



Lancashire Secular Humanists

# Newsletter

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2010

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS

## Williams – the - Whine is at it again

Not content with the almost exponential growth in Religious Schools The Archbishop of Canterbury now accuses the Government of treating all religious believers as “oddities” and “eccentric”.

Dr Rowan Williams said ministers were wrong to think that Christian beliefs were no longer relevant in modern Britain and he criticised Labour for looking at religious faith as a “problem” rather than valuing the contribution it made to society.

The Archbishop also suggested that the “political class” was too remote from the concerns of most people, who still had God in their “bloodstream”. In his only interview in the run-up to Christmas, he called on ministers to be more willing to talk about their own beliefs. Speaking to The Daily Telegraph The Welsh Wizards whined on:

*The trouble with a lot of Government initiatives about faith is that they assume it is a problem, it's an eccentricity, it's practised by oddities ...*

*The effect is to de-normalise faith, to intensify the perception that faith is not part of our bloodstream. And, you know, in great swaths of the country that's how it is.*

..... See also article Pg.4



“Oddities” & “Eccentric” How Could Anyone Possibly Think That?

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7:30 Wednesday 20 January 2010  
 Gt. Eccleston Village Centre

Debate: Legislation prohibiting possession  
 & use of illegal drugs is doing  
 more harm than good and should  
 be repealed

## Acme Inc. [Company Memo]

From: . . . Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director  
 To: . . . . All Employees  
 Date: . . . October 1, 2009  
 Subject: . Gala Christmas Party

I'm happy to inform you that the company Christmas Party will take place on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, starting at noon in the private function room at the Grill House.

There will be a cash bar and plenty of drinks!

We'll have a small band playing traditional carols... feel free to sing along. And don't be surprised if our CEO shows up dressed as Santa Claus!

A Christmas tree will be lit at 1:00 PM. Exchanges of gifts among employees can be done at that time; however, no gift should be over £10.00 to make the giving of gifts easy for everyone's pockets.

This gathering is only for employees! ...  
 Our CEO will make a special announcement at that time!

Merry Christmas to you and your family,

Patty

Continued on Pg 2



From - **'The Atheists Guide To Christmas'**  
[article by Adam Rutherford]

... Everyone, even the most hardline rationalist, behaves in absurdly irrational ways. It's the nature of humankind. I couldn't believe in God any less: it makes no sense to me, and more importantly, my trust in science's extraordinary explanatory abilities renders the need for divine answers superfluous. All things are potentially explicable without recourse to the supernatural. But that doesn't mean I exist in a purely rational way. I've spent the last twenty-eight years supporting a football team who in that time have won a grand total of two trophies, both before I was seven. All because of the random cosmic happenstance of having emerged into the world in a hospital lift in the small market town of Ipswich. And even so, I will be a 'tractor boy' till my cardiac myocytes twitch their last. Is that rational? No. It's not even very much fun much of the time, Goddammit.

**Acme Inc.** [Company Memo]

From: ... Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director  
To: ... All Employees  
Date: ... October 2, 2009  
Subject: . Gala Holiday Party

In no way was yesterday's memo intended to exclude our Jewish employees.

We recognize that Hanukkah is an important holiday, which often coincides with Christmas, though unfortunately not this year ... However, from now on, we're calling it our 'Holiday Party.'

The same policy applies to any other employees who are not Christians and to those still celebrating Human Rights Day!

There will be no Christmas tree and no Christmas carols will be sung ... We will have other types of music for your enjoyment.

Happy now?

Happy Holidays to you and your family,

Patty

Continued on Pg 3

## Setting Up A Support Network

by LSH member David Hollinshead

Picture the scene .....

You are at a funeral of a family friend, in a lovely old village church. Sunlight is shining through the beautiful stain glass windows and there is a light aroma of flowers in the air. In amongst the grief however you are gradually feeling more and more isolated from the proceedings going on before you.

This is what happened to me recently.

I had not been to a funeral for nearly twenty years, and maybe then I accepted that this was the "normal" way of going about things. I sang the hymns, closed my eyes when prayers were being said and my mind was totally focused on the event.

The funeral I attended last month was a totally different affair. Maybe if I had known the hymns that had been chosen I would have had a good old sing song without any issues and forgotten about the whole hypocrisy.

