



Cumbria Humanist Group

**David Boulton, Member of BHA and the Sea of Faith Network, talking about
“Taking Humanism to Church”.**

**Meeting at the Eden Rural Foyer, Old London Road, Penrith
on Wednesday, 15 October 2008 at 7.30 pm**

When David Boulton, Humanist and member of the Sea of Faith Network, spoke to the Cumbria Humanist Group at the Eden Rural Foyer on 15 October, members were at first somewhat perplexed at his title – “Taking Humanism to Church” – but it became clear that the church in this case was a social and cultural institution rather than a building. David is also a non-theist Quaker, which again might seem incongruous until one looks at the common beliefs and principles of Quakers and Humanists.

Unlike militant atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris, David does not condemn all personal religion and he observed that it was grossly unrealistic to compare, as these writers do, people of faith with whom we share our human values with those whose extreme fundamentalism only leads to harm and destruction: Christian pacifists with Taliban warlords, Martin Luther King with Ian Paisley, Edith Cavell with Sarah Palin. Religion can be accepted as a personal ‘spirituality’ and need not involve supernatural beliefs. To quote Hamlet, *“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”*

David’s parents had been members of the Extreme Brethren fundamentalist sect and he and his brother had had a very restrained although happy childhood, and only with maturity did David become sceptical about his parents’ beliefs, although he retained affection and respect for the literature of the King James bible and the hymns of his childhood. He was inspired by the faith-based politics of such as Tony Benn, as well as the earlier work of post-Reformationists such as seventeenth century Digger and Quaker Gerard Winstanley, “. . . pulling God down from the skies” and William Blake’s “All deities reside in the human breast.” In such writings the Christian philosophy begins to morph into Humanism, and find common identity with the core human values of all the main religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The Sea of Faith Network aims to ‘explore and promote religion as a human creation’, and recognise these common values, both in those of traditional religious faith and in Humanists who hold no supernatural beliefs.

We heard how a statue of Hindu god Ganesha in a doctor’s surgery led a patient to ask the doctor whether he believed in the god, to which he replied that he believed everything about Ganesha except his existence! The personal and cultural value of faith need not be incompatible with rationalism.

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information.

(430 words)

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Affiliated to the British Humanist Association