



## *Cumbria Humanist Group*

**Film : “2500 Years (& more) of Free Thinking. A History of Humanism.”**  
Followed by discussion.

**Meeting at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle  
on Wednesday, 18 February 2009 at 7.30 pm**

On 18 February members of the Cumbria Humanist Group watched a film produced by the European Humanist Federation (EHF) “**2500 Years (& more) of Free Thinking. A History of Humanism**”, tracing the history of philosophies and faiths that have influenced the evolution of a free-thinking society in Europe over the last two and a half millennia. The roots stretch from paganism, animism and polytheism, from Pharaonic Egypt to Confucianism and Taoism in China, the contributions of the Greek and Roman civilisations, to the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the influence of Islamic science and mathematics. This historical, social and political panorama recalls the West’s history at the crossroads of many civilisations, all of which participated in the building of Europe and retraces the different influences and modes of thought that have impregnated the continent and helped in the construction of free thinking. Resistance to political power of religion, with the Christianity of Roman empire, led eventually to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, to democracy and the French and American revolutions, to constitutions that formally separated church and state.

Enriched by these many trends, Europe was formed through a journey across different periods: the Middle Ages, the renaissance, the Reformation that would see the birth of modern science, the Enlightenment, human rights, humanism and the secularisation of society. These days it is too easy to forget the role of Islam in the scientific and wider cultural development of Europe in the middle ages and Renaissance. Members commented that such science was more purely based on intellectual curiosity than the often commerce-driven science of today, although we must take care to distinguish between scientific knowledge and technological applications in such a debate.

The film concluded with the question that, now that the third millennium has started can Europe, rich in memories and experience, succeed in bringing to the world the constructive values of free thinking? Britain is some way behind other European countries in disestablishment of religion and secularisation of society, whatever the evangelists may say. We may be getting there, but slowly, and we still have a long way to go.

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at [www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk](http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk) or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information

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(374 words)

[www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk](http://www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk)  
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*Affiliated to the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society*