During the prayers, and they seemed to be endless, I just looked around admiring the building and watching the fellow mourners.

There was only one other person with his head not bowed. It made me think that surely not everyone else there was a Christian, surely some of them were just going through the motions.

My moods seem to flit between grief and frustration over the meaningless of the religious side of the funeral. I was also feeling frustrated, if not on the verge of anger, that there is no one I could share these emotions with. I could hardly discuss it with fellow mourners over a cup of tea at the village hall afterwards.

During the service I thought that this is where fellow humanist / secularist members could help each other. It would be great if I felt I could have rung someone in the group just to talk about my experiences of the day. It would have been very comforting to know I could have talked to someone who would have understood what I was going through.

I'm sure I would have gone to bed that night less confused and calmer. And thinking more about my friend, which after all is what a funeral should be about in my opinion.

I hope this article will not just be read and forgotten about, as I would like the LSH group to consider setting something up.

Maybe we could have a list of members, who are happy for anyone else in the group to ring them to talk through any sensitive issues.

**David raises an important issue.** There are of course times when we would all benefit from being able to talk about things - such as bereavement - with someone else; someone who shares our own outlook on life. And sometimes it is beneficial if that someone else is a person with whom we are not intimately involved. I think an informal [self-selecting] mutual-support network of LSH members & friends is a good idea. Suggestions of how this could be set up and maintained would be welcomed ... **Ideas to usual address please!**

**Acme Inc.** [Company Memo]

From: . . . Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director  
To: . . . . . All Employees  
Date: . . . October 3, 2009  
Subject: . Holiday Party

Regarding the note I received from a member of Alcoholics Anonymous requesting a non-drinking table, you didn't sign your name.

I'm happy to accommodate this request, but if I put a sign on a table that reads, "AA Only", you wouldn't be anonymous anymore.

How am I supposed to handle this?

Somebody?

And sorry, but forget about the gift exchange, no gifts are allowed since the union members feel that £10.00 is too much money and the executives believe £10.00 is a little chintzy.

**REMEMBER: NO GIFTS EXCHANGE WILL BE ALLOWED.**

Continued on Pg 4

**Amen!**

From NSS [Web-site](#):

### **You Can Help To Stop Council Prayers:**

There are many — maybe even the majority — of local councils in this country that start their meetings with Christian prayers. Non-believers and those of other religions are put in the embarrassing position of wondering whether to participate or pointedly not participate. It is intolerable that elected representatives should be put through this in carrying out their duty.

A typical reaction to their protests is that they are told they can leave the chamber during prayers and return.

We also know of potential candidates who will not put their names forward for election, appalled that they should be expected to participate in prayers. This deprives local democracy of much-needed new blood.

We are not seeking to restrict freedom of worship.

If some Council members wish to pray, there is no problem with them doing so before Council meetings. But this should be separate from the meetings and preferably not in the same room, so that those arriving for the meeting are not inconvenienced.

We have been working on this campaign for some months and after complaints from councillors, top lawyers working on behalf of the NSS have sent a letter to one council advising them that prayers during council meetings are in conflict with human rights provisions. The council is currently considering our lawyers' letter and we will soon be bringing you details of the outcome.

We now need to know which councils are including prayers in their meetings and which aren't.

We need supporters to enquire whether their district, town, parish and county council meetings include prayers. Because there will be so many to deal with, please help us by using the following format:

**For Council's who 'are' holding prayers:** ... Please send separate emails for each council where there are council prayers, please. The exact name of the council should be in the subject line. In the text please confirm the information and show how you obtained it. Then give the official to whom we should write (normally Town Clerk or County Clerk) with their position, the council and full postal address so we can simply paste this and write to them. We would appreciate your concluding with your name and telephone number for any queries. Email your results to [councilprayers@secularism.org.uk](mailto:councilprayers@secularism.org.uk).

So, your email should read: . . .

[Precise name of Council] includes prayers in its meetings. I established this by [reference to the agenda or minutes in the library/by speaking to name and position of official on date, telephone number or place].

Please write to ..... My name and telephone number are: .....

Conservative peer Baroness Warsi of Dewsbury [*Britain's most powerful Muslim woman*] was pelted with eggs on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> December during a visit she made to a predominantly Muslim area of Luton.

