



Dorset Humanists

## **Chairman's View**

January 2012



Christopher Hitchens, who has died aged 62, was not polite about religion. In his 2007 book 'God is not Great' he wrote repeatedly that 'religion poisons everything' and described himself as an 'anti-theist'. In his 2010 debate with Tony Blair in Toronto he described the deity as 'a celestial dictatorship' and declared that 'redemption is offered at the low price of the surrender of your critical faculties'. He demanded: 'Name me one religion that stands for the empowerment of women or ever has. Wherever you look in the world and you try to remove the shackles of ignorance and disease and stupidity from women, it is invariably the clerisy that stands in the way'. He famously excoriated Mother Teresa, explaining that 'her teachings and entire lifetime of work were exerted to make sure that women could not get hold of the means of family planning, so that the effect she had on prolonging and entrenching and deepening poverty and disease hugely outweighed any good she might have done'. In complete contrast he praised Martin Luther King as 'a profound humanist' whose legacy has 'very little to do with his professed theology... No supernatural force was required to make the case against racism.' The key to Hitchens's thought was his loathing of tyranny which explains his support for both the Falklands War and the Iraq War as wars of liberation, and his hatred of 'Islamic fascism'. He wrote a book about Thomas Paine and he was, in many respects, a modern-day Paine.

We have lost another defender of women's rights against religious patriarchy. Dorset Humanist and former Mayor of Bournemouth Keith Rawlings, who was a lay preacher for forty-two years, joined the Church of England Synod primarily in order to vote for the ordination of women. During his tenure as Mayor he visited a local Baptist Church which was appealing for *men only* to come forward as deacons. Upon leaving, when asked 'See you again?', he replied 'Not in this church you won't - until you change your attitude to women'. Maggie Pepin conducted a flawless and joyful celebration of his fascinating life as teacher, bookseller, preacher, husband, father, actor, badge collector, writer, councillor, and humanist.

*David Warden*