



# Dorset Humanists

*Bulletin – January 2010*

## **Forthcoming events...**

### ■ **Saturday 9th January – 2.00pm**

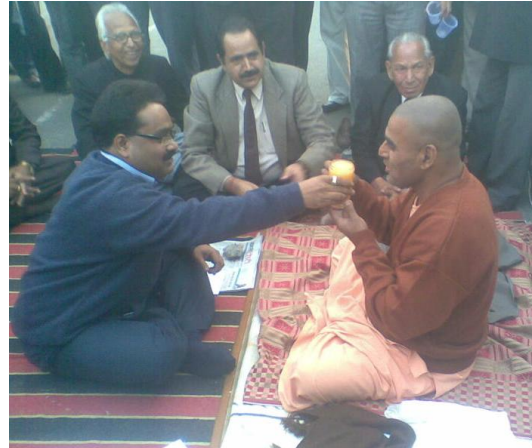
Moordown Community Centre,  
Coronation Avenue,  
Moordown BH9 1TW

### *The Myth of Jesus – a talk by Geoff Jones*

Most people believe that Jesus was, if not the Son of God, at the very least an inspiring moral teacher. It has become increasingly clear to a handful of scholars, however, that the original Jesus was an imaginary figure who only later acquired a human biography as a result of political pressures to turn him into a tangible and marketable Saviour. Geoff Jones will unravel the fascinating process by which this remarkable transformation came about.

### ■ **Saturday 20th February 12.30pm**

Our annual **Darwin Day** celebration lunch followed by "Space, Evolution and our Origins – a talk by Stephen Welch". Stephen is the author of "Stardust: Our Cosmic Origins". Please complete the lunch booking form enclosed with this mailing as soon as possible and no later than Friday 5th Feb. Fifty members have attended this special gathering for the past two years, so please book your place early. Friends are welcome, if there are spaces available after 5th February.



**Swamiji ends his hunger strike by accepting juice from the Deputy Commissioner of Kurukshetra**

## **Swamiji ends hunger strike**

Swami Manavatavadi, who directs a Humanist mission in northern India, stopped eating and drinking on 17th December in protest at the escalation of religiously-inspired hostilities and the inaction of the local administration. Without liquid, the human body ceases to function after a few days. Swamiji reached Day 6 of his hunger strike seated outside the Deputy Commissioner's office in the full glare of the public and local media. On Day 6, the DC himself pleaded with Swamiji to end his strike in return for a promise to meet Swamiji's ten-point bill of demands. If these are not met he will resume the hunger strike.

Dorset Humanists and President of the European Humanist Federation, David Pollock, have written to the State Governor asking him to intervene.

Send bulletin updates to [david\\_warden2000@yahoo.com](mailto:david_warden2000@yahoo.com) or phone 01202 768212

[www.dorsethumanists.co.uk](http://www.dorsethumanists.co.uk)

## News roundup...

### ■ Dorset Humanists give £300 to Humanist Schools in Uganda

For the final meeting of 2009 we heard an interesting talk by Steve Hurd about the work of the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust, of which he is Chairman. There is no government funding available for secondary education in Uganda, for which the development of primary education has created a huge demand. The Trust was formed in 2008 to help the Ugandan Humanists who have established three schools run on liberal-humanist lines to offer an alternative to those run by private and religious foundations.

His talk was received with enthusiasm, and the subsequent donations, supplemented by a grant from our group funds, amounted to £300. Steve has arranged for us to receive periodic up-dates about the progress of the schools

*Phil Mayer*

### ■ Swamiji's 10-point Bill of Demands

Dorset Humanists has been friends with Swami Manavatavadi since August 2003 and we regularly help supply the children with school bags and uniforms. Swamiji has visited Dorset Humanists twice and David Warden has made two return visits to India. Swamiji's Humanist mission has been the victim of religiously-inspired harassment, intimidation and violence for many years and this has culminated in his recent hunger strike. This is his 10-point Bill of Demands (abridged for easy reading) as issued to the local administration:

1. End the oppression and persecution of this Institute and Kids' Kingdom.

2. Consolidate our Plot No. 9 in the Dharmshala Complex from seven parts into one parcel of land.
3. Prevent the Chief Executive Officer of the Kurukshetra Development Board from entering our Institution and harassing and abusing our children.
4. Prevent the destruction of our publicity posters and protect the green area in front of the Institute.
5. Stop the continuous attempts of our Brahmin neighbours, the Saraswat Brahman Sabha, to drive us away.
6. Ensure that there is no repetition of the 2007 conspiracy to arrest/murder me on the false charge of possession of illegal substances which were to be deposited on our land.
7. Establish a commission under a Supreme Court Judge to inquire impartially into the persecution which began on February 4, 2007 with physical violence and threats to kidnap, rape and kill our women and children and to kill me.
8. Recover and return us the digital camera and digital recorder looted by Saraswat Brahman Sabha people on February 4, 2007.
9. Arrest and prosecute those people involved in violent actions against me on February 24, 2007 for which First Information Report (F.I.R.) No. 45 on February 24, 2004 was recorded.
10. Protect our peaceful and non-violent Institute from any further attack.