Taking part in a walkabout she was confronted by a group of male protesters accusing her of not being a proper Muslim and of supporting the death of Muslims in Afghanistan.

Baroness Warsi said the men were "*idiots who did not represent the majority of British Muslims*". Adding "*these type of protesters bring Muslims into huge disrepute*".

One of the protesters Sayful Islam; a spokesman for 'Islam4UK' said "*She is not a practising Muslim. Clearly by looking at her she does not represent Muslims*." [Baroness Warsi was not wearing a Hijab]

Interviewed on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme the following day Sayful Islam added: "*We represent the fundamentals of Islam ... we promote what Islam promotes - the implementation of Sharia. Every single Muslim should be living their lives according to Sharia ... regardless of where The East or The West.*" He added "*She supports British Troops in Afghanistan – She should never side with disbelievers against Muslims. A fundamental of Islam is to always support allies of Muslims.*"

When asked if he regretted the incident he clarified the fact that he didn't throw the eggs himself but went on to say "*... I don't regret it happened. If Islam permits it I wouldn't regret anything they do.*"



### Immortal [and rapidly becoming even more] Invisible

New research from NatCen (National Centre for Social Research) has confirmed that religious belief and adherence in Britain is in free fall. The research also reinforces what the NSS has been saying over many years – Britons do not want religion to run their personal lives or to interfere in politics. The research also finds Church ‘teachings’ on a range of social issues are completely out of step with the opinions and desires of the population at large.

Keith Porteous Wood, Exec. Director of the National Secular Society, said: “*This research takes its place among the many other studies that confirm the same thing: religion is not an important issue for the British generally. In fact, I think the news for the churches is likely to be even worse, because it is a well-known phenomenon among pollsters that on questions of religion, respondents tend to exaggerate and overstate their commitment.*”

Mr Wood continued: “*Despite this data, we have a Government that seems to be completely dominated by the idea that religion is terribly important to everyone and that the religious take on morality is the correct one. The figures on attitudes to assisted dying are particularly significant, given that earlier this year a parliamentary bill on the matter was rejected on the say-so of religious interests. It is time the Government took on board the fact that permitting religion to have so much influence on policy-making is thwarting the will of the people.*”

### So just remind us - you know - that bit about ‘Educating not Proselytizing’!

[This letter - The Times - Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009]

Sir,

Your gloomy predictions about the demise of the Church of England details the projected drop in worshippers at the same time as their ages rise, but fails to note the current increase in the impact of church schools.

Against the average figure of people attending church on a typical Sunday (less than 900,000) is the figure of children in church schools (more than one million).

There has been a steady increase in the number of church schools, including 28 academies.

So, if the parish system of the Church is losing impact, the education system is developing impact.

My own belief is that the rumour of God is being circulated more widely and with greater conviction.

Furthermore, if the Church worked even closer with its schools, it would secure its future, acquire a reputational uplift and secure more avenues for effective engagement\*.

.....▶

The Rev Dr Howard Worsley  
Diocesan Director of Education  
Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham

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### Acme Inc. [Company Memo]

From: . . . Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director  
To: . . . . . All Employees  
Date: . . . October 4, 2009  
Subject: . Generic Holiday Party

What a diverse group we are!

I had no idea that December 20<sup>th</sup> begins the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which forbids eating and drinking during daylight hours . . . There goes the party!

Seriously, we can appreciate how a luncheon at this time of year does not accommodate our Muslim employees' beliefs. Perhaps the Grill House can hold off serving your meal until the end of the party or else package everything for you to take it home in little foil doggy baggy . . .

Will that work?

Meanwhile, I've arranged for members of Weight Watchers to sit farthest from the dessert buffet, and pregnant women will get the table closest to the restrooms.

Gays are allowed to sit with each other . . . Lesbians do not have to sit with Gay men, each group will have their own table . . . Yes, there will be flower arrangement for the Gay men's table too.

To the person asking permission to cross dress, the Grill House asks that no cross-dressing be allowed, apparently because of concerns about confusion in the restrooms . . . Sorry.

We will have booster seats for short people.

Low-fat food will be available for those on a diet.

I am sorry to report that we cannot control the amount of salt used in the food . The Grill House suggests that people with high blood pressure taste a bite first.

There will be fresh "low sugar" fruits as dessert for diabetics, but the restaurant cannot supply "no sugar" desserts . . . Sorry!

