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### [From the web](#)

This week's highlights from the web.

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### [The Abortion debate continues – conscience versus science](#)

Tory Leader David Cameron and Prime Minister Gordon Brown have gone head-to head over the abortion debate, with Cameron calling for a reduction in the time limit for abortions and Brown leaving it where it is. [Cameron called for the limit to be lowered from 24 weeks to 20](#). His call was backed by the country's most senior religious leaders.

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### [From the web](#)

U.S basketball legend Charles Barkley ruffled a few feathers with [this interview](#) on CNN, lambasting "fake Christians".

Take a look at Youtube hero Pat Condell's [take on the Archbishop & the sharia fiasco](#)

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### [Secularist Of The Year To Be Announced Tomorrow](#)

The winner of the £5,000 Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year will be unveiled tomorrow, Saturday 20 October, at a glamorous lunchtime event in London. The prize will be presented by Richard Dawkins to the person adjudged to have made a significant contribution to secularism in the preceding year.

Among the guests will be nominees Peter Tatchell, Oliver Kamm, Mina Ahadi and Johann Hari. Several honorary associates will also be in attendance and we will have entertainment supplied by rising comedienne Christina Martin. There will be other surprises along the way. A full report will appear on our website soon after the event and in the following *Newsline*.

If you have tickets for the show and you are unable to attend, please let us know as soon as possible, as there is a long waiting list for returns, despite our having moved to a larger venue.

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## **Security for Taslima increased as death fatwa is issued**

Security was stepped up for the exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen after the controversial author was issued with a death threat, police said.

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## **Richard Dawkins to present Secularist of the Year prize**

Best-selling author and leading biologist Richard Dawkins will present this year's NSS Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year.

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## **Only a minority think religion is a force for good in Britain**

Only 45% of people consider that religion is a force for good in society in Britain according to a poll taken in the wake of the recent terrorist incidents in Britain. The poll also showed that 71% of people think that the Glasgow car bomb has given Islam a bad name; and 54% think it has damaged the reputation of religion in general.

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## **From the Web**

Did you know that eating pork causes a reduction in modesty, and that is the reason Muslims won't touch 'swine-flesh'? Read the whole of this superstitious nonsense, filed for some reason under 'Science & Technology', in the Muslim Weekly.

[Teachers outraged at Catholic demand to prove their piety](#)

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## **Join the campaign against church bid to take over new school**

The Church of England is lobbying hard to run a new secondary school at Swiss Cottage, central London.

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## **It ain't necessarily so – new books in the NSS shop**

NSS member John Radford has come up with an amusing new book Don't You Believe It! Some things that everybody knows, that actually ain't so.

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## **Honorary associate opposes BNP**

NSS honorary associate, Iain Banks, author of best-selling novels *The Crow Road* and *the Wasp Factory*, has joined a campaign in Scotland to oppose the British National Party in the forthcoming elections. Mr Banks branded the far-right party desperate losers". The BNP said the campaigners were "œcranks".

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## Stimulating new books not to be missed

There has been an avalanche of new books of interest to secularists recently, with many more stunners to come in the next few months.

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## Teenager Sues Council Over Religion

An 18 year old Catholic girl is demanding Â£70,000 compensation from the Highland Council in Scotland because she says they sent her to live with Protestant foster parents. A judge at the Court of Session this week gave the case the go-ahead, saying it involved "œnovel and difficult questions of law".

The girl, identified only as "œAR", was taken into care in 1997 and was under the supervision of social workers and foster parents for most of the next nine years. She was sent to live with two sets of foster carers and says her needs were not properly met. The girl claims the council failed her because she couldn't continue to follow her religion. She also claims the council's treatment of her breached the European Convention on Human Rights and she suffered depression and anxiety "œ" and now can't get a job.

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## Scary New Novel In The NSS Shop

Here's a thrilling new futuristic novel that will scare the pants off you. *Invasion* by D.C. Alden predicts a grim future in which Islam has triumphed and Britain is no more than a distant outpost of the Arabian empire.

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## Uk Televangelists Get All Clear To Start Raking In The Cash

Ofcom, the TV regulator, has decided to remove its ban on TV evangelists appealing directly to viewers for money.

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## How Religious Terror Causes Artists To Self-Censor

Film director Paul Verhoeven says he is too frightened to adapt his ideas for a Jesus biopic because he fears a Christian backlash. The director movies such as *Showgirls* is writing a book about the life of Christ as a man, charting the political and social landscape of his time and largely ignoring Christianity's emphasis on his spirituality. But even if the work proves popular, Verhoeven is wary of adapting it for the big screen because of the controversy it could attract. He tells *Empire* magazine, "My scriptwriter told me not to do the movie in the United States because they (Christians) might shoot me. It's not a joke at all. I took that very seriously. So I took his advice and decided to write a book about it first."