### ■ Sponsor a Humanist teacher in the developing world

Can you spare £5 or £10 a month? Dorset Humanists has the opportunity to help sponsor a teacher at Swamiji's Humanist School. £35-60 a month will pay the salary of a school teacher. 64 children are currently enrolled and there has been substantial progress on school buildings over the last year. Please contact David Warden if you would like to make a regular monthly donation.

Alternatively, if you have teaching skills why not become a Humanist teacher in the developing world

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yourself? Please ask David Warden for details.

*Swamiji writes:*

“In pre-school classes, children learn reading, writing and arithmetic in both in Hindi and English. In years 2-5, children learn Hindi, English, Social Sciences, Geography, History, Civics, Elementary Science, Arithmetic, Geometry, Drawing, and language and literature in Hindi, Sanskrit and English.

All subjects are taught by an elementary school teacher who would be Bachelor Educated. We want to provide some light snacks after the classes are over in the evening.

The cost of a teacher is 3000-5000 Rupees per month (£35-60). The minimum wage is £2 a day.”

#### ■ 100 Club

Our fund-raising 100 Club now has 32 members, so each month's lucky winner will receive £16 and the same amount will go to Group funds. Each new member will boost the prize fund and it's not too late to join, so, if you fancy your luck, please contact Brian Scotford at the monthly Moordown meetings.

#### ■ The Humanist Meaning of Christmas

David Warden was filmed by Bournemouth University students responding to the question: “What is the Meaning of Christmas for Humanists?”. David suggested that there is no ‘Meaning’ of Christmas with a capital ‘M’ but that Christmas is a cultural festival which helps people get through the depths of Winter with festivities, decorations, present-giving, food and fun. Christmas, as the Winter Solstice, predates Christianity by many centuries. Asked what Humanists think about the ‘commercialisation’ of Christmas, David said that he has friends who run

a gift shop and who rely on Christmas trade to make a living. Commerce, therefore, is not necessarily a bad thing.

#### ■ Council prayers

David Warden was also phoned by Darren Slade of the Echo for his views on the National Secular Society's campaign to end the practice of prayers before Council meetings. David said it was “an anachronism which jars with local government's equality and diversity agenda... Council meetings should be secular”.

*Follow these links on our website:*

<http://dorset-humanists1.blogspot.com/2009/12/lets-end-council-prayers-now-campaign.html>

<http://dorset-humanists1.blogspot.com/2009/12/prayers-at-council-meetings-under-fire.html>

## *In my opinion...*

*From a posting on the website of the International Humanist and Ethical Union:*

“I have come to the opinion that Humanism is too often associated with atheism, and is being dragged into religious acrimony when it deserves to be a philosophy respected for itself, at the same time respecting the private beliefs of others. Atheism of course is not a philosophy, being simply a non-belief, or perhaps the most primitive philosophy of all, as you prefer.

Someone must someday explain to me why "Secular Humanism" is completely concerned with religion. Is this sadly ironic or am I missing something? The British Humanist Association, for example, supports a

campaign called 'The Atheist Bus', but not 'The Humanist Bus'. Are they ashamed of Humanism?

Another example: Richard Dawkins is a Vice President of the British Humanist Association and sells books touting evolution and atheism vs religion, but he assumes the mantle of "Humanist" for vanity purposes I must presume? A social climber? (Books for atheists sell better than those for Humanists, too, I expect). Beer sells better than champagne.

Humanism is a noble philosophy that I define as an inclusive sensibility for our species, planet and lives. Rather than take Humanism's name in vain, should the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the British Humanist Association rename themselves, in fairness, and stop hijacking Humanism? I know the IHEU is particular about the proper names of these concepts, and needs to leave Humanism to Humanists if it can't get past religion bashing as 90% of its activities."

'Djones' 9th Dec 2009 IHEU website

■ *Please contribute opinions and snippets to the Bulletin at any time by contacting David Warden. Letters and emails may be edited.*

### ■ **Irish atheists challenge blasphemy law**

*From the BBC Website...*

An atheist group in the Irish Republic has defied a new blasphemy law by publishing a series of anti-religious quotations on its website. Atheist Ireland says it will fight any action taken against it in court.

The quotations include the words of writers such as Mark Twain and Salman Rushdie, but also Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad and Pope Benedict XVI.

The new law makes blasphemy a crime punishable by a fine of up to 25,000 euros (£22,000; \$35,000).

The government says it is needed because the republic's 1937 constitution only gives Christians legal protection of their beliefs. The new law was passed in July 2009 but came into force on 1 January. Atheist Ireland responded by publishing 25 quotes it considers anti-religious on its website. The group said its aim is to have the law repealed and to attain a secular Irish constitution.

Chairman Michael Nugent said it would challenge the blasphemy law through the courts if it were charged, the London-based Guardian newspaper reported.

"This new law is both silly and dangerous," he said. "It is silly because medieval religious laws have no place in a modern secular republic, where the criminal law should protect people and not ideas."

Atheist Ireland says it will hold a series of public meetings around the country to launch its campaign.

Read the blasphemous quotations here:

<http://blasphemy.ie/2010/01/01/atheist-ireland-publishes-25-blasphemous-quotes/>

■ *It took UK Secularists and Humanists 150 years to get rid of the blasphemy laws (abolished in 2008).*

### ■ **Quote...Unquote**

"Whether a person is atheist or any other, there is in fact in my view something not totally human if they leave out the transcendent... we call it God... I think that if you leave that out you are not fully human."

*Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor*