

Hastings Humanists *Newsletter* May 2009

Our Next Meeting, 14 May: *How I Became a Humanist Celebrant* by Lesley Arnold-Hopkins. Our member Lesley is Accredited by the BHA to conduct Humanist funerals. Others conduct weddings and baby-namings. She will tell us something about the courses provided, and entertain us with anecdotes of her experiences.

Our Blog: Those who are connected to the internet should not forget to look at our blog <http://hastingshumanists.blogspot.com> for up-to-date news about the group and other happenings. The following items are mostly taken from the blog, but there of course you also get more details by clicking on the links. Lesley agreed to join the blog as a contributor. If other members with some internet knowledge would like to contribute please let me know and I will send you the details for signing on.

The Coronation Street Controversy: This was Lesley's first contribution to the blog. Who would have thought that safe and sensible Corrie would cause such an upset for Christians? Angry Coronation Street viewers complained to Ofcom and ITV after Ken Barlow referred to the Christian faith as "superstition" and God as a "supernatural being" during an episode on Easter Sunday. The broadcast watchdog said it received 23 complaints and ITV about 100.

In the soap, while the Barlow family were preparing to go to church, Ken - played by William Roache - questioned his son Peter on why he was allowing his grandson, Simon, to be "indoctrinated" by the church. He then went on to criticise Simon's school for teaching creationism. After the family returned from church, Ken began to tell his grandson that Jesus rising from the dead "may not necessarily be true" and that scientists think the Big Bang created the universe. More details on the BBC website.

How do we feel about Ken Barlow being our new champion? Would we have liked someone a bit "cooler"?

Science and Religion: I went to a series of talks with this title at Conway Hall on Saturday 25 April, sponsored by the [Centre for Inquiry](#). My main reason for going there was to hear Mary Warnock speak on "Religion as Humanism" but unfortunately she pulled out at the last minute. She was replaced by Raj Persaud who spoke on a different subject (the psychology of internalising or externalising blame and reward). The other scheduled talks were by Jack Cohen on the [Omphalos](#) theory of Philip Gosse, Simon Singh on the [Big Bang](#), and Stephen Law on [Theodicy](#). Frankly I didn't get much from these that I didn't know already. I did meet Alan Hayes of Leicester Secular Society there.

The Science of Religion: Once I came home I watched on RichardDawkins.Net, a much more edifying lecture by Andy Thomson on [Why We Believe in Gods](#). This is a tour-de-force on the most modern research into the Cognitive Neuroscience of Religion. Some of his language is difficult to follow, but we are likely to hear much more of it as these concepts and methods develop further. Personally I don't think I've ever had any tendency to believe in Gods anyway.

BHA News: The British Humanist Association March/April *News* appeared in a much improved A4 format. I have a couple of spare copies that I will be sending to non-email members of the group. Continued overleaf

BHA News continued: One of the main stories is that the BBC's "Central Religious Advisory Committee" is being replaced by an independent "Standing Conference on Religion and Belief" which will include a humanist representative, the excellent Andrew Copson.

There is also a new organisation, the [AHS](#), to coordinate Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies

Hanne Stinson, the BHA Chief Executive has raised money by having the "Happy Human" logo tattooed on her arm. Personally I dislike tattoos, along with piercings, and wouldn't recommend the practice, despite it being a current fad.

The Narnia Stories: The BHA e-bulletin, dated 20 April, linked to a programme on C. S. Lewis called [The Narnia Code](#), which I watched. Its thesis, by Michael Ward, is that the seven books of the Narnia Chronicles, which many critics have called a "hotchpotch" are in fact based on the seven planets of medieval cosmology. I find the thesis convincing. However, the books are still a hotchpotch! Moreover, despite the irrelevant pontifications of Prof Polkinghorne at the end of the film, this is not Christian symbolism. It is Astrology!

The Population Problem: Although we are Humanists that doesn't mean we want a planet over-run with Humans! The [Optimum Population Trust](#) is in the news since David Attenborough has become one of its patrons. He says: "I've never seen a problem that wouldn't be easier to solve with fewer people, or harder, and ultimately impossible, with more." Population tends to be a taboo subject, because of the fear that it could only be controlled by coercive measures. But without some rational approach, based on education and voluntary self-control, it is probable that population will be controlled in the end by flood, famine, pestilence and war. The world population is now approaching 7 billion and is projected to go over 9 billion by 2050.

Letter in the Press: I had a short letter published in 10 April *Hastings Observer*. It was a reply to one that appeared two weeks before which advocated following "the Almighty's ideas of how we're meant to live". I signed it as Secretary of Hastings Humanists to give us extra publicity, and it led to one new enquiry.

Who'd be Female under Islamic Law?: This was an article by Yasmin Alabhai - Brown in *The Independent*. "I am a Muslim woman and, like my late mother, free, independent, sensuous, educated, liberal, contrary and confrontational when provoked, both feminine and feminist. I style and colour my hair, wear lovely things and perfumes, appear on public platforms with men who are not related to me, shake their hands, embrace some I know well, take care of my family. I defend Muslims persecuted by their enemies and their own kith and kin. I pray, fast, give to charity and try to be a decent human being. I also drink wine and do not lie about that, unlike so many other "good" Muslims. I am the kind of Muslim woman who maddens reactionary Muslim men and their asinine female followers. What a badge of honour. Female oppression in Islamic countries is manifestly getting worse. Islam, as practiced by millions today, has lost its compassion and integrity and is entering one of the darkest of dark ages. Here is this month's short list of unbearable stories (imagine how many more there are which will never be known): She lists horror stories from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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