Did I miss anything?!?!?

Patty

*Continued on Pg 5*

**The BHA has written** in protest to Nelson Thomlinson School in Wigton, Cumbria, after it ignored requests from 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils to withdraw themselves from religious worship.

BHA Campaigns Officer Paul Pettinger said ‘the law on 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils withdrawing from collective worship is clear.

Rather than welcoming that 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils had decided to affirm their own beliefs by not taking part in worship, the school seems to have instead forced some of them to attend. This not only offends the pupils’ dignity by failing to respect their right to freedom of belief and conscience, but it also infringes upon their legal right not to take part.’

### Definitely one for your ‘Dictionary of Definitions’

“ . . . secure more avenues for effective engagement”:  
(*euphemism*): Brainwash Children - Indoctrination  
(*see also*) - Religious Education - Faith Schools.



### Kiwi fundies outraged by Mary & Joseph

This mischievous billboard about to be hoisted by St Matthew-in-the-City Church, Auckland has raised the ire of a Christian lobby group.

Intended to provoke conversation about spiritual matters at Christmas, the billboard is more likely to provoke smutty jibes about the hows & the whys of Mary's encounter with a celestial penis – and 'Family First NZ' is appalled!

According to [this report](#), it is intended to challenge stereotypes about the way that Jesus was conceived and get people talking about the Christmas story.

But Family First National Director Bob McCoskrie describes the church's plan as irresponsible.

*The church can have its debate on the virgin birth and its spiritual significance inside the church building, but to confront children and families with the concept as a street billboard is completely irresponsible and unnecessary.*

*The church has failed to recognise that public billboards are exposed to all of the public including children and families who may be offended by the material.*

### Acme Inc. [Company Memo]

From: Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director  
To: All F\*%^ing Employees  
Date: October 5, 2009  
Subject: The F\*%^ing Holiday Party

I've had it with you vegetarian pricks!!!

We're going to keep this party at the Grill House whether you like it or not, so you can sit quietly at the table furthest from the "grill of death," as you so quaintly put it . . . and you'll get your f\*%^ing salad bar ... including organic tomatoes!

But you know, tomatoes have feelings, too.

They scream when you slice them.

I've heard them scream.

I'm hearing them scream right NOW!

The rest of you f\*%^ing wierdos can kiss my \*ss.

I hope you all have a rotten holiday!

Drive drunk and die,

The B\*tch from H\*ll!!!

Continued on Pg 6

### All The Same – But Different

As we all know people come to Lancashire Secular Humanists for diverse reasons:

Some have found it a good way to meet like minded individuals; to enjoy a free exchange of information and ideas safe in the knowledge that the 'G' word is not going to crop up and spoil everything.

Some enjoy participating in lively debates with other freethinking individuals.

Some relish discovering new perspectives through subject-specific talks and guest speakers.

Some are seeking assistance, advice or support regarding a specific issue.

Some simply want to support an organisation that advances the understanding of secular humanism.

Some - want to get involved in a more proactive way to create a fairer, more equitable society for all by campaigning to diffuse the influence enjoyed by - and partiality extended to - religion.

*[No doubt there will be many other reasons too]*

It seems perfectly natural for individuals within LSH to evolve into groups-within-a-group.

We already have a book club: those who bring; borrow and share information about books that interest them and think might interest others.

We have a social club: folks who adjourn to the local pub after each meeting to continue conversations and develop ideas.

We have our 'LSH Wanderers': individuals who are happy to travel to participate in debates hosted by others.

And now – for people who fall into the last category above and want to be more pro-active about promoting secular humanism and/or challenging religious privilege – there's a desire to coordinate and target the efforts of those who communicate with The Press; Other Media; MPs; Councillors (etc) about specific issues.

Sharing details about what has / what hasn't worked; about who is / who isn't receptive; about timing individual efforts with others so as to have maximum impact (*and so on*) seems eminently sensible and potentially more effective.

Anybody who wants to get involved in this way should contact me [Ian] (*usual address*) and I'll make sure you each know who else shares your interest.

### Quick Quote Corner

Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand. *Mark Twain*  
(1835 - 1910)

**Amen!**

*Continued from Pg 3*

### **For Councils who 'are not' holding prayers:**

Please list exact names of Councils, each on a separate line please.

There is no need for a separate email for each Council not holding prayers . . . They should be sent to [nocouncilprayers@secularism.org.uk](mailto:nocouncilprayers@secularism.org.uk).

Then after the council name(s) please add:

Information provided by [your name and telephone number]

You could help the process by forwarding this edition of [Newsline](#) to friends in other parts of the country and inviting them to help.

You might also wish to invite them to subscribe to [Newsline](#) at the same time.

**Watch this space - and [Newsline](#) - for news of the progress of this campaign.**

### **What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To**

#### **Cumbria Humanists**

<http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk/>

7.30. Wed. 20th January 2009: ... Eden Rural Foyer, Penrith  
Annual General Meeting

#### **Isle of Man Freethinkers**

<http://www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk/>

No 2010 activities listed on I.O.M. Freethinkers Web-site yet

#### **Liverpool Humanists**

<http://www.liverpoolhumanists.co.uk/>

7.30 Wed 13th January -The Crown , 43 Lime St, L/pool, L1 1JQ  
'Supporting Humanist Schools in Uganda'  
A talk by Chris Wright

#### **Greater Manchester Humanists**

<http://greatermanchesterhumanists.googlepages.com/>

7 (for 7.30) Wed 13th January: Friends' Meeting Ho. Mount St,  
Manchester, M2 5NS  
Dr. Mark Savage [Consultant Physician & Chair NE Manchester  
Diabetes Network] - The Secular medical Forum

#### **South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists**

<http://www.humanists.org.uk/>

7.30 Tue 19th January: At the home of Angela Mayer  
Workshop - Review progress since Sept Meeting.

#### **Humanist Society of West Yorkshire**

[www.wyhumanists.org.uk](http://www.wyhumanists.org.uk)

7 (for 7.30)Thurs 14th January: Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Sq,  
Leeds, LS3 1AD  
"The New Atheists" - Tim Stephenson,  
North Yorkshire Humanist Group

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### **Nine Lessons and Carols for Godless People**

*Review by Laura Abbott*

At this time of the year atheists are thought to turn into Grinches and Scrooges. However with the roaring success of the 'Nine Lessons and Carols' sell out shows, it's clear that our festive cheer is out and proud with a very healthy slice of rationalist sense to accompany the mince pies!

Over 3,500 people flocked to the Hammersmith Apollo, London to enjoy a rather unique and wonderful display of comedic talent and mind boggling science hosted by Robin Ince. Laughing to the point of tears at the stand-up prowess of Al Murray (better known as the Pub Landlord), Dara O'Briain and Shappi Khorsandi, were the audience only then silenced by the beautiful juxtaposition of brilliant scientific minds.

Of course the engaging presence of Richard Dawkins reading from his own published work was a must have for the evening as well as the gloriously refreshing, 'spine-wizard battling' Simon Singh and a notably amazing appearance by the particle physicist Brian Cox.

It can be convincingly argued that these scientists really stole the show; often reducing the auditorium to silence where a pin-drop would have been deafening.

Thinking back to your own chemistry and physics lessons at school, perhaps it is difficult to process how an evening made up of mainly scientist could be so enjoyable!

This was certainly the case for me.

The sold out show reassures you that there are so many people in the country that think the way you do in one way or another, and most importantly are willing to spend money on the tickets and to get to London in order to celebrate that fact.

Even a small pocket of brave Christians tucked away in the wings seemed to enjoy themselves!

This show could not be recommended more highly.

Along with the turkey, too much chocolate or alcohol, this show, once a year, is going to be my new indulgent, Christmas tradition because as Dawkins puts it, *'there's nothing wrong with an atheist celebrating Christmas ... it's the same as reading a novel; you don't have to believe in the existence of the characters to enjoy the book.'*

#### **Acme Inc. [Company Memo]**

From: Joan Bishop, Acting Human Resources Director  
To: All Employee's  
Date: October 6, 2009  
Subject: Patty Lewis and Holiday Party

I'm sure I speak for all of us in wishing Patty a speedy recovery ... I'll continue to forward your cards to her.

In the meantime, management has decided to cancel our Holiday Party and give everyone the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> off with full pay.

Happy Holidays!

Joan

*The End! ...[With thanks to Rachel Coupe]*

*\* With apologies - the [hyperlinks](#) are for those reading this 'on-line'*