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# Freethinker

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**Effeminacy  
and fanaticism:  
Islam's bizarre  
love-hate  
relationship  
with  
homosexuality**

**– see *Islam:  
Pathway to  
Perversity,  
centre pages***

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royal tit of Prince Joe Eboh – p4**

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Fresh abuse scandals hit Catholic Institutions in  
Austria and Australia – p11**



QUICK, get behind the sofa, hide under the stairs, there's a terrorist coming! No, not really. It's an animal-rights protester fully-armed with leaflets. But according to the Government, I and thousands of others are regarded as "terrorists".

Most of us would faint if we had to terrorise anybody, but Mr Blair is petrified at the thought of being smacked in the face with a leaflet, or strangled with our little bits of purple ribbon. We must be silenced, unlike religious extremists who continue to enjoy freedom of speech, even when it is intimidatory, inflammatory and full of hatred for the indigenous population of this country.

It is disquieting to know that the *Freethinker* is the only platform available to me for airing my grievances.

On some peaceful, lawful animal rights demos, protesters wearing monkey masks are forced to remove them to enable the police to identify and video them. When Muslims protest for their causes, men and women wear face coverings which show only the eyes. Religion rules, OK?

Fanatical Muslims burned the British flag in Regent's Park and shouted poisonous slogans against the West. No action taken. A Muslim teacher was given 100 hours' community service for making several attempts to burn down her school, causing £50,000 of damage. Any animal-rights protesters found carrying fire-lighters or setting fire to anything get up to 18 years in prison.

Muslims demonstrate in Trafalgar Square carrying banners stating "Muslims against Western values". I question why they are here. If I waved a banner proclaiming "Westerners against Muslim values" I'd be arrested and severely punished, especially now that some politicians want to stifle any anti-religious opinions.

At Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, a Muslim, moaning about the West and displaying an unsympathetic attitude to the victims of September 11, waved his hands in my face whilst holding a mug. I tried a few times to draw his attention to this and expressed a hope that the mug did not contain a hot drink. As this man ignored me and the mug-waving continued, I lightly tapped the cuff of his thick coat. At that point he angrily turned on me, remarking that I shouldn't have done this. I explained that I was drawing his attention to the fact that he was clipping me with the mug. His reply was that I was "unclean" and should not have touched him. It seems that by touching this man's coat, not his flesh, I had put him in a condition of uncleanness which required him to spend the next several hours praying.

As I am neither young nor fanciable, it might have seemed flattering to be considered a vamp, but I realised that I was verbally attacked for simply being born a female. Not having any weapons of mass destruction about

me at the time, I relied upon a few sharp words to squash this arrogant individual who swiftly turned to abject grovelling when he realised that he was not dealing with the crushed women in his community. I make a mental note not to give Muslims the kiss of life or stop them from falling over a cliff.

### Guest contributor **BARBARA BARRATT** is incensed over the fact that there appears to be one law for the religious and another for everyone else

If I had called this Muslim "dirty" the police officers who were present would have bundled me into their van.

Large groups of foreigners are allowed to block the pavements around the Houses of Parliament, unlike animal-rights protesters who are threatened with arrest even if they only appear to be taking up too much of any pavement in the UK. One foreign group even caused a breach of the peace, took over an embassy and held hostages. No action was taken against them. In reply to my complaint to the House of Lords, I was told that this was because there were elderly people in the crowd. When I pointed out that a 75-year-old Englishman was arrested and roughly thrown into a police van in Trafalgar Square at a lawful demo to stop the killing of seals I was given the lame excuse by the noble lord, that no action was taken against the hostage-takers for the sake of racial/religious harmony.

An Asian accused of credit-card fraud on more than one occasion was again arrested. No action taken. A young Asian studying at taxpayers' expense was arrested for possession of equipment for duplicating bank cards and stealing thousands of pounds from customers' accounts. Sentence: 100 hours' community service.

Compare some of the above crimes to those committed by animal-rights campaigners. Nine months' jail for sending a couple of angry letters to vivisectioners who were breaking the law. 18 months for phoning and asking vivisectioners and huntsmen to justify their actions, five years for making angry phone calls to vivisectioners and huntsmen, a fine of £250 and £600 costs for a first-time demonstrator who allegedly called out to a breeder of animals for vivisection that he was scum.

Am I racist? I know I'm not. I rejoice when I see a bearded, turbanned man jumping for joy on seeing the England football team score goals. Law-abiding black, Asian, Chinese,

Malaysian people and others have brought much pleasure to this country. The hygienic standards, friendliness, sense of service and courtesy shown to customers in their restaurants would shame many British establishments. I enjoy their company because they are not trying to force religious beliefs upon us, and would rather die than insult the people who are giving them a good living.

Even those who have no sympathy for animals would agree that there is an unreasonable leniency shown to religious fanatics and I ask "Who stands to gain from this creeping lunacy?"

I believe the answer could be "those at the top". As Christianity has lost its stranglehold on the people of this country, other means must be found to control a wilful population. Prince Charles and Tony Blair, both with strong religious leanings, fall over themselves to promote the interests of Islam, stating that we (that is you and I, not them) could learn a lot from that religion.

A newly qualified teacher was forbidden to read *The Three Little Pigs* in class for fear of giving offence to Muslims. The teacher pointed out that it was an English classic being read in an English school to English children. Archbishops and cardinals now cosy up to Islamic leaders as they share similar beliefs that women and gays must be suppressed and abortion condemned. On a larger scale it is necessary to enslave both men and women to serve the needs and purposes of those at the top. And as Islam has shown that it has more ability than any other ideology to control the minds and bodies of people, this is the obvious choice for those who manipulate events in this country and this world.

Cult-busters say that if you can make people do what you want them to do – ie in regard to choice of clothes, food, partner – then you can make them believe what you want them to believe. Read *My Forbidden Face* by Latifa and you will see how quickly the Taliban forced its will on the people of Afghanistan. Overnight women went from wearing Western style dress to wearing mandatory bottle shaped garbs.

To the screams of "Islamophobic" should I respond with cries of "Anglophobic"? Must we spend our lives walking on eggshells?

In seeking to get a little more freedom of speech and less police harassment, I've reached the conclusion that I must get a good stock of headscarves and carry a bell before me calling out "unclean, unclean" whenever I walk through Hyde Park.

If the situation gets any more ridiculous I might have to do something about my head-strong bunions in case I find them pointing in the wrong direction when I sit with my legs crossed. Or is the crossing of one's legs now considered politically incorrect, and so forbidden? It was forbidden at the Catholic school I attended.



# Australian woman to sue over cruelty at the hands of a religious sect

A WOMAN who was brought up in the notorious religious sect The Family, is suing its leader, Anne Hamilton-Byrne, for cruel and inhumane treatment she claims she was subjected to as a child.

According to a report in *The Age*, Melbourne, Anouree Crawford, 34, was raised as a member of The Family from 1974, when she was four, until 1987, when she was removed from a property in Eildon, Victoria, during a police raid.

In a claim filed in the Supreme Court in June, Ms Crawford, of Warrandyte, Victoria, said she was assaulted and starved as a form of punishment. She said her head was immersed in a bucket of water and she was regularly forced to spend the night locked in a shed in freezing conditions.

Ms Crawford told *The Age* the children, who ranged in number from 22 to seven over the 13 years she spent with the cult, were fed meagre amounts of salad, rice and fruit, supplemented with 25 vitamins served each day on a plate.

"Basically food deprivation was a daily event. The reason for the deprivation was to control us, to make us weak and to feed us the most minimal amount of protein," said Ms Crawford, whose father, Michael Byrne, was Mrs Hamilton-Byrne's stepson.

"We were always hungry, we stole food every day."

In her claim, Ms Crawford said she was hit with a bat, a metre-long ruler, a piece of wooden dowelling and a cane.

"They were called beltings, these were very serious events. I don't believe we ever really misbehaved, but the perception we were given was that we had misbehaved," she said.

"Again it was a control issue, thought control. The excuses were definitely rampant for beltings and missing meals."

She claimed she was given a general anaesthetic for an unnecessary and dangerous manipulation of her spine, was force-fed when she was unable to swallow and was made to watch other children being abused.

Ms Crawford, who says she was removed from her natural mother when she was a baby, also alleges that Ms Hamilton-Byrne, 82, of Olinda, raised her in virtual isolation from the outside world and deprived her of a normal education and social interaction with other people. She now suffers from a severe psychiatric and psychological disorder and has been unable to obtain regular employment. She is seeking unlimited damages for injury and loss of earning capacity.

She said she suffered from obsessive com-

pulsive disorder, depression, an eating disorder, and was unable to socialise.

"It's certainly a permanent consequence of the treatment up at Eildon," she said.

Ms Crawford, who is painfully thin, said her eating disorder was not anorexia, and explained it as being "related to the perception of oneself. If one feels one hasn't been loved, one doesn't feel compelled to feed oneself."

Her solicitor, Michael McGarvie, said Ms Crawford's case was one of the saddest he had seen in his 22 years as a personal injuries solicitor. "Anouree's life has been shockingly distorted by her upbringing and the court will hear that she is not going to get over it," Mr McGarvie said.

Ms Crawford said she felt strong anger towards Ms Hamilton-Byrne, particularly during a severe depressive bout two years ago. "I

didn't know what a mother was. She called herself teacher, we were her children," Ms Crawford said.

"I think if one were not to feel angry, one would not be able to experience a normal reaction to the situation."

The case is likely to be heard in the Supreme Court next year.

The police removal of Ms Crawford and eight other children from the Kia Lama property in Taylors Road, Eildon, on August 14, 1987, was conducted with warrants issued under community welfare laws, but no charges were laid against Mrs Hamilton-Byrne for the abuse of children.

However, in September 1994, she and her husband William were fined A\$5,000 each in the Supreme Court for falsely declaring that three children were their natural triplets.

## Bible classes axed after being ruled unconstitutional

BIBLE classes in the public schools of Rhea County, Tennessee, have been ruled unconstitutional. A federal appeals court upheld a ruling that said weekly Bible classes had to be scrapped. This is the same county where the "Scopes Monkey Trial" pitted creationists against evolutionists 79 years ago.

A three-judge panel of the 6th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati agreed last month with a February 2002 ruling by US District Judge R Allan Edgar of Chattanooga, who said that the Bible Education Ministry program in Rhea County violated the First Amendment's clause calling for separation of

church and state. The 30-minute classes were held weekly for about 800 students in kindergarten through fifth grade at the county's three elementary schools.

The county's city of Dayton, about 35 miles northwest of Chattanooga, is where orator and presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan and the lawyer Clarence Darrow squared off in the courtroom during the 1925 prosecution of teacher John T Scopes for teaching evolution in the public schools instead of the biblical story of creation.

The Bible classes were conducted by students, from Bryan College, established in honour of William Jennings Bryan.

Rhea County superintendent Sue Porter said school board members would likely discuss whether to appeal the latest ruling. Bible classes had been offered in Rhea County for 51 years, but they were challenged as unconstitutional by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which launched a legal bid to have them axed.

The appeals judges ruled that, although school officials insisted that the classes were "value-driven" - teaching responsibility and positive morals - they were "also teaching the Bible as religious truth".

They said that the classes entangled church and state because they took place on school premises during instructional hours "with the explicit sanction of the Board of Education".

### Making a drama out of faith

**A MORMON drama student has successfully sued the University of Utah for violating her religious right not to participate in class performances that she found offensive.**

**Christina Axson-Flynn was drummed out of the theatre programme because she refused to use the word "fuck", take God's name in vain, or remove her clothing.**

**The six-year-long civil lawsuit ended when the university agreed not to force students to take part in activities that clashed with their religious beliefs. The university has had to refund Ms Axson-Flynn's tuition fees, and pay \$250,000 in legal fees.**

WHEN Prince Joe Eboh circulated an e-mail promising a share of "45 billion US dollars" to anyone who would help him liberate this mind-boggling sum from Nigeria, little did he realise that he would wind up the one being stung – and made to look a complete idiot in the process.

His e-mail found its way onto a computer owned by "scambaiter" Mike (full name kept secret), who, with a small team, is dedicated to fighting back against those who send out '419' e-mails, so called after a section of Nigeria's legal code.

The prince – if he really is a prince – wrote in his first e-mail: "I am fine today and how are you? I hope this letter will find you in the best of health. I am Prince Joe Eboh, the Chairman of the Contract Award Committee, of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), a subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). NDDC was set up by the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha, who died on 18th June 1998, to manage the excess revenue accruing from the sales of petroleum and its allied products as a domestic increase in the petroleum products to develop the communities in the Niger Delta Oil producing areas. The estimated annual revenue for 1999 was 45 billion US Dollars ...

Mike replied to the e-mail, saying that his name was Father Hector Barnett of the Holy Church of the Order of the Painted Breast and that, unfortunately, he "could not do business with people who are not of our faith".

He added: "I would dearly love to help you. If you ever decide to join our faith then, of course, I could help you both with my experience and financial support. I wish you well in your endeavour, my brother."

**Nigeria is said to be one of the most religious countries in the world. It is also home to a large number of e-mail fraudsters who have made millions from a variety of scams. But now the tables are being turned – with hilarious consequences**

"Now I knew the guy would write back and say: 'Well, can I join your faith?' and indeed he did," Mike said in an interview with BBC reporter Dan Damon.

In due course he received the following reply: "Dear Father Hector, if joining your faith is what it takes to help me, of course I am ready to join you. I'm from a good Christian family. I will do anything you want me to do in the faith. Don't forget that I have to transfer the money to your account as urgently as possible. Send me your account details. I hope to read your mail soon." Mike responded by telling the "prince" that "our ministry was founded in 1774 by a wonderful lady by the name of Betsy Carrington. She spent many of her first preaching years in Kenya, spreading the holy gospel

amongst the local people there. She was the first person male or female to promote Christian texts and beliefs to the Masai warrior tribe.

"The most famous account is when, as a test, she had to remove the top part of her clothes and paint the top half of her body and breast with the red Masai war-paint as a gesture of faith and belief, so that they would accept her and trust her. She was almost immediately accepted by them and was one of the most trusted Westerners known at that time.

"As a qualification to enter the Holy Church of The Order of The Red Breast, all followers must go through the initiation procedure that Miss Carrington made so famous. I have attached a photograph of four of our young inductees going through the procedure.

"Please use this picture to enable you to make the same marking on yourself. I have also attached a small picture showing the design in more detail. I look forward to welcoming you into our membership my brother."

"Prince" Joe carried out the induction and e-mailed back a photo of himself in the properly-sanctified state, together with a message saying "I want to thank the Almighty God himself for the opportunity I have to be a member of this great church, The Holy Church Of The Painted Breast. I'm looking forward to establishing a branch of the Church here. But I'd like us to finish everything about the business proposal, which I sent to you earlier ..."

"He then tried to hit me for \$18,000 – the fee for transferring the millions," Mike said.

He wrote back as Father Hector, saying that the church had plenty of money, but there was a withdrawal fee of \$80.00. "I persuaded him to send me this sum, which he did, inside a birthday card, by courier," Mike revealed.

"Prince" Joe was also supplied with a church mantra, which he was ordered to repeat each day: "When all above seems a great test, Get on down with the Holy Red Breast."

"When I said the prayer this morning," Joe revealed in another e-mail, "something like a fountain went down my system making me to feel strong & happy."

Father Hector of the Church of the Painted Breast then entered a troubling period of religious uncertainty. He notified the "prince" that "I have been troubled recently after the death of a dear friend of mine, Minnie Mowse. She was a very, very dear friend indeed, and her death affected me greatly and started to make me question my faith. I have decided to leave the church and join a travelling circus. I have already made two very good friends, and tomorrow I will be starting my circus training with them ..."

"Prince" Joe then began receiving e-mails from another "Reverend" of the Church of the Painted Breast, who notified him that Father Hector had disappeared, along with \$18,000

## US religious survey yields surprising result

TEN percent of Protestants, 21 percent of Roman Catholics, and 52 percent of Jews in the US do *not* believe in God, according to a recent survey by Harris Interactive of 2,306 adults.

Still, Americans are far more likely to believe in God and to attend religious services than people in most other developed countries, particularly in Europe.

While 79 percent of Americans believe there is a God, only 66 percent are absolutely certain of it. Nine percent do not believe in God and 12 percent aren't sure. And weirdly, not everyone who calls himself or herself a Christian actually believes in God.

Just over half (55 percent) attend a religious service a few times a year or more. Thirty-six percent attend once a month or more often, and just 26 percent say they attend every week. Forty-one percent of women and 31 percent of men attend once a month or more. Protestants (47 percent) are more likely to go to church once a month or more often than are Roman Catholics (35 percent). Jews are least likely to go with 16 percent saying they go to syna-

gogue once a month or more. Church attendance is highest in the Midwest and lowest in the West.

Eighty-two percent of Midwesterners and Southerners believe in God, compared with 75 percent in the East and West.

Beliefs get stronger with age, according to the survey.

Of those 25 to 29 years old polled, 71 percent believe in God. That number jumps to 80 percent for people over 40, and hits 83 percent for those 65 and over.

Other fascinating facts about who believes in God:

- 84 percent of women believe in God, compared with 73 percent of men.
- 91 percent of African Americans believe in God, compared with 81 percent of Hispanics and 78 percent of whites.
- 87 percent of Republicans believe in God, compared with 78 percent of Democrats and 75 percent of Independents.
- 82 percent of those with no college education believe in God, compared with 73 percent who went to college.

from church funds. By this stage Joe already knew from Hector's increasingly eccentric e-mails that the priest had put the money into a business exporting snow to Siberia. But despite being \$80.00 down, and knowing that Father Hector had well and truly gone off the rails, "Prince" Joe was still confident that he could extract \$18,000 from the church. That is,

*I have a sense that for many Nigerians, religion is very much on the surface – Rev Fr John Sheedan SJ, in an interview published in the Guardian (Nigeria), Sunday July 4 2004.*

SOME months ago, following an extensive poll, the BBC found Nigeria to be the most religious country polled in the world. It emerged as the least sceptical country ahead of the UK, South Korea, Russia, Israel, Mexico, India, USA, and the Lebanon.

The strength of Nigeria's piety is centred on the god-compliant responses of those interviewed in the course of the research. Most (and in some cases all) respondents from Nigeria said they believed in God or a higher power and prayed and attended a religious service regularly. They agreed that God or a higher power judged their actions and the way they lived their lives, and that belief in God or a higher power made for a better human being.

But what has Nigeria to show the world for all this piety and godliness?

I would say religious fanaticism and fraud.

With regard to the first, this year alone, more than 2,000 people have been killed in religious clashes and sectarian violence in different parts of the country.

In February, Muslim militants massacred over 50 Christians in the central Nigerian town of Yelwa. Most of the victims were slain while seeking refuge in a church. And in May, Christian ethnic militias launched reprisal attacks and killed over 600 people in a mainly Muslim town.

In an apparent revenge for the killing of Muslims by a Christian group in Plateau, Islamic militants in the northern city of Kano, traditionally a hotbed of religious violence, attacked and killed hundreds of non-believers in the city.

As I was writing this piece, reports came in of another outbreak of violence in Adamawa. Adamawa is one of the states in Northern Nigeria where sharia (Islamic law) is not being implemented, but religious tension remains high. The latest outbreak of violence was said to have been sparked off by sharp disagreements over the rebuilding of a minaret in the riverside town of Numan, a year after the mosque was razed in similar sectarian violence. About 37 people were confirmed dead while thousands have been displaced from their homes.

until the BBC report went out in mid-July, and was relayed across the globe, together with a photo of the corpulent Joe proudly exhibiting his painted breast. By now, he must know that he had been taken for a fool.

What happened to the \$80.00 dollars? This cash, and similar sums extracted from other scammers, is given to charities in the north of

## What has Nigeria to show for its piety?

Four years ago religious riots over the implementation of sharia in Northern Nigeria left over 2,000 people dead. Nigeria's religious have therefore been a national burden and an international embarrassment, a source of hatred, intolerance, conflict and mutual destruction instead of a resource for peace, unity stability and progress.

With regard to fraud, Nigeria ranks among the most corrupt country in the world. One of the pointers to Nigeria's high-level corruption is the email money scam. As Keith Porteous of

### Leo Igwe, Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement, poses the question

the National Secular Society London noted in his article in the *Freethinker* (May 2004), it is from Nigeria, the least sceptical country, that the vast bulk of e-mail money scams emanate. And that is the truth.

Interestingly some of the Nigerian money scammers invoke the name of God in their e-mails in their desperate attempt to rope in and dupe gullible folk. One such e-mail was circulated in the name of a Mrs Florence Johnson.

"Beloved in Christ! Calvary greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am MRS FLORENCE JOHNSON I am 65 years old, I am now a new Christian convert, suffering from long time cancer of the breast. From all indications, my condition is really deteriorating and is quite obvious that I may not live more than six months, because the cancer stage has gotten to a very severe stage. My late husband was killed during the Gulf war, and during the period of our marriage we had a son who was also killed in cold blood during the Gulf war. My late husband was very wealthy and after his death, I inherited all his business and wealth. My personal physician told me that I may not live for more than six months and I am so scared about this. So, I now decided to divide part of this wealth, by contributing

England by Mike and his anti-scramming volunteers. When asked why these people who are themselves scammers can't spot an obvious scam, Mike replied: "I think it operates in much the same way as it does with real victims. Greed clouds their judgment. This is what happens to those who fall for the 419 scams; they just see all these millions.

to the development of evangelism in Africa, America, Europe and Asian Countries ... I am willing to donate the sum of 2,500,000.00 Million US Dollars to your Church/Ministry for the development of evangelism and also as aids for the less privileged around you."

Anyone falling for this, and similar scams, is asked to send money to cover the transfer costs, often amounting to many thousands of dollars.

Some years ago, the CNN showed a video clip of some Nigerian fraudsters praying with their victims at Lagos airport. These money scammers, one assumes, are among the Nigerians who would say they believe in God or a higher power and that belief in God makes for a better person.

It is quite evident that Nigeria's religiosity has absolutely nothing to do with moral rectitude and ethical behaviour. Instead Nigeria's much-vaunted piety and godliness has everything to do with moral bankruptcy, depravity, hypocrisy and fraud. The fact is that many Nigerians only pay lip-service to religion, and their piety should only be seen as a form of moral decay. Nigerians swear by the Bible or Koran, and say "By the grace of God or *Insha Allah*" even when they are lying, cheating, stealing or deceiving the next person.

I also noticed that of all the countries covered by the survey, Nigeria was the least developed. At least one expects that a very godly country should be rich and prosperous (after all, as they say in Nigeria, "our God is not a poor God") but this is not the case. In Nigeria, poverty, hunger, starvation, ignorance, diseases, frustration and general disillusionment are endemic.

While the most sceptical nations are often found in the highest echelons of the Human Development Index, Nigeria is well down the ladder as one of the poorest countries in the world. It therefore logically follows that while scepticism and religious unbelief are (or could be) an indication of development and progress, religious piety and godliness are symptoms of national disease, underdevelopment and general lack of progress.

I began with one quote and end with another: *In large measure, the sectarian violence that frequently erupts in Nigeria is a product of the inherent duplicity, hypocrisy and cynicism of those who fervently avow God in all their misdeeds – Okey Ndibe, "Of God and Ungodly Deeds", the Guardian, July 1, 2004.*

THE Home Secretary, David Blunkett, announced last month that he intends to try once more to introduce a law to criminalise Incitement to Religious Hatred. The last time Blunkett tried this, in 2001, as part of his anti-terror legislation, it was scuppered by the House of Lords.

So, why does Blunkett feel that this law is necessary, when so many others so passionately oppose it? There is no doubt that racist groups such as the BNP are attempting to avoid existing race hate laws by focusing their venomous propaganda on Muslims or Islam. In this way they can create hostility to Asians without using their race to do it.

Increasingly, though, religious hatred is being expressed by one religious group against another – sometimes by simply citing passages from “holy books” that are perceived as hateful by competing religions. In the state of Victoria in Australia, where legislation similar to that being proposed by Blunkett is already in force, a case of Religious Vilification is dragging through the courts brought by an Islamic group against a group of fundamentalist Christians.

In retaliation, fundamentalist Christians are busily taking notes about what is preached during devotions in mosques. So, after seeing their judicial proceedings and indeed the law itself reduced to farce, some of those who pressed hardest for the law in Victoria are now wishing it had never been introduced.

The religious proponents of such legislation in the UK tend to argue in favour of such a law on the grounds of equality. Case law in 1983 had the effect of bringing Sikhs and Jews under the protection of the Incitement to Racial Hatred legislation, but this was because they were deemed to be identifiable ethnic groups, not because of their religion. Nevertheless, this illusory disparity has given those of other religions who do not enjoy protection the spurious justification to call for equality in the form of an extension of the incitement to racial hatred law to include religions. Such calls have become more insistent because there is an increasing tendency for ethnic minorities to identify themselves in religious terms rather than, as hitherto, geographic minorities. Religions have codes of behaviour, spokespeople, and leaders who often hold

much greater sway on their followers – and the government – than minority ethnic leaders had been able to do.

### Some drawbacks

But before leaping into passing new laws we need ask – are they necessary? Will they really eradicate religious hatred or simply lead to even greater problems?

We already have a plethora of laws on the statute book to deal with most forms of anti-social behaviour – from harassment and defamation right up to incitement to violence and murder.

**KEITH PORTEOUS WOOD, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, explains why an incitement to religious hatred law would be illiberal, dangerous, and – above all – practically useless**



Any complaint that might be brought under the proposed new legislation could, as far as I can see, be dealt with under already existing legislation. Anything more would be superfluous – and even dangerous.

Nor is incitement law the panacea that Mr Blunkett appears to think it is. The one incitement to hatred law we already have, the racial one, “has not significantly affected the production and circulation of racist material”, according to the Commission for Racial Equality when giving evidence to the House of Lords Religious Offences Committee (see below). The Committee went even further in concluding in 2002 about the incitement law: “it has been argued that laws against inciting racial hatred create more expectations than can be fulfilled by prosecuting authorities anxious to avoid giving racist utterances the publicity of a trial and the endorsement of an acquittal.” So, a further reason for not pressing on with this law is that it is unlikely to be effective.

### Parliament has already tried and failed

An extension of the incitement law to include religious hatred has already been considered in Parliament in detail at least twice and rejected.

Mr Blunkett's first attempt to do so was included in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill introduced in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attack in 2001. His intransigence in the face of widespread objections infuriated his opponents who came from every party including his own, and formed what was probably the most broadly based opposition to any Government measure seen in Westminster for some decades. At the very last minute he offered concessions – and significantly they aimed to placate the religious bodies worried about being prosecuted for using the texts they hold sacred. But few of his critics were won over and he was forced to drop the incitement provisions. The stark alternative was to lose the whole anti-terrorism bill – and with it the remainder of his political credibility.

The overwhelming majority of the opposition came from those worried about the implications for freedom of expression, although there were also objections that the legislation had been prepared too hastily, and that an Anti-Terrorism Bill was an inappropriate vehicle for such a change. So, soon after Blunkett's measures were defeated, the Lords Select Committee on Religious Offences was set up largely to recommend how incitement to religious hatred could best be outlawed. Their starting point was that they probably needed to do little more than replicate Blunkett's formula of adding “and religious” to incitement to racial hatred legislation. The National Secular Society argued against this in both a written submission and in oral evidence before the Committee. Seeing no easy way forward by this route, they changed tack and – for the best part of a year – examined a number of alternatives, but failed to find a satisfactory way of framing legislation.

### Freedom of expression

Mr Blunkett's entering the ring for a second time presumably means he thinks he has found a solution to a conundrum that defeated a committee of eminent peers who struggled with it for a year – and it is no surprise that he is already facing a barrage of opposition similar to the last time round.

Not everyone opposes this law, of course, and, as would be expected, the main supporters are minority religious groups. There are, however, some among our own ranks who believe there should be legislation to address this problem, providing freedom of expression is not compromised. They acknowledge, however, that what Mr Blunkett is proposing – and that is all that is on offer so far – is unlikely to satisfy that criterion.

Nick Cohen, writing in the *Observer*, made a spirited and compelling case against Blunkett's proposals. If incitement to religious hatred had been a crime at the time of the persecution of

### Anti-Islam church sign

A SIGN outside the Faith Baptist Church in the US town of Avon, Washington, has led to fierce controversy. Proclaiming “Islam: America's No 1 Enemy” it was placed by Pastor Marc Monte, who said: “I want to stir interest, not alarm, but Islam is a false religion, dangerous and hate-promoting.”

Rushdie, he warned us, his enemies would certainly have tried to bring him to trial.

Cohen recalled that when in 1857 the then Lord Chief Justice "persuaded Parliament to limit free speech by passing the Obscene Publications Act" he told them that "censorship would apply 'exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well regulated mind.' Only hateful pornographers had anything to fear. His assurances were worthless. Dry guides on birth control were prohibited. The works of Emile Zola, Gustav Flaubert, James Joyce, D H Lawrence, Jean-Paul Satre and even Daniel Defoe (for *Moll Flanders*) couldn't be sold, while tens of thousands of authors and publishers censored themselves for more than a century. After that experience, if you're relaxed about extending prohibition you should be careful about what you wish for because you will have no right to be dismayed by what you get."

Cohen's point about the already worrying trend of self-censorship is well made. This even happened with Section 28 of the Local Government Act which sought to ban in schools "the promotion of homosexuality" as if it were a fizzy drink. Many schools quietly stopped initiating any references to homosexuality, and teachers tip-toed round the subject, avoiding it completely if possible. And that

was despite the fact that the law was hopelessly framed and, effectively, unusable. There will be no such mollifying factors with Mr Blunkett's law, and writers and critics will restrain themselves "just in case" they say something that will land them in prison.

The opposition facing Blunkett may be even more intense this time because of resentment about Section 39, a provision with severe freedom of expression implications which was spirited through the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act. The Home Secretary recently admitted – it almost seemed, boasted – on Radio 4's *Today* programme that Section 39, which introduced Religiously Aggravated sentences, carrying jail sentences of up to seven years for insulting behaviour, had slipped through almost unnoticed. This was probably because the fight over Incitement to Religious Hatred provisions diverted peers from subjecting the rest of the Bill to as much scrutiny as it would otherwise have received. The oversight was an extremely serious one. I am convinced that Section 39 is already causing greater restriction on freedom of expression and am concerned that, gradually over time, case law might – as some are pressing for – extend its protection against insult from protecting *people* to protecting *beliefs*. In other words, a back-door blasphemy law protecting all religions, and one with very harsh penalties.

Having also heard the Home Secretary's contempt for what he described as the

"liberati", I do not expect him to be moved by, or even to listen to, those extolling the importance of protecting freedom of expression at all costs. But his scorn for protecting freedom of expression has overwhelmed him to the extent that he seems unable to appreciate that there is also a strong pragmatic element in the freedom of expression arguments.

The widely-held fear is that the real beneficiaries of an incitement to religious hatred law will be religious extremists. It will be they who will use the law, bringing fear to others, too intimidated to criticise them, and so giving them ever more confidence to spout about the inferiority of infidels and non-believers. I cannot emphasise the importance of this too highly. The most effective way to control such people, and racist extremists, is to expose their utterances – and bring forth vigorous counter-arguments – in the public arena.

So, even ignoring the key freedom of expression point, why is Mr Blunkett going out on such a limb once more, given the incitement law's ineffectiveness and the strength of the opposition to it demonstrated so effectively in 2001?

Could it be that in the wake of the Iraq war – as even the mirage of weapons of mass destruction disappears – New Labour has woken up to the fact that through its own acts it has almost entirely alienated the Muslim vote? And now it has to pay compensation in the form of this illiberal and dangerous legislation?

## 'Crazy' Bush has to go, says psychiatrist

A MAN suffering from megalomania, paranoia, a false sense of omnipotence, an inability to manage his emotions, a lifelong need to defy authority, an unresolved love-hate relationship with his father, and the repercussions of a history of untreated alcohol abuse – that, in a nutshell, is the psychological profile of the god-obsessed George W Bush.

*Bush on the Couch* is a new book in which psychoanalyst and George Washington University professor Dr Justin Frank uses the president's public pronouncements and behaviour, along with biographical data, to craft an extremely disturbing picture of George W Bush.

American commentator Arianna Huffington last month wrote: "It's not a pretty picture, but it goes a long way in explaining how exactly our country got itself into the mess we are in: an intractable war, the loss of allies and international goodwill, a half-trillion-dollar deficit."

She added: "One of the more compelling sections of the book is Dr Frank's dissection of what he calls Bush's 'almost pathological

aversion to owning up to his infractions' – a mindset common to individuals Freud termed 'the Exceptions', those who feel 'entitled to live outside the limitations that apply to ordinary people'.

"Limitations like, for instance, not driving while drunk. Or the limitation of having to report for required Air National Guard duty. Or the limitation of having to adhere to international law," said Huffington.

"And it doesn't help one outgrow this sense of entitlement when daddy and his pals are always there to rescue you when you get in trouble -whether it's keeping you out of Vietnam by bumping you to the top of the National Guard waiting list or bailing you out of lousy business deals with cushy seats on corporate boards or making sure the votes in Florida (just another limitation) aren't properly counted.

"But you don't make it as far as W has without some psychological defenses of your own – especially when it comes to insulating yourself against your own fears and insecurities.

"Raised in a family steeped in privilege and

secrecy, and prone to the intense aversion to introspection and denial of responsibility that are the hallmarks of a so-called dry drunk – one who has kicked the bottle without dealing with the root causes of the addiction – Bush has become a master of the psychological jujitsu known as Freudian Projection.

"Freudian Projection is, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, a defence mechanism in which 'the individual deals with emotional conflict from internal or external stressors by falsely attributing to another his or her own unacceptable feelings, impulses or thoughts.'

"In layman's terms, it's the soot-stained pot calling the kettle black.

"At the end of his analysis, Dr Frank offers the following prescription: 'Having seen the depth and range of President Bush's psychological flaws our sole treatment option – for his benefit and for ours – is to remove him from office'.

"You don't need to be a psychiatrist to heartily second that opinion."

Islam's condemnation of homosexuality is unambiguous – "it is a disease in need of curing", insists the contentious Muslim cleric, Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, whose visit to the UK last month sparked enormous controversy.

Islam's attitude towards lesbian and gay people can also be pathologically hostile, as demonstrated by the fanatical Islamic group *Al-Muhajiroun*.

In a recent tirade against the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, the group issued a statement saying: "Know that one of the most sinful acts known to humankind is what is termed homosexuality. This sin, the impact of which makes one's skin crawl, which words cannot describe, is evidence of perverted instincts, total collapse of shame and honour, and extreme filthiness of character and soul. It is truly a sin disbelieved by healthy minds and violently rejected by natural instinct. Even animals and other creatures are repulsed by this action. Have you ever seen an animal exhibit homosexual behaviour. The answer is an emphatic NO!

"This kind of sexual activity between men was not known on Earth since creation until the time of the people of Lot. They were the people whose men began this practice amongst themselves, instead of having normal relations with women ...

"The crime of homosexuality has many serious consequences and harms. One such serious consequence of homosexual activity is the birth of serious diseases that plague the Earth. The AIDS virus claims millions of lives every year and this kind of sexual deviance is among its main causes.

"We therefore call on all sexually deviant groups to embrace Islam as a means of expiation of your sins. And know that the door of repentance is open to everyone with Allah until his life span ends. May Allah guide us to the straight path and make us die as Muslims and avoid a horrible and shameful death."

Apart from exposing the writer's deplorable ignorance of biology – he has clearly never heard of the exuberant carryings-on of the bonobos (miniature chimpanzees), one of around 450 species of mammals and birds known to engage in homosexual behaviour<sup>1</sup> – this rant suggests that homosexuality is completely alien to Muslims, and is solely the disease of the infidel. In fact, the opposite is true. Whereas, in all probability, there are no fewer – or more – naturally gay and lesbian people in Islamic societies than in any other, a far greater proportion of Muslims overall engage in homosexual activities.

The reason for this is that Islam unnaturally skews human sexuality. Because it demands strict segregation of the sexes in all aspects of life, it is inevitable that men and women – who are not necessarily gay by nature – will seek sexual gratification with people of the same sex. This phenomenon is well recognised in

the West. In institutions where the sexes are segregated, for example, prisons, public schools, and the military, homosexual acts do take place – again, among people who are not always naturally homosexual.

In one of the most illuminating essays I have ever read concerning Islam and homosexuality, Dr Serge Trifkovic<sup>2</sup>, in his book *The Sword of the Prophet: A Politically-Incorrect Guide to Islam*, wrote: "In Muslim nations, the suppression of liaison between men and women outside pre-arranged wedlock has produced frustrated sexual tension that has sought and found release in homosexual intercourse through the centuries. Those denied access to licit sexuality have sought and obtained outlets that have produced chronic contradiction between normative morality and social realities. Male and female prostitution and same-sex practices – including abuse of young boys by their older male relatives –

**Islam has a bizarre love-hate attitude towards lesbians and gay men. Freethinker editor BARRY DUKE pulls together the issues involved**



have been rampant in Islamic societies from the medieval to the modern period. It should be emphasised that those societies stress a distinction between the sexual act itself, which was deemed acceptable, and emotional attachment, which was unpardonable:

*Sexual relations in Middle Eastern societies have historically articulated social hierarchies, that is, dominant and subordinate social positions: adult men on top; women, boys and slaves below* – Bruce Dunne, 'Power and Sexuality in the Middle East', *Middle East Report*, Spring 1998.

"A Muslim who is the active partner in sexual relations with other men is not considered a 'homosexual' (the word has no pre-modern Arabic equivalent); quite the contrary, his sexual domination of another man may even confer a status of hyper-masculinity. He may use other men as substitutes for women, and at the same time have great contempt for them. This depraved view of sex, common in mainstream Muslim societies, is commonly found in the West only in prisons. In all cases it is the presence of love, affection, or equality among sexual partners that is intolerable.

"Equality in sexual relations is unimagin-

# Islam: P to Per

able in Islam, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Sex in Islamic societies has never been about mutuality between partners, but about the adult male's achievement of pleasure through domination.

"Historically, this state of affairs was not concealed from Western observers who were fascinated, shocked, and often attracted by the outward appearances of rampant, barely concealed pederasty. By 1800, a European traveller to Egypt wrote:

*The inconceivable inclination which has dishonored the Greeks and Persians of antiquity constitutes the delight, or, more properly speaking, the infamy of the Egyptians ... the contagion has seized the poor as well as the rich.*

"The 'contagion' in question was spelled out more bluntly by an earlier writer, Thomas Sherley, describing the Turks:

*For their Sodommye they use it soe publicly and impudentlye as an honest Christian woulde shame to companye his wyffe as they do with their buggeringe boys.*

"A 17th-century French visitor to the Middle East went so far as to claim that Muslims were bisexual by nature, and many male authors gave descriptions of 'licentiousness' (lesbianism) among women in harems and bath houses.

"Homosexuality became known to the English as the 'Persian' or 'Turkish' vice.

"This peculiar aspect of the Middle East has never entirely disappeared. The sight of men, even soldiers in uniform, strolling along a street hand in hand, strikes first-time visitors as extraordinary even today. The Muslim world enjoyed a reputation as a haven for sex with boys and men well into the twentieth century. The proclivities of many Western authors like Gustave Flaubert, Oscar Wilde, or Andre Gide, reflected the pederast and homosexual attractions of the Islamic world; the fascination continues in the 'gay culture' of our own time:

*But the bottom line ... is that there's still something extremely sensual and potent about the image of the Islamic male. You only have to compare the stiff, asexual frigidity of Bush and his bookmarmish wife with the moist-eyed, sensitive and soft-spoken quality of the bearded Bin Laden, feminine yet virile, with his multiple wives and vast progeny, to grasp the difference.* – Bruce la Bruce, gay film-maker.

"The author of this passage ... has intuited something important, and dangerous. Excessively doting, downtrodden mothers, fixated on their offspring, and aloof, mostly dis-



# Pathway Diversity

tant and domineering fathers, create preconditions for what is known in clinical psychology as the 'lost object homosexuality'.

"The cry for the missing father that emanates across the Muslim world into the endless void from a hundred thousand minarets five times each day, can never be answered. The hatred that motivates Bin Laden and his 'feminine yet virile' followers is not the normal aggressiveness of the child for the father at the Oedipal stage, which can be mediated and managed, but hard-core psychotic homosexuality of the son abandoned by his father, a near-incurable condition that can lead to homicidal, delusional paranoia.

"This condition is well known to the practi-

**'Sex in Islamic societies has never been about mutuality between partners, but about the adult male's achievement of pleasure through domination'**

tioners of clinical psychology and psychoanalysis in Great Britain, where thousands of sons of upper and upper-middle-class families end up in neo-Islamic establishments known as public schools.

"It is not too far-fetched to conclude that British Islamophilia under Disraeli and after was not merely due to the usual game of balancing the powers:

*I sometimes wonder if there is not some horrifying attraction, especially for English boys brought up in a public school, to the brutal manliness that regards sodomitic rape as an expression of virility. In any event, a series of Anglo-Saxon males who have gone in search of their manhood found it in Islamic culture: Sir Richard Burton, T E Lawrence, and Pasha Club are at the head of a large pack, whose rear is brought up by the academic camp-followers and foundation executives who find, in their defence of Islam, the excuse for their hatred of Jews. - Thomas Fleming, *Chronicles*, 1999.*

"Men and women have been created different, and the recognition of those differences is essential in any society that does not want to follow the path of post-modern depravity. Islam has found the opposite extreme of the modern West's bed-hopping unisex feminism. The tradi-

tional Western view, a balance between sexual equality and sexual difference, between freedom and restraint, is the best answer. Islam's problem of homosexuality, a reflection of the deeper psychosis endemic to the Islamic world view, illustrates a problem that cannot be solved short of Islam's thorough and comprehensive reform and revision."

**H**aving created the conditions which make social and sexual deviation inevitable, the paranoid-schizophrenic world of Islam then treats those deemed guilty of such deviation with the utmost cruelty. For example, in seven Islamic countries the "crime" of homosexuality carries the death sentence and in other states, *shariah* (Islamic law) insists on a variety of harsh and barbaric punishment for transgressors.

In Saudi Arabia in April, 2001, five homosexuals were sentenced to 2,600 lashes and six years in prison, and four others to 2,400 lashes and five years' imprisonment for "deviant sexual behaviour". Amnesty International subsequently reported that six men were executed on charges of deviant sexual behaviour, some of which were related to their sexual orientation, but it was uncertain whether the six men who were executed were among the nine who were sentenced to flogging and imprisonment in April.

It is difficult to establish precisely the number of homosexuals that have been executed in Iran since the Islamic revolution in 1979, since not all sentences are widely publicised, but estimates range from several hundred to 4,000. According to Amnesty International, at least three homosexual men and two lesbians were publicly beheaded in January 1990.

The Islamic Penal Law Against Homosexuals, approved in July 1991 and ratified in November of that year, is simple. Article 110: "Punishment for sodomy is killing; the Sharia judge decides on how to carry out the killing." Article 129: "Punishment for lesbianism is one hundred (100) lashes for each party." Article 131: "If the act of lesbianism is repeated three times and punishment is enforced each time, the Kabul and Kandahar law only differed on the method of killing." One group of scholars believed the condemned should be taken to the top of the highest building in the city and hurled to their deaths, while others advocated placing them in a pit next to a wall which was to be toppled on them, so that they are buried alive. Both methods were solidly grounded in authoritative tradition, and both were applied.



Gay Muslims parading in the US behind the Al-Fatiha banner

At least five men convicted of sodomy by Afghanistan's *sharia* courts had been "placed next to walls by Taliban officials and then buried under the rubble as the walls were toppled upon them". In one such incident, three homosexuals were punished thus while Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar watched along with thousands of spectators. After the 30-minute waiting period, the three men were still alive, but two died the next day. What became of the third is unknown. The punishment by stoning is derived from the Koranic account of Sodom's destruction by a "rain of stones," which was itself the product of Mohammed's misunderstanding of the Hebrew story of "fire and brimstone," ie sulphur.

For decades, an underground gay scene flourished in Egypt, despite being viewed with disdain by most members of the Muslim and Christian communities. As long as gay life was discreet, it was long tolerated as an open secret. But with the new millennium came a vicious crackdown on gay life, culminating in the widely-publicised conviction of 23 Egyptian men who were jailed for one to five years on charges including "practising sexual immorality", a local euphemism for homosexuality. Another 29 were acquitted.

Since then, gay life in Egypt has been almost completely extinguished.

Trifkovic in his essay, *Islam's Love-Hate Relationship with Homosexuality*, points out that "The Koranic claim that homosexuality was unknown before it first appeared in Sodom is a uniquely Islamic concept; so is the notion that its destruction was exclusively due to the homosexual practices of its inhabitants, a departure from the Hebrew Scriptures. In addition to the Koran many *hadiths* or authoritative traditional sayings mention *liwat*, (homosexual intercourse) eg 'When a man mounts another man, the throne of God

shakes', and 'Kill the one that is doing it and also kill the one that it is being done to'. Mohammed's first successor Abu Bakr reportedly had a homosexual burned at the stake. The fourth caliph, Mohammed's son-in-law Ali, ordered a sodomite thrown from the minaret of a mosque. Others he ordered to be stoned. One of the earliest and most authoritative commentators on the Koran, Ibn Abbas (died 687) blended both approaches into a two-step execution in which 'the sodomite should be thrown from the highest building in the town and then stoned'. Later it was decided that if no building were tall enough, he could be shoved off a cliff."

So where does this leave lesbian and gay Muslims? By all accounts, in a world of fear, isolation and denial – not only in hard-line Islamic states, but also in the much more tolerant West.

Faisal Alam, a once devout Muslim who, having found it impossible to reconcile his faith with his homosexuality, established the *Al-Fatiha*<sup>3</sup> foundation for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgendered Muslims, says:

"We are about 200 years behind Christianity in terms of progress on gay issues."

Alam, who is associated with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, DC, adds: "Islamic attitudes toward homosexuality are barbaric. That's the only way to put it. It's an issue that has not even begun to be discussed. It's still viewed as a Western disease that infiltrates Muslim minds and societies. If you tell most straight Muslims you are gay and Muslim, they will tell you it's an oxymoron – you cannot be both."

In 1998, Alam organised *Al-Fatiha's* first convention. Almost 40 people participated – a pitifully small attendance, but nonetheless a significant number considering how terrified most Muslims are of "coming out".

Sceptical gays who first hear of Alam's group often worry that it might be a fundamentalist front intent on "outing" gay Muslims. "One woman thought the fundamentalists were going to line us up and shoot us," he said in an interview with David Gold.

"That picture", wrote Gold in an article published in 1999 in the US publication *Southern Voice*, "isn't too far from the reality gays face in some parts of the Muslim world. And yet this is the same Islamic world, observers say, where strict segregation of the sexes routinely leads men and women alike to turn to their own gender for love and physical companionship – the same Islamic world from which Western gay men sometimes return with head-spinning stories of wild homosexual adventures.

"Ponder this seemingly irreconcilable contradiction, and you begin to glimpse the enormous spiritual conflict with which gay Muslims wrestle every day. The first thing

most gay Muslims say when they hear of another gay Muslim is, 'My God, I thought I was the only one'.

"A desire to combat that withering isolation led Alam, in November 1997, to launch an internet list service for gay and lesbian Muslims. That list has now grown to include 250 people in 20 countries."

Those who attended *Al-Fatiha's* first convention came from the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. A second gathering, held Memorial Day weekend in New York City, attracted 60 people. A third took place in London in 2000, under conditions of utmost secrecy – for it was discovered that *Al Muhajiroun* was planning to wreck the event by beating drums loudly and throwing eggs and bricks at the participants.

In addition to the *Al-Fatiha* website, Alam maintains the Queer Muslims Home Page on the internet. Yahoo also features a queer Muslim club. But Alam said he rarely looks at the posted comments, which are often "letter after letter of filth" written by Muslims enraged at the idea of granting any vestige of respect to homosexuality.

"Given this condemnation and the fact that some Islamic countries continue to impose the death penalty for sodomy, why do gay people remain in the Islamic faith? Their answers are as complex as the ancient religion itself," wrote Gold.

"For each of us, it is a struggle", Alam says. "Probably 90 to 99 percent of gay Muslims who have accepted their sexuality leave the faith. They don't see a chance for a reconciliation. They are two identities of your life that are exclusive.

"Islam has been such an important part of my life since I was a teenager that I cannot see myself living without it. But I am the last person on earth to say I have reconciled it with my sexuality", Alam says. Though he still considers himself a Muslim, Alam is no longer now religiously observant.

Alam, a native of Pakistan, says that forced segregation of the sexes leads to the impression that "sexuality is something very fluid. It's much easier for two guys to express their love toward one another and be accepted than it is for a male and a female." He recalled seeing men holding hands and kissing in public, all the while followed by wives completely veiled in the Islamic tradition.

Sexual roles, too, play an important part. In Arab culture, Alam says, the male who takes the active role is not considered gay. Teens and younger men take the active role in sex with older men. Alam said that old accounts exist of British soldiers on duty in the Arab world who wrote home ecstatic about the willingness of Arab men to play the active role.

Even so, those caught at it risk being thrown

into quicksand. And the situation is "100 times worse" for lesbians, because of the oppressed status of women in most Islamic states.

Because Islam lacks a central hierarchy, gay and lesbian Muslims are left in the position of having to appeal to Islamic scholars for a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuality.

Alam says *Al-Fatiha* has identified several "progressive and open-minded" Islamic scholars in the hope of encouraging them to break with hard-liners. "If one of two of them will say something on this issue, we will have gotten somewhere." But such an attitudinal sea-change would surely come slowly.

In the meantime, Gold wrote, Muslims like Alam are left coping with an often hostile environment. Alam now feels "ostracised" by the larger Muslim community. He was asked to leave a Muslim youth group when it was learned he was gay. And when his parents found out, they cut off his school money.

Alam is not blind to the danger he faces – even in the United States. "A lot of people have asked me, 'Are you afraid for your life? Are you afraid of being killed?' I'm not worried, but I do take precautions," he says. He described himself as "very out – but not in the Muslim community."

Though he has long anticipated a backlash from conservative Muslims, Alam continues to organise. *Al-Fatiha* now has chapters in New York City and Toronto, and Alam has plans to launch groups in Atlanta, Vancouver, Washington, DC, San Francisco, Detroit and Chicago. "We're asking for tolerance", Faisal Alam says. "It's a far cry from asking for gay marriage. That issue will not happen until hundreds of years from now."

## REFERENCES:

- 1 Homosexual behaviour occurs in more than 450 different animal species world-wide, and is found in every major animal group. Detailed evidence of this behaviour is contained in *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, a comprehensive study by biologist Bruce Bagemihl (St Martin's Press, New York, 1999, 752 pages. Hardback, with many illustrations, index, references.) ISBN 0312192398.
- 2 Serge Trifkovic received his PhD from the University of Southampton, and pursued post-doctoral research at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, US. He has contributed to the BBC World Service, the Voice of America, CNN International, and the *Times* newspaper, London. He is foreign affairs editor of the American magazine, *Chronicles* and *The Sword of the Prophet* is published by Regina Orthodox Press (September 11, 2002). ISBN: 1928653111.
- 3 The *Al-Fatiha* Foundation is based at 405 Park Avenue, Ste 1500, New York, NY 10022. Website: [www.al-fatiha.org](http://www.al-fatiha.org)

AN investigation is under way in Austria after media reports of sexual misconduct at a Roman Catholic seminary at St Poelten, west of Vienna. It is alleged that priests were photographed fondling and kissing trainee priests, and pornographic images were found on the seminary computers.

The school director and his deputy have resigned and the Austrian Bishops' Conference has promised a full and swift internal investigation.

"Anything that has to do with the practice of homosexuality or pornography has no place at a seminary for priests," it said.

Austrian news magazine *Profil* published the pictures of the alleged abuse at St Poelten, about 80km (50 miles) west of the capital, Vienna. It also reported that a police investigation had uncovered as many as 40,000 images and videos – some allegedly including child pornography – on computers at the seminary.

That investigation began after allegations of child sexual abuse against the director of the seminary, Ulrich Kuechl. He has resigned, but denies the allegations. Now his deputy Wolfgang Rothe has also stepped down, following the latest allegations of sexual misconduct.

Bishop Kurt Krenn, who is in charge of the St Poelten diocese, has dismissed the pictures as "childish pranks" – and called the allegations of sexual misconduct "groundless".

But the scandal is not likely to die down – with some officials in the diocese asking the Vatican to remove Bishop Krenn, whose remarks have caused an uproar in the mainly Roman Catholic country.

"Collecting child pornography cannot be dismissed as a prank," said Thomas Huber, a Green Party politician, quoted by the Associated Press news agency. The opposition Socialists have called for a full criminal investigation. Austrian Cardinal Hans Hermann Groer resigned in 1998 amid allegations that he had molested young boys.

Meanwhile, another headline-grabbing case of Catholic abuse has broken in Australia. Centred on the Salesian order, the scandal involves David Rapson, who had been sentenced to two years in jail in 1992 for sexually abusing a 15-year-old student of the Salesian school Rupertswood, near Sunbury, Victoria.

On July 19, 2004, *The Age* in Melbourne reported that the head of the Salesian order, Father Ian Murdoch, visited Rome as part of his campaign to deal with sex-abuse allegations against Salesian priests. This resulted in the Pope defrocking Rapson. In his first interview since allegations against the Salesians surfaced worldwide, Father Murdoch revealed that he made two trips to Rome to persuade the Vatican to expel him. Father Murdoch also revealed that he had prevented a former head of the order, Father Julian Fox, from returning from Rome to

Australia unless he agreed to face his accusers in a case of alleged sexual assault.

The Salesians also paid A\$35,600 in compensation following sex-abuse allegations against Father Fox.

In all, Father Murdoch said about 30 complaints of abuse going back several decades had been made since he became head of the order in 2000. Fifteen of those complaints had been found to have some substance, costing the order possibly hundreds of thousands of dollars in compensation. About 15 priests and brothers were allegedly involved in those incidents and 10 to 12 other cases dealt with by the order before Father Murdoch took over.

Father Murdoch expressed sincere regret to victims, their families and the many innocent members of his order tarnished by the widely publicised abuse.

"We're sorry," said Father Murdoch, who described dealing with the abuse as "a bit like

dealing with death".

He said he was so sickened by the details of the Rapson abuse and the devastating effect it had on one victim and his family that he resolved that Rapson had to be removed from the priesthood as fast as possible. "There is no doubt in my mind that David Rapson is an offender of the worst kind," he said.

In February the Pope signed a document removing Rapson from the priesthood.

The Salesian order became engulfed in a sex-abuse scandal after it was revealed recently that it had sent priest Frank Klep to Samoa in 1998, despite his being investigated by Victorian police for sex crimes. This was two years before Father Murdoch became head of the order.

Klep returned to Melbourne ahead of a deportation order by Samoan authorities and is now facing further abuse charges from his time at Rupertswood.

## Should Calasanz be re-designated Patron Saint of Paedophiles?

THE abuse of children in the charge of Catholic priests is by no means a modern phenomenon, according to a book published earlier this year. *Fallen Order*, by Karen Liebreich, reveals that Father Joseph Calasanz, the 17th-century Spanish priest who founded the Piarist Order to educate children of the poor, and who is now the patron saint of schools, covered up sexual abuse.

The subject of a painting by Goya – *The Last Communion of Calasanz* – the priest, who was canonised in 1767, had routinely been protecting colleagues against accusations of child abuse.

Calasanz's order was suddenly and mysteriously shut down by Pope Innocent X in 1646, but the reason for its closure has been kept a closely-guarded secret for more than 300 years.

It was not until Karen Liebreich, a Cambridge-educated historian, discovered papers in the Vatican archives that the truth emerged: Calasanz was regularly moving priests and even promoting them when claims of abuse were levelled against them – a system known as "promotion for avoidance", which the Church has practised ever since.

One recent example of this happening in the UK was when Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the current leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, admitted moving a priest who subsequently committed further offences against children.

When Calasanz learned that a priