

BHA responds to Cardinal O'Brien's Easter Message

from BHA Website ... www.humanism.org.uk

The BHA has responded to alarmist claims made by the leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland, calling them 'divisive and sectarian'.

Cardinal O'Brien used his Easter sermon to 'warn' Christians that they faced a threat of persecution, citing cases which have been widely discredited including by Christian groups, and which have already been rejected by the courts for their failure to demonstrate any discrimination against Christians.

Misrepresenting any call for a secular state as 'aggressive', he urged Christians to be united in their 'awareness of the enemies of the Christian faith'.

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the BHA, commented, *'Ill informed attacks on "aggressive" or "militant" secularists are rapidly becoming an Easter and Christmas perennial from archbishops and cardinals.*

What these attacks ignore is that campaigners for secularism in our public life are overwhelmingly motivated, not by anti-religious prejudice, but by a positive desire for equality and an equitable public sphere. These alarmist speeches, designed to stir up the faithful and foster a false narrative of persecution, are divisive and sectarian.

They obscure the reality of the situation, which is that the churches are seeking to defend a level of influence and privilege totally out of proportion to their significance.'

BHA submits evidence to Commission on Assisted Dying

In March, BHA chief executive Andrew Copson gave oral evidence to the Commission on Assisted Dying, an independent body set up to investigate what system, if any, should exist to allow people to be assisted to die.

The BHA has now submitted written evidence outlining the Humanist perspective and moral arguments around assisted dying. Arguing that with proper legal safeguards and a well-structured framework to prevent misuse, assisted dying and voluntary euthanasia are ways for the terminally ill & incurably suffering to receive help ending their lives with dignity.

Dignity, compassion & autonomy – to help those who cannot help themselves – is often the most moral action available and should be legalised.

Religion will play a big part in all our lives – Like it or not!

from NSS Website – www.secularims.org.uk

The Government has reinforced its links with religious groups by organising a jamboree for Christian leaders at 10 Downing Street, which took place on Wednesday 27th April.

David Cameron hosted the reception that included religious leaders and prominent Christians in an effort to reassure them that his Government will do all it can to include them in the running of the country.

Mr Cameron said in his "Easter message" over the weekend that Christian values made an "enormous contribution" to Britain. *"Easter is a time when Christians are reminded of God's mercy and celebrate the life of Christ. Jesus taught us to love God and love our neighbour,"* he said.

Baroness Warsi, the Conservative party co-chairwoman and a Muslim, claimed the previous Labour government treated religion as *"a rather quaint relic of our pre-industrial history"*.

Keith Porteous Wood said: *"This is another clear indication that this Government intends to attempt to de-secularise Britain and force religion on to an unwilling population. Every survey shows that while Britons are not generally hostile to religion, they do not want it interfering in their lives. Despite what the Prime Minister says, the people of this country do not look to religious leaders for moral guidance, and the country is none the worse for it – despite the claims of priests with vested interests. It is up to all of us to resist this march of mainly reactionary religion into our lives."*

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Faith Schools Fail To Challenge Homophobia 2

Teachers warn that Homophobic bullying in schools is "endemic" and likely to rise with the growth in faith schools.

Already the Catholic Church has been openly critical of a nationally agreed code of conduct requiring teachers to "... *proactively challenge discrimination*".

Teachers fear that this failure to tackle discrimination will only be exacerbated from September by the setting up of "free" schools run by religious groups.

The NUT said: "*Some religious schools believe they are above the law and can do anything that they believe is line with their religious beliefs.*"

Dave Brinson, of the union's executive, told the NUT conference in Harrogate: "*Discrimination, intolerance and bigotry have not gone away. They're still there and still need to be challenged.*"

Deborah Gwynn, from St Helens, Lancashire, revealed details of a survey which showed that 40% of teachers hear pupils use homophobic words on a daily basis.

Less than half the teachers surveyed believed their schools had an effective policy for combating homophobia. Adding, "... *we have to challenge the use of homophobic language by students no matter how innocent it might seem.*"

A survey carried out by the School Health Unit for Stonewall* show almost two-thirds of gay pupils had suffered homophobic bullying at school.

Of those, 41% had been physically attacked and 17% had received death threats.

Half had missed schooling as a result.

Leaders of the NUT added that teachers in faith schools could also suffer discrimination as a result of legislation allowing heads to appoint staff on religious grounds. Thereby favouring teachers of a particular faith in promotions and appointments.

The Union warned that some schools were "unlawfully" using their faith status to avoid implementing equality policy.

It added that they were "... *alarmed by the Government's plans to push through academies and free schools*" and called on the conference to oppose "... *all groups who promote discrimination whether it is on religious grounds, e.g. evangelical Christian academies, or ideological grounds*".

Of the first 11 "free" schools approved by the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, four were faith-based.

Those applying to set up free schools included evangelical Christians who wanted to give their school a creationist ethos, and Muslims.

[*a lobby group on behalf of gays and lesbians]



From
The
Committee
Room

LSH Committee Meeting – April 2, 2011

Précis only – full minutes circulated to LSH Members.

- Following discussion, it was agreed that future monthly **LSH** meetings would benefit if guest speakers taking questions were supported by the chair's presence alongside him / her.
- It was agreed that 'Question Time' formats might be good for some meetings although there was an acknowledgement that it has proved difficult to secure debate opponents.
- We should constantly widen of our range of subjects. Future meetings could include [*for instance*] - Science – Astronomy - Moral Dilemmas - Political Issues as well as religion & education.
- The issue of a more central Lancashire location for our meetings was also aired.
- Ways of raising funds to support **LSH** activities were discussed – possibly developing our website towards fundraising [e.g. links to search engines].
- Designs for **LSH** car window stickers were considered - it was agreed one simply showing the **LSH** logo and our website address, should be adopted ... Quotations for 50 - 100 are being sought – along with a banner in the same design.
- Proposed **LSH** action opposing faith-based "free school" in Lancs were discussed – along with the possibility of that coordinating any activity with our **LSH** Outreach event to coincide with national 'Humanism Week.'
- The need for an Events Secretary to co-ordinate with the committee and confirm future speakers / events / venues etc) was discussed – plus a proposal for a reserve list of stand-by speakers [*from within our group*] to step in at short notice if a planned speaker became unavailable.
- It was agreed an 'Events Calendar' of meetings should be planned for at least six months ahead.
- The committee approved **LSH** support for the Secular Europe Campaign.

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Next **LSH** Committee Meeting 09.30am Sat 2nd July 2011
Meeting Room – Great Eccleston Village Centre
All 'paid-up' **LSH** members welcome

April Meeting

Our guest speaker at LSH's meeting was Steve Barksby; a long-time supporter of Dignity in Dying.

Steve's address was well received by a very attentive audience – *many of whom were first time visitors to any Humanist meeting.*

A healthy barrage of questions was maintained both during his primary presentation and throughout the Q & A session which followed.

As usually happens when people are engaged in discussions such as these, the clock proved to be the enemy. Even though we started on time, and were more rigorous than usual about ensuring everybody had an opportunity to ask questions and participate in the discussions, the simple truth is our allotted 1½ hours disappeared in a flash.

Prior to the event Steve admitted to looking forward to speaking to a Humanist group, anticipating a less hostile environment than he is usually subjected to – but I think he was surprised that what antagonism there was in the room was not motivated out of any sense of annoyance that the proposed legislation went too far: but rather out of a frustration that it does not go nearly far enough.

During his talk Steve made reference to two web-sites and [as promised] the URL's are included here:

www.compassionindying.org.uk - which is full of useful information about your rights under the current legislation; and where 'Advanced Decision' documents can be downloaded free.

www.benefitsandwork.co.uk - with details of how to claim (or appeal) Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Incapacity Benefit (IB). The site has a forum sharing experiences of real people with significant disadvantages being denied vital assistance.

For further details about Dignity in Dying - to join - or to donate: go to their website - www.dignityindying.org.uk



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"One of the greatest challenges facing civilization in the 21st century is for human beings to speak about their deepest concerns – about ethics, spiritual experience, and human suffering in ways that are not flagrantly irrational. Incompatible religious doctrines have Balkanised our world and these divisions have become a continuous source of bloodshed. Words like "God" and "Allah" must go the way of "Apollo" and "Baal" or they will unmake our world."

– Sam Harris
(The Times
2005)

Multi-Faith Advisory Group for Hospitals

from LSH member - Julie Humphrey

Ages ago, I offered to represent LSH on a multi-faith group advisory group for hospital chaplains. It's met a few times since then, but the first time I've managed to get to a meeting was a few weeks ago.

It's a very small group, (*only five present - including myself*) which has the very worthy aim of helping medical staff to meet the needs of a culturally and religiously diverse community.

They've put together a booklet about the Pastoral Care Service – which has useful information on different attitudes and beliefs about death from many different religious perspectives, and - *you guessed it* – nothing at all about the beliefs and attitudes of people who have no religion.

They have also agreed that a copy of every major holy book will be made available to patients – so I need to look out something suitable for the LSH to recommend to be added to the collection.

It's not that they don't *want* to provide an appropriate service to atheists/humanists, it's just that, as so often happens, it doesn't occur to them that doing so is (or should be) actually part of a policy around culturally diverse service to all sections of the community.

So I've agreed to provide some information to go into the Pastoral Care Service booklet, and to continue to attend the meetings, in the hope that, since atheists die just as regularly as religious people, their needs are not forgotten.

Now There's A Challenge!

If you had to recommend one book that should be available to Atheist patients in hospital – which would it be? Would you choose something which addresses issues connected with death – or would you opt for something which focuses on the compensations of life?

Thinking Caps On.

Which book would you recommend - and why?

Reply to Editor - contact details on Pg.1



Prefer A Republic? – Don't Hold Your Breath.

from ... www.centreforcitizenship.org

In 'The Mother of All Parliaments' Republicans are barred by the Parliamentary Oath all members are obliged to swear before taking their seat:

"I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and her successors, according to law, so help me God."

The 1866 Act requires that 'elected legislators publicly affirm or swear an oath of allegiance to Elizabeth Windsor (the hereditary head of state described in the oath as "Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth"), to her son Charles Windsor and to any member of her family who might follow her as hereditary head of state' . . . And any representative of the people who fails to do so is liable to be fined and to be thrown out of parliament.

A democracy that prevents a democratically elected legislator from taking her or his seat in the legislature without swearing allegiance to a feudal institution that is at odds with the democratic spirit and democratic institutions, is a democracy that has no sense of shame.

"Quick Quote"

Suppose there were groups of secularists at hospitals who went around the terminally ill and urged them to adopt atheism: *'Don't be a mug all your life. Make your last days the best ones.'* People might suppose this was in poor taste. –

... Christopher Hitchens (on the constant questioning about whether he is still an atheist in the face of his terminal illness)

Pioneering Lancs Project Prevent Forced Marriages

'Practical Solutions'; an East Lancashire 'drop-in' centre located in Bangor St, Blackburn has so far prevented eight young people; some as young as 15, from being married against their will.

Project leader Mussurut Zia said: *"It has been busy, and we are seeing an increase at the moment. Because it's coming up to the Easter holidays, people are going to be away for long periods of time, and end up being left in the country they have gone to. Sometimes they're brought back into the UK, but are no longer allowed to go to college or school. People may not realise they are missing for a good few months."*

Ms Zia said the service has seven volunteers but was coming under increasing financial pressure due to an expanded workload with calls coming in from across the country.

The project offers support to those at risk; enabling a dialogue can take place in the family. In the most serious cases the victim can be taken to a place of safety such as a refuge while a solution is found.

At present there is no specific criminal offence of 'forcing someone to marry' but a victim can ask for police help if a crime, such as threatening behaviour, assault or kidnapping, has occurred.

In 2009, Lancashire Police used new powers to apply for the first ever Forced Marriage Protection Order. Breaking the injunction is a criminal offence. However, Ms Zia said, the police were not involved in these eight cases, because the people did not want to bring shame on their families.

Anjum Anwar, who runs Blackburn Cathedral based 'Women's Voice' said: *"As far as I'm concerned it is a criminal act. How can it not be, for a child to be forced to do something against their will?"* Her service receives around three calls a week, and she describes forced marriage as a 'very serious phenomenon' adding; *"It's an on-going problem, and I think it will get worse before it gets better."*

Lancashire Council of Mosques chairman Salim Mulla said: *"I have very strong feelings about this, and it's something I can never, never support. Our religion, Islam, forbids it and I have been involved in quite a few cases where I have had to explain this to the parents. This charity provides an invaluable service."*

On the occasion of the royal nuptials...



AND DO YOU, KATHERINE, PROMISE TO PERPETUATE THIS ARCHAIC, EMBARRASSINGLY ANTI-DEMOCRATIC AND INTELLIGENCE-INSULTING--BUT EVER SO CAPTIVATING--FARCE TILL DIVORCE DO YOU PART?

Quick Quote

"The American head of state grew up with a mother on food stamps. The British head of state grew up with a mother on postage stamps. Is that a contrast that should fill Brits with pride?" ... Johann Hari [Huffpost]

It's 200 years since the poet Shelley was expelled from Oxford University after publishing a little pamphlet titled *The Necessity of Atheism*.

The British Humanist Association marked the anniversary by setting up a new 'Shelley' lecture to take place annually in Oxford, on a subject relevant to literary culture.

It seems to me long overdue that the BHA has taken up Shelley as a humanist hero.

I've been reading and loving Shelley's poetry for many years, so I made the trip to Oxford last month, to attend the inaugural lecture, given by Anne Wroe (author of *Being Shelley*) and chaired by Richard Dawkins.

Anne Wroe began by telling us about Shelley's expulsion – how he and a fellow under-graduate wrote and had printed *The Necessity of Atheism*, and placed copies of it in the window of a local book shop. Within half an hour a local clergyman had seen it, read it, and insisted that the publishers burn all but the one copy he kept for evidence.

Within days Shelley and Hogg were expelled. Shelley's aristocratic, landowning father hoped this was a youthful indiscretion, to be repented at leisure, but for Shelley it was just the beginning of a lifelong, uncompromising atheism which he maintained until his death at the age of 29, when he was drowned off the coast of Italy.

In a typical gesture of defiance, on a visit to Switzerland in 1816, he stated his occupation in the hotel register as 'Atheist' and defiantly declared his ultimate destination as 'Hell'.

An article by Jonathan Ree in the current issue of *New Humanist* says that Shelley was 'an absolute toff' but doesn't say how he totally rejected the privileges of the class into which he was born, and spent his life in principled and brave opposition to every form of tyranny – religious, political, and domestic.

He spent his life fighting for liberty and what we now call human rights for all people – which is why Shelley's poetry is beloved of 'self-educated radicals' (as Jonathan Ree rather patronisingly points out) if not the literary establishment including the likes of T S Eliot. (Eliot called a love of Shelley an 'adolescent affair', but being a very conservative and religious sort of chap who didn't like the idea of progress ...

Continued next column ... ►

... he hated Shelley's rather unconventional lifestyle and couldn't distance himself enough to objectively appreciate the poetry, if not the man.)

People have told me they think of Shelley's poetry as sentimental, lyrical verses about love, flowers, clouds and skylarks (because these lyrical poems are the ones that schools and anthologies consider 'safe'). But the majority of Shelley's poems are full of revolutionary ideas and calls to action against the exploitation and oppression of the reactionary government of the time. Poems such as *Men of England* and *The Masque of Anarchy*, which was written as a result of the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester, are simple but eloquent polemics demanding freedom and equality for all.

In his poem *Queen Mab* (probably the most revolutionary poem in the English language) Shelley says 'the name of god has fenced about all crime with holiness' – he was astute enough to see how religion is used by the establishment to oppress and exploit the people.

In his masterpiece *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley used the Greek myth of Prometheus and, in his version, uses Prometheus to free the world from the tyranny of religion. In choosing the title *Setting Prometheus Free* for one of his recent books, A C Grayling follows Shelley's version of the myth and says: 'Shelley was right as regards the philosophical truth that the myth reaches towards – no reconciliation – only victory to one side or the other over the religion man invents for himself out of ignorance, fear or to oppress others.'

Towards the end of her talk, Ann Wroe quoted one my favourite bits from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*:

The lightning is his (man's) slave; heaven's utmost deep

*Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered and roll on!*

*The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none.*

Surely this is a poem of praise for humankind's greatest achievement – science.

Now, what's sentimental about that?

Invitation Declined

Last month **LSH** was contacted by a representative of a Blackburn based group describing themselves as 'A collection on intellectual professionals seeking dialogue with people of all faiths & none with a view to breaking down barriers between communities' – asking if we'd be happy to present a humanist outlook in a series of debates.

We were invited to participate in an event described as 'an intriguing subject' - the title of which was '**Creation – Does God Exist**'.

The debate had the specific aim of seeking to: 'buck the trend' of discrediting creationism; thereby reducing increased isolation being experienced by some communities.

We felt compelled to decline the invitation on the grounds that; simply in participating we might be perceived as tacitly implying an acceptance that there is an intellectual debate to be had on this subject; when our position is totally opposite that of this forum's declared ambition to 'buck the trend' of discrediting creationism.

We added that, far from being an 'intriguing subject' creationism is an utterly faith-rooted concept and as a consequence that isolation referred to is entirely self-imposed.

We explained that freedom for individuals to believe or disbelieve as they choose is a fundamental tenet of humanism and nothing would be gained on either side for us to attend simply to assert that those people of faith who persist in promoting the concept of creationism; in the teeth of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, are simply wrong – and for people of faith to assert they are not! Adding that, having been previously involved in similar events, that is all these debates ever boil down to – irrespective of whether the creationists arguments are faith / intelligent design / or ontologically based.

I'll let you know if we're invited to future events [Ed.]

LSH's 'May' Meeting

Although the speaker is not yet confirmed we have had a positive response from Blackpool & District Astronomical Society to our invitation for a member to talk to us about their particular area of interest.

Blackpool & District Astronomical Society was formed in Oct. 1986 by a few keen local amateur astronomers. The society is growing and now has around twenty-five members, with a wide cross section from novices to experienced observers.

Meetings take place on the first Wednesday of the month and include a talk / lecture, by either a guest speaker or one of their own members, and often include a slide show, video or hands-on sessions.

Members specialise in areas such as lunar, planetary and deep sky CCD imaging, video astronomy, asteroid occultations, double star and ... Continued ... ►

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... ► solar observation. They offer advice including what equipment to buy / how to use it & encourage beginners to learn from the experience of others.

See You There

7.30pm Wednesday 18th May at Gt Eccleston

Below are just two photographs taken from BADAS's excellent website
www.blackpoolastronomy.org.uk



Lunar Occultation of Saturn
22/03/07

Total Lunar Eclipse - 03 March 2007

What Our Neighbours Friends Are Up To

Cumbria Humanists

e-mail - oldcodger2@btinternet.com

Sadly Cumbria Humanists is currently disbanded enquiries can be directed to George Weston at the above e-mail address.

Isle of Man Freethinkers

www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk

7.30pm Sun 8th May- **It's Fun Finding Out** - talk from Mike Jempson about investigative journalism

Liverpool Humanists

<http://livehum.org>

No details posted yet - for update see website

Greater Manchester Humanists

<http://gmh.humanist.org.uk>

7pm Wed 12th May : Friends Meeting House, Mount St, M2 5N
Rev Jane Barraclough – Minister Cross St Chapel - Unitarianism

South Cheshire And North Staffs Humanists

www.humanists.org.uk

Meetings start at 7.30pm - Details of March's meeting not yet posted - see website for further info.

Humanist Society of West Yorkshire

www.wyhumanists.org.uk

7pm Thus 12th May: Swathmore 3-7 Woodhouse Sq. Leeds,
Animal Experimentation - Dr Dan Lyons,
Campaigns Director, 'Uncaged'

Lytham St Annes & Blackpool Amnesty

www.amnesty.org.uk/lytham

7.30pm Mon 2nd May: Church Rd Centre Methodist Church;
St Annes. FY8 5PX

LSH Meetings - The Small Print

Lancashire Secular Humanists is a group for free-thinking individuals living lives informed by **Logic, Science & Humanity**

All **LSH** meetings are 'open' meetings. Anyone is invited to join in our discussions regardless of whether they are humanist – secularist – religious - undecided - or [just] interested.

We are people who enjoy participating in intelligent discourse between ourselves and with others about wide ranging subjects on the understanding that the only common denominator will be that nobody resorts to dogma in defence of a contention.

Being freethinkers there are many things we secular humanists will not agree on between ourselves, but there are matters on which we do take a firm and unanimous stand ...

We do not condone discrimination of any sort - nor do we hate religious people ... Such views are entirely contrary to any humanist philosophy and we reserve the right to exclude any person promoting them!

Don't Forget - If you have trouble parking at Great Eccleston for our meetings you can use The Farmers Arms Car Park

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