added to the 'Extras' section www.birmingham-asc.org.uk/extra .

Of most interest to members might be the fact that some new exemplar teaching material has been added:- Exemplar 3 for primary schools has some guidance, in advance of the full schemes, regarding a model that "can be used in a school with four Religious Traditions equally represented".

This can be found at www.birmingham-asc.org.uk/resource_schemes_units.php

I am a "registered user" and as such have 'Author' status, and will be able to submit articles, resources and web links. These submissions will be moderated before publication, but give the opportunity for any Brum Hums member to submit ideas, resources & possible lesson plans relevant to a particular disposition and thus bring Humanism to the attention of teachers (& hopefully pupils), even though it is not mentioned specifically in the syllabus. Help from members would be really useful as I will be unable to devote weeks to this task even if I am co-opted. John Edwards

WILL MEMBERS PLEASE LET VICTORIA DENNING KNOW ANY CHANGES OF EMAIL ADDRESS. SOME IS REGULARLY RETURNED AND YOU COULD BE MISSING OUT ON INFORMATION

A LETTER FROM KENILWORTH

Yesterday (Thu 18/03), I had the pleasure of introducing myself to the Coventry & Warks Humanist group at their meeting in Kenilworth. The setting was a small, but modern room in the Waverley Road Day Centre. I was warmly greeted by the meeting's chairman, George Broadhead, and a group of about 25 or so members, amongst whom I very soon felt quite at home. After announcements, the main business began. This consisted in the showing of short extracts from two DVDs, on a recalcitrant machine which was minus its remote control !

The first of these was a recording of "The God Delusion Debate", which took place in a hall in Birmingham Alabama between Richard Dawkins and a Christian mathematics professor, one John Lennox, in 2007. The audience there was Christian, and predictably rather hostile to Richard. ("He's really in the Lion's Den!" someone near me remarked.) In the short extract shown, Richard made his well-argued case for employing the methods of scientific enquiry into the nature of the universe and how it all works, rather than accepting the simplistic, unenlightening "God dunnit, the Bible sez so" explanation. Lennox's reply included the usual hoary old chestnuts about science having nothing to say about "eternal questions" of love, beauty, the purpose of human existence etc. So far as I recall, the Bible has little to say about particle physics either! A flavour of the debate can be got from YouTube extracts, for example at:- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LadcfqjPV28&NR=1>

The second DVD was of the hilarious film "Religulous", which I saw in the cinema in 2009, and which had me almost in tears at the time. The protagonist is politically incorrect American comedian Bill Maher, who tours the US conducting "Ali G" style tongue-in-cheek interviews with a variety of characters, mainly Christian of course, but also some Islamists, Mormons and Scientologists. These include the likes of Ken Hamm at his preposterous Genesis theme park, a Christian Republican senator tying himself in knots with his paradoxical religious assertions, the Jesus character in a Florida theme park's Gospel Story enactment, and many others. I haven't laughed so much since "Life of Brian", and recommend the film to other BrumHums if they get the chance to see it. Again, it can be sampled on YouTube, e.g. at:- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZpREDn4NFA>

After the discussions, the evening ended with the tea and biscuits. I chatted with a few of the others, including George, of course. He wished to be remembered to older BHG members, especially Jane and Harry, with whom he said he had had close associations in the past. I came away feeling it would definitely not be my last visit.

John Markey

A LETTER FROM SUTTON COLDFIELD

Readers of 'News & Views' may wish to be warned of the recent tragic case of a patient who forgot to take his homeopathic medicine and died of an overdose.

John Bason

"NERDSTOCK" or 9 LESSONS & CAROLS FOR GODLESS PEOPLE

Because he was once accused by Stephen Green of "not liking Christmas" Robin Ince decided he would get together a 20-piece orchestra, a choir, some scientists and assorted atheist & agnostic comedians to have a proper Godless celebration in a London theatre to celebrate the Big Bang, Evolution, Science and Comedy. All three shows, entitled "9 Lessons & Carols for Godless People", were sold out and one of them, at the Bloomsbury Theatre, was recorded and shown in January on BBC4 under the title "Nerdstock" – intentionally insulting or what? I managed to record it and thought it worthwhile reproducing the inspiring words of Carl Sagan with which Robin Ince opened the show:- ***"Every aspect of nature reveals a deep mystery and touches our sense of wonder & awe: Theophrastus was right. Those afraid of the universe as it really is, those who pretend to nonexistent knowledge and envisage a Cosmos centred on human beings will prefer the fleeting comforts of superstition. They avoid rather than confront the world. But those with the courage to explore the weave and structure of the Cosmos, even where it differs profoundly from their wishes and prejudices, will penetrate its deepest mysteries."***

You can find more inspirational words at www.todayinisci.com/Quotations

OUR CONDOLENCES & THOUGHTS

Readers of 'News & Views' may not have known that Harry Stopes-Roe was having heart trouble. He went into the QE in before Xmas for a 9 hour operation to repair 3 of his 4 heart valves and is slowly recovering after a spell in intensive care. Malik & Fouzia's happiness at the birth of their fourth child in February was dashed when Michael became seriously ill and died after just 6 days of life. We all hope that in time their physical and mental scars will heal. Our thoughts are also with Jane & William Wynne Willson as William continues to battle bravely against his cancer.

PUTTING THE 'FUN' INTO FUNERALS!

Last autumn I was asked to do a funeral for a gentleman, so promptly contacted his wife by phone. I checked that she understood my ceremony would contain no hymns or prayers and that it would be non-religious. That was fine, Bill didn't want any of that 'nonsense' and he was a real joker. I went to visit her. Once again checked that she understood about the content of the ceremony and again Bill's wife assured me that was fine, 'Bill had a really good sense of humour'. A couple of hours later I left with all the information I needed, plus amusing family tales from the eight children and several of the grand children.

As I came to the end of writing the script I suddenly had the thought – I wonder whether she has misheard both me and the Funeral Director, and instead of Humanist, does she think it is a Humorist Ceremony she is getting! Bill was a bit of lad, the stories the family had related were all about the practical jokes he had played during his life and he obviously did have a sense of humour and a big personality.

I was a little anxious, but on the day I arrived at the crematorium where the Funeral Director told me the hearse was coming from the pub where Bill spent most of his waking life, as his friends had been having a morning/mourning drinking session and a few card games on the coffin! The family and mourners arrived 'in good spirit' and the six sons were the pall bearers.

Bill's wife had chosen The Walker Brothers - 'Take it Easy on Yourself' as the entry music and the mourners walked in singing loudly to the CD. As the coffin was placed on the catafalque the sons kissed the coffin and sat down. The crematorium was full and I was still a little anxious!

I started the ceremony, and a slip of the tongue made me say I was Victoria Denning from the British Humorist Association! Not a flicker from the mourners, but from the corner of my eye I noticed the organist do a double take! I carried on without correcting myself.

At the committal, as the curtains closed, there were shouts of 'Have a good time', 'Bye, Bill', 'It was nice to know you', and 'Watch what you get up to'. I got to the end of the ceremony and announced the final piece of music we were to leave the crematorium to, 'one of Bill's favourites which reflected his sense of humour, ~ The Laughing Policeman'. The mourners stood up, laughing and cheering and gave Bill a round of applause.

There were plenty of positive comments afterwards saying Bill would have loved it, so at last I began to relax! Perhaps this was a Humorist Ceremony after all and perhaps a bit of fun had been put into a funeral!

Victoria www.victoriadenning.co.uk

Also on Funerals, I discovered some possibly contentious views on the Internet recently.

Belinda Forbes, a professional civil funeral celebrant wrote:-

"When I meet a bereaved family for the first time, the only thing I know with any certainty is that they don't want a religious minister to conduct the service. Quite a brave step for some people. Also, in the vast majority of cases, the deceased will have left no instructions about the kind of funeral service they would like (fair warning to you all). In my experience, the families do their utmost to arrange a service which would be appropriate for the deceased. Most people I meet are not atheists, Humanists or even secularists; they are people for whom organised religion has little or no place in their lives. But only about 40% of the "non-religious" funerals I conduct are completely devoid of religious or spiritual content. Here are just a few examples of funerals I have conducted:-

* Young couple burying their baby twin boys aged 4 weeks and 6 weeks. The nurses from the SCBU wrote them a poem referring to their sons as being angels in heaven now. I read that poem.

* Young man of 23 committed suicide. His best friend stood up to speak and spoke about him "being in a better place now". Very moving.

* Grown up children choose "We'll Meet Again" for their 83 year old mum.

* 54 year old man's children tell me that they can't stand religion and nor could their dad. Then they promptly chose their dad's "favourite hymn" for his funeral as well as the theme tune from Match of the Day. I led the singing!

I am an atheist – I do not believe there is a heaven, a better place, or angels, or that we'll meet again. Many families may still want a song about angels or a poem about heaven but ... organised religion has no place in their lives – or deaths! And we should celebrate that. However, one should bear in mind what one of the more empathetic clerics said to me, which I think is true, "Funerals are for the living not the dead. When all is said and done the dead are compost."

Margaret Nelson of Suffolk Humanists seemed to differ, saying she "wouldn't accept a job that involved religion, because I'd feel hypocritical about mouthing nonsense and couldn't compromise my principles, but I always double check that a client understands what I don't or won't offer, though there's usually an opportunity for religious mourners to say a private prayer if they want to."

Another writer pledged, "I shall add to my living will that if anybody present at my 'last shout' so much as breathes the words god, or Jesus Christ, heaven or eternal bliss, I shall come back and haunt 'em!"

“NON-BELIEVERS GIVING AID” – A NEW DISASTER RELIEF FUND

Humanists have reacted generously to the disaster in Haiti, contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars through a wide range of specifically Humanist charities. In response to the devastating earthquake and ongoing suffering in Haiti, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) partnered with a new disaster relief fund called 'Non-Believers Giving Aid' which was created by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason. This will give all money collected to two secular organizations providing aid in Haiti:- “Doctors without Borders” and the “Red Cross” and donors can choose how their gift is split. This new mechanism will remain open for future disaster relief work and Humanists are invited to make humanitarian donations for Haiti or other disasters through the new fund at: <http://givingaid.richarddawkins.net>



Humanist Charity relief arrives in Haiti.

Many IHEU Member Organizations joined Non-Believers Giving Aid, including the BHA and the Rationalist Association. Other IHEU MOs set up their own fundraising efforts for Haiti or made direct donations. The Norwegian Humanist Association donated 100,000 Norwegian Krone (almost 20,000 US Dollars) to the Red Cross for Haiti Aid and the Sceptics and Humanists Aid and Relief Effort (SHARE) – affiliated with the Council for Secular Humanism – forwarded donations exceeding \$90,000 (as at 22 Jan) to Doctors without Borders in Haiti. Humanist Charities, an adjunct of the American Humanist Association, worked with a less prominent project, started even before the earthquake by Children of the Border to provide food, water and medical supplies, raised over \$50,000. In recent years, the Dutch Humanist group HIVOS (the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation) has provided tens of millions of Euros to support development projects throughout Africa, Asia and the Americas (go to Alliance 2015 for more information).

IHEU president Sonja Eggerickx commenting on the generous Humanist response to the Haiti disaster said, “Humanists have joined the global outpouring of support for the victims of the devastating Haiti earthquake. In the past, Humanists have created their own charitable agencies to fill a need that is not being met by others, but more often they have preferred to do their charitable work with others of different beliefs, rather than setting up competing agencies just to promote ‘the Humanist brand’. Most of us make humanitarian donations without drawing attention to our Humanist beliefs but now a new approach is growing - Humanist charities are appealing to specifically Humanist donors but then forward 100% of the donations to the best qualified mainstream charity. This raises the profile of Humanism and ensures the maximum support goes to the best and most inclusive aid organizations. I hope this generous and assertive approach will grow as our community of Humanists grows.”

Related to this topic is the following letter from a Michael Green published in the NSS Newslines:-
“A little advice for those who want to donate in aid of victims of the Haiti earthquake but want to avoid giving money to a faith-based organisation – don't give through the Disasters Emergency Committee. Of the 13 members of the DEC, 5 are faith-based: CAFOD (Catholic), Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Tearfund (Christian) & World Vision (Christian). Instead, they should give directly to one of the other 8 members or any other secular emergency relief charity which works or will work in Haiti.”

ARE ATHEISTS MORE INTELLIGENT THAN BELIEVERS?

In June 2008 Professor Richard Lynn (Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Ulster University) claimed that people with higher IQs were less likely to believe in God.

A survey of Royal Society fellows found that only 3.3 % believed in God – at a time when 68.5 % of the general UK population described themselves as believers. A separate poll in the 90s found only 7% of members of the American National Academy of Sciences believed in God. Professor Lynn said most primary school children believed in God, but as they entered adolescence – and their intelligence increased – many started to have doubts. Dr David Hardman, lecturer in learning development at London Metropolitan University, gave some support to the idea saying, “*It is very difficult to conduct true experiments that would explicate a causal relationship between IQ and religious belief. Nonetheless, there is evidence from other domains that higher levels of intelligence are associated with a greater ability – or perhaps willingness – to question and overturn strongly felt institutions.*”

Many of those outraged by this assertion quickly tried to give Lynn's words a racist cast and some detected a tinge of Western cultural imperialism as well as an anti-religious sentiment. The point is probably not a very helpful one to make, as it fails to take account of a complex range of social, economic & historical factors and perhaps few Humanists would wish to be associated with it. However, Chris Barker made some other interesting observations in the Freethinker magazine regarding the accusation of racism. He wrote "I do not believe for a moment that it is racist to point out that, in those countries where religion dominates the lives of its citizens – countries whose populations are mainly of a darker hue – social, economic and technological progress is virtually at a standstill. This paralysis exists not because these people are stupid, but because religion has served to crush innovation and entrench primitive thinking. There can be no doubting that these people have been stupefied by religion masquerading as knowledge. The only cure for this boils down to proper education, free of all religious influence.

Let me draw your attention to an interesting statistic. 20% of the world's population are Muslims but out of this huge population of 1.4 billion people only 6 Muslims have ever won Nobel Prizes. {Anwar El-Sadat (1978, Peace); Abdus Salam (1979, Physics); Najib Mahfooz (1988, Literature); Yasser Arafat (1994, Peace); Ahmed Zewail (1999, Chemistry) & Shirin Ebadi (2003, Peace)} The world's Jewish population, on the other hand, totals around 13 million, yet out of this comparatively tiny number there have been 165 Nobel Prize winners. To suggest that this is the result of Jews being more intelligent than Arabs would, of course, be racist. But to conclude that Jews put a far higher value on a mainly secular education, rather than on religious indoctrination, is certainly not. Nor is it racist to point out that Asians in the UK from a Hindu background perform far better in the academic sphere than those who are Muslims. Again, an example of education triumphing over religion.

THE SECULAR MEDICAL FORUM (www.secularmedicalforum.org.uk)

Greater Manchester Humanists had a meeting on in January in which Dr Mark Savage, a Consultant Physician, gave a talk on the Secular Medical Forum, which was founded in 2006 following informal discussions at the AGM of the National Secular Society. I felt the report in their Newsletter (received by email) would be of interests to all our members as well.

Dr Savage outlined the positions taken by this developing group on a range of ethical issues facing medicine and society. The following summary of the main themes of his presentation includes points arising in the extensive discussion that followed. The SMF campaigns for a secular approach and is opposed to religious influences which impinge on the services provided to the non-religious. It strongly supports the right for women to have legal and safe abortions and would like to see an end to the present requirement for the agreement of two physicians. The SMF fully supports the use of advance decisions (formerly 'living wills'), and recommends that everybody completes one. It believes that legislation for assisted suicide, with adequate safeguards, for terminally ill, competent adults should be introduced in the UK as soon as possible, while fully supporting good quality palliative care alongside this option. The SMF is strongly opposed to genital mutilation for religious reasons, and the use of NHS funds for this purpose. It fully supports embryonic stem cell research - and also the creation of hybrid embryos - because of the possible potential benefits for all those millions of individuals who have, or will develop, illnesses ranging from Alzheimer's disease or Motor Neurone Disease to Diabetes or Heart disease, as adult stem cells have a very limited potential. The SMF is concerned that patient care is being increasingly compromised by health care workers with conscientious objections to a wide range of medical activities. These include family planning, abortion and emergency contraception, prevention of infection by 'being bare below the elbow', and medical education. Some practitioners have made moral judgments as to which types of patients they will or will not treat. The SMF considers that people with strong objections to offering normal medical care and activities should responsibly choose to work in a specialty which does not bring their personal views into conflict with patient care. Individual professionals invoking conscientious objections should provide sufficient information to enable patients to make informed decisions before the point of contact. Mark felt that hospital chaplains are given undue respect - judging by the size of the room allocated to them at his hospital! Each full-time hospital chaplain paid from NHS funds costs the equivalent of at least two nurses. The SMF is not alone in thinking that spending on nurses or other health care personnel would be a more appropriate way to spend limited NHS finances. However, if patients feel that pastoral support is valuable, the SMF would support the development of non-religious pastoral support or hospital visiting schemes. Another concern was the extent to which chaplains and other religious representatives are appointed to clinical and research ethics committees. The SMF feels that only people with relevant ethical expertise should be members of such committees, and that there should be no discrimination in the selection process.

OFFICIAL FIGURES SHOW THAT BRITAIN IS RAPIDLY SECULARISING.....

The British Social Attitudes Survey is one of the largest annual polls of opinion in Britain and is commissioned by the National Centre for Social Research. The latest edition was published in January and showed a deepening suspicion of people with strongly-held religious beliefs.

When asked which, if any, religion they belonged to, 50% said they were Christian (in 1983, that was 66%). 43% said they had no religion (up from 31% in 1983). In 1983 1% of respondents had been Muslim, whereas in 2008 it was 3%.

When asked whether they believed in God, 18% said that they definitely don't; 19% said they didn't know whether there was a God and there was no way to find out; 14% said they didn't believe in a personal God, but did believe in some higher power; 13% said they sometimes believed in God and sometimes didn't; 18% said they had doubts but overall believed in God and only 17% said they had absolutely no doubt that God exists. When asked to assess their own religiosity, 7% said they were "very or extremely" religious; 30% said they were somewhat religious; 22% said they were neither religious nor non-religious whereas 26% said they were "very or extremely non-religious". 62% admitted they never went to church.

The only good news for religious bodies in these findings was that most people - believers and non-believers alike - thought that religion "helps people to find inner peace", "make friends" and "gain comfort"; but they still considered religion to be good for other people, not themselves.

When asked about religious leaders trying to influence how people vote in an election, 75% said that they shouldn't, while 67% thought religious leaders should stay out of Government decision-making altogether. When asked the question '*If many of our elected officials were deeply religious, do you think that the laws and policy decisions they make would probably be better or probably be worse?*' almost 50% thought they would be worse, whereas only 26% thought they would be better.

Then came: '*In matters of right and wrong, some people say it is important to faithfully follow the leaders and teachings on one's religion. Others say it is important to follow one's own conscience?*' Only 6% thought they should follow their religious leaders & 89% that they should follow their own conscience!! 60% agreed that there can be no absolutely clear guidelines of what is good and evil and the same number think that "morality is a personal matter and society should not make everyone follow the same standard".

On the idea of trying to convert people to another faith, only 17% thought it was OK for religious believers to try to recruit others to their faith; 81% took the opposite view. On the question of intolerance, 73% of Britons maintain that "people with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others."

On the matter of "faith schools", the survey asked: '*Some schools are for children of a particular religion. Which of these statements comes closest to your views about these schools: No religious groups should have its own schools. Some religious groups but not others should have their own schools. Any religious group should be able to have its own schools?*'

42% agreed with the 1st option, that no religious groups should have schools. "Some groups but not others" was supported by 13% and 43% supported the right for any religious group to have its own schools. The NSS felt that the last percentage would have been rather different if the question had been about supporting these schools with public money! 52% of respondents agreed with the opinion that "Britain is deeply divided along religious lines" and only 16% disagreed. From other answers, the authors of the report suspect that the term "religious extremist" is now perceived almost entirely to apply to violent Muslims.

...BUT FRANCE IS STILL WAY AHEAD OF US !!

Three recent court cases in France have reinforced the 1905 law that separates church and state, while an opinion poll reveals a large drop in the number of people claiming to be Catholic.

The first legal case was in the Haute-Vienne department, where every year, the Catholic Church exhibits the relics of the local saints. The Church asked for public money for this exhibition and although the town council refused to contribute, the General Council and the Regional Council decided to give 26,360 euros. A court in Limoges, however, declared the grants illegal and the money will be reimbursed.

The mayor of Ploërmel, in Morbihan (Brittany) decided to build an enormous statue of Pope Jean Paul II (against article 28 of the 1905 law). The General Council decided to give 4,500 euros to finance the statue, but a local court quashed the decision and the public funds - illegally paid - will have to be reimbursed.

In Wandignies-Hamage, a commune in the Nord Department, the mayor wanted to hang a crucifix in the dining hall of a public school. A local freethinker referred the matter to the court which ruled that the crucifix must be removed. The mayor appealed against the decision but the Court of Appeal confirmed it and the crucifix was banned. A spokesperson for Libre Pensée, the French group for Freethinkers, said it was essential that the 1905 law separating Church and State must be respected & upheld and that these 3 decisions were a welcome confirmation that the law still has teeth. Can you imagine these votes happening in the UK?

Meanwhile, an opinion poll by the IFOP Institute for the daily paper *La Croix* showed a precipitous drop in the number of French people who describe themselves as Catholic from 81% in 1965 to 64% in 2009. But even though around 2/3rds of the population of France declare themselves to be nominal Catholics, the numbers actually attending church has dropped massively. In 1965, 27% of French people went to mass once a week or more but in 2009 this had dropped to 4.5% !!!

At a doctrinal level, 63% of practising Catholics think all religions are the same; 75% ask for an updating of the Church's policy on contraception & 68% want the Church to reconsider its stance on abortion.

WOULD YOU HAVE DONE THE SAME THING?

The latest Hampstead Humanist Society Newsletter contained the following thought-provoking piece from Britta Burtles, the Editor's wife, entitled *"Humanism and Tolerance"*

Some time ago, while we were chatting, a humanist friend told me that he believes in God. I was quite surprised and dismayed and wanted to tell him that, if he believes in God he cannot be a humanist. But then I thought: It is none of my business to decide whether or not he is a humanist. He is an intelligent person, and will have – like my husband Jim and myself – examined his whole belief-system carefully, before deciding that, despite his belief in god, he is a humanist. So I have to accept that he is.

I also thought: If I tell him that I disapprove of him believing in God, he would never again be carefree, open and honestly discuss with me or any humanist his views or beliefs. With one fell swoop I would have demolished his freedom of speech and his trust in other humanists.

I even thought: What about other fellow humanists who maybe also believe in God or other religious and spiritual concepts? Should they better not talk about what they believe, but be guarded and keep their thoughts, views and beliefs a secret lest they get reproached or even excluded from what they think and believe?

So I thought: Should I be pig-headed, blinkered and mean just because I don't share his belief? Should I criticise him who is as much a convinced and dedicated humanist as I am? Do I have the right to pass judgment? I admit I felt just a tad ashamed for having been narrow-minded and petty. I think that one is a humanist not only if one believes in most of the generally accepted humanist considerations, but mainly because of one's positive and constructive attitude, behaviour and actions towards fellow human beings, because of one's contribution to humanism and because one has decided that one is a humanist.

I am glad I took the time to think these things through before making negative pronouncements about my friend. My original thoughts were also quite counter-productive. If I had made them public, they would have made other humanists with unorthodox beliefs afraid to talk freely about them and maybe even turned them away from humanism. Jim & I think humanists should be able to feel free to communicate to each other about whatever they believe, without being afraid of attacks and denunciation. If people are convinced, keen and active humanists, they should not have to hide their however unusual beliefs.

Fortunately Jim & I are not alone in our way of thinking. A few months ago we went to a lecture by Jim Herrick, a renowned and distinguished humanist. In the subsequent question time two members of the audience asked him whether he would condemn and exclude people from humanism if they believed in God or other religious concepts. To my surprise he said: "No I wouldn't and I couldn't." Perhaps I needn't have been so amazed about his answer and liberal outlook, for after all, we live in the 21st Century and have moved away from the Dark Ages and its horrid practice of excommunication for ideas and beliefs which were not officially accepted. Jim & I are glad to know that humanists like Jim Herrick have replaced that vile practice with open-mindedness and tolerance.

COOLLY RATIONAL

You are cool, you say?
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I'm curious, wish to
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Is cool inarticulate?

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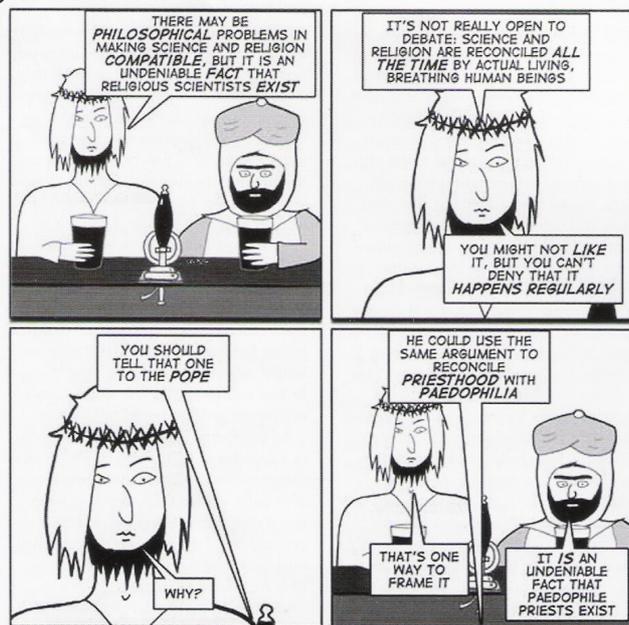
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DON'T FORGET 'WORLD HUMANIST DAY'

World Humanist Day is a Humanist holiday celebrated annually around the world on June 21st. According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), the day is a way of spreading awareness of Humanism as a philosophical life stance and means to effect change in the world. It is also seen as a time for Humanists to gather socially and promote the positive values of Humanism. For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Humanist_Day

EX SPANISH PRIEST, TURNED AMERICAN PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, LOGIC, & PHILOSOPHY OF BIOLOGY, WINS WORLD'S RICHEST PRIZE!

The Templeton Prize honours a living person who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works. Created by the late global investor and philanthropist Sir John Templeton, the Prize is a cornerstone of the John Templeton Foundation's international efforts to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions, ranging from explorations into the laws of nature and the universe to questions on love, gratitude, forgiveness, and creativity. It is the world's largest annual monetary award given to an individual, currently valued at £1 million, and was first awarded in 1973.

The 2010 prize was awarded to Francisco J. Ayala, an evolutionary geneticist and molecular biologist who has vigorously opposed the entanglement of science and religion while also calling for mutual respect between the two. Ayala, now 76, has devoted more than 30 years to asserting that both science and faith are damaged when either invades the proper domain of the other. Ayala is a Professor of Biological Sciences at the University of California and his research into parasitic protozoa may lead to cures for malaria and other diseases. He has suggested that efforts to block religious intrusions into science are vital for "the survival of rationality in this country (USA)." To that end, in 1981 he served as an expert witness in a pivotal U.S. federal court challenge that led to the overturning of an Arkansas law mandating the teaching of creationism alongside evolution. Three years after the Arkansas court challenge, Ayala was asked by the National Academy of Sciences to serve as principal author of *Science, Evolution, and Creationism*, a categorical refutation of creationism and so-called intelligent design. Even as he warned against religion's intrusion into science, Ayala, a former Dominican priest, also championed faith as a unique and important window to understanding matters of purpose, values and the meaning of life and in 2001, George W. Bush awarded him the National Medal of Science. This respect for the rightful, if separate, roles of science and faith has allowed Ayala to consider questions such as "Does scientific knowledge contradict religious belief?" and "Is morality derived from biological evolution?" that draw upon each discipline and may bring new insights that advance human endeavor. In a statement prepared for a news conference, Ayala forcefully denied that science contradicts religion. "If they are properly understood," he said, "they cannot be in contradiction because science and religion concern different matters, and each is essential to human understanding." HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, will award the Prize at a private ceremony at Buckingham Palace on May 5.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

It must surely have occurred to a lot of people that if there is a God, He doesn't seem to be a part of the Roman Catholic Church, because all those depraved, child-molesting priests obviously don't believe they are going to hell, and neither does the Pope.

A man in Nottingham was searching the on-line job vacancies on the NHS site and noticed two advertisements adjacent to each other for his own local Heath Care Trust, one for a chaplain for the "Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust". The salary offered was up to £34,000. The other was for a staff nurse in the stroke unit. Salary? £20,710. When the axe begins to fall on jobs in the NHS, as it inevitably will, let's hope it will be on the chaplains before it is on the staff nurses! As the NSS commented "if the chaplains had any sense of duty, they'd offer themselves up for sacrifice in order to save the medical services that, after all, are what hospitals are about."

"A belief which leaves no place for doubt is not a belief; it is a superstition" : José Bergamin

I am aiming to produce the next issue in July. Please send any articles, letters, news or suggestions to me, preferably by e mail to jaejed@hotmail.com or via a letter.

Contributors note that material in "News & Views" may be utilised by other Humanist groups, with acknowledgements

STOP PRESS: The first meeting of the new Nottingham Secular Society will be on Wed. 21 April at 7:30pm for 8:00pm at the Duke of Cambridge, 548 Woodborough Road, Nottingham NG3 5FH.

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Having tried “The Harborne Festival” last year, your committee has decided to go back to “**The MosFest**” to try and publicise the group & humanism in general to the people of Birmingham. The date for the Moseley High Street event is **Saturday 10th July** and the stall will have to be manned all day. If any member can spare an hour or two to chat to enquirers or intercept ‘likely-looking’ (or indeed unlikely-looking) passers-by, their help would be most appreciated. Please volunteer your services at the AGM or, if you are unable to attend this, please let a committee member when you hope to help out.

On the subject of publicity, you will hopefully find a couple of **business cards** in with this posting. Please keep one with you so that you can hand it to anybody you meet who seems interested in Humanism. If everybody could recruit just one new member, BrumHums would be in a much better position to host ‘big name’ speakers and help in worthwhile social activities such as visiting non-believers in hospital who request a visit from someone other than the ‘GodSquad’. We apologise that the attempted publicity badges, enclosed with a previous issue needed a powerful magnifying glass to be able to read the writing; they looked good in the website’s preview but will obviously have to be re-designed if we are to re-order, in the meantime we would encourage the wearing of the BHA’s ‘happy humanist’ badges.