



Dorset Humanists  
**Chairman's Letter**  
January 2010



In a forthright posting to the website of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, published in this month's Bulletin, 'Djones' has suggested that Atheism is suffocating Humanism. There is a real problem here in that most people have heard of the word 'atheism' but far fewer have heard of the word 'Humanism'. He even suggested that the British Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union, 90 per cent of whose activities amount to 'religion-bashing' should rename themselves and 'stop hijacking Humanism.' My own view is that the BHA and the IHEU are heavily influenced by the secularist tradition which has been religion-bashing since the time of Charles Bradlaugh (died 1891). Bradlaugh fell out with the founder of Secularism, George Holyoake, who was much less aggressive. The 'noble philosophy of Humanism' referred to by Djones is hard to pin down but, broadly speaking, it means living the best human life possible without reference to God or supernatural forces. Humanists should be prepared to attack religious ideas when they interfere with human well-being, but we should also be prepared to call a truce with religion to the extent that it seeks to help people live better lives. Over the Christmas period, I have been reading *Holy Mavericks* by sociologists Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere. They profile five prominent US evangelical Christian pastors, including Joel Osteen and Rick Warren, who run churches in vast stadiums attracting congregations in the tens of thousands. These evangelists have reinvented Christianity as life-coaching with a Christian wrapper. It's easy enough to strip away all the God-talk and what you find is classic 'positive thinking' psychology. The secret of these evangelists' success is in meeting the existential needs of contemporary Americans, being finely attuned to their customers' cultural tastes, and effective marketing. If Humanism could learn to do those three things maybe we also could start to see a massive surge in growth. If you have skills and talents that Dorset Humanists could use to these ends, then please come forward and help us make 2010 our best year yet.

*David Warden*