See also: [Saudi play critical of Islamists halted by violence](#)

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## Editorial: Christian Bullies Press Their Advantage

**By Terry Sanderson**

The new breed of Christian activists in Britain are using tactics familiar from the religious Right in America. They've had several false starts, but now they've found the case that could be manipulated into a national scandal. Through a relentless process of lies, misrepresentation, exaggeration and dissembling they have managed to convince the country that a simple health and safety rule is, in fact, a persecutory attack on a poor, defenceless Christian lady. Nadia Eweida is no such thing. She is a conniving religious propagandist who puts the promotion of her "faith" before any other consideration. Is anyone surprised to hear that she is now being funded by evangelical religious groups in the USA?

The BA cross dispute is a masterpiece of manipulation. The churches have been ably assisted by a right-wing newspaper (and the BBC) in misleading just about everyone in the country about the true situation. Rev Tony Kelsoe was allowed to go on *Thought for the Day* and call for a boycott of British Airways. Is that what this supposed "pause for reflection" has now become "a platform for clerical rabble-rousers, safe from any contradiction?"

Let's not mince words here. The Church of England is now in the hands of a crew of evangelical bully boys who will, like their cousins in America and Africa, stop at nothing to get their way. The despicable methods the bishops have used to cheat their way into the headlines are the true disgrace.

BA quite rightly asks front line staff not to wear visible jewellery. It dangles. At airport check-in, as anyone who has ever flown will know, there is a conveyor belt on which luggage has to be put. It is

unlikely that Ms Eweida's necklace would become entangled, but stranger accidents have happened. As a general rule it is best if staff using such machinery do not have things hanging from their necks. It's a rule that has to be enforced for everyone's sake.

If Ms Eweida is true to her faith, then she does not have to make a big show of it. She should be secure enough to know that her cross is there underneath her uniform. But no – she wants to tell people about Jesus – even the ones who don't want to know. And remember, this is an international airline whose public representatives must deal with people from all cultures and all religions. BA should have the right to insist that its uniform is neutral so that there can be no misunderstandings.

Instead, we get this selfish woman insisting that she and she alone must have the right to break the health and safety rules. That her religion is more important than anything else. Haven't we heard this somewhere before – like in the case of Shabina Begum who wanted to defy the agreed school uniform code to wear an extreme garment which she insisted was essential to her religion? In that instance, when the high court agreed with the school that she did not have a right to insist on being different, we didn't hear the bishops beating their chests about it. Now that all seems to be different.

BA has fallen over itself to be fair to Ms Eweida. They have offered her another job away from the front line where she can wear her cross in whatever way she likes, but she won't take it because she wants to make a point. She wants to present herself as a religious martyr. She is nothing of the sort – she is a religious activist trying to shove her religion down everyone's throats. And the bishops of the Church of England – and those stupid MPs who signed an EDM about it and should know better – are anxious to make the most of the misunderstanding.

Bishops as examples of moral rectitude? In this instance they're lying, cheating and should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

See also: [\*A cross BA has to bear\*](#)

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## **Professor Steve Jones Named “Secularist Of The Year”**

The geneticist and anti-creationist Professor Steve Jones has been named Secularist of the Year by the National Secular Society. Professor Jones is the 2006 winner of the £5,000 annual Irwin Prize for his contribution to the promotion of secularism.

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## **Editorial (II): A Secular BBC Is A BBC For All**

## **Witchcraft Report Will Be “Harrowing”**

Ministers are preparing to publish a “harrowing” report on the abuse meted out to African children in Britain branded as “witches”.

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## Is The Blasphemy Law Going To Be Extended?

Home Secretary Charles Clarke intimated that the Government might yet extend the blasphemy law to cover all religions, rather than abolish it, as had been implied if the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill got through Parliament.

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## Secular Arabs Fearful of Islamic Resurgence In Palestine

The victory of Hamas “ or the Islamic Resistance Movement to give it its English name “ which won 74 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Parliament, has raised the fear that Palestinians might henceforth be subject to sharia, or Islamic law. As one of the dark jokes now sweeping Ramallah has it, “Drink like it”™s going out of fashion: it is.”

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## Catholic Church Protests at Proposed Loss of Public Subsidy in Spain

Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero™s plan to reduce financial aid to the church is bringing angry opposition from self-serving clergy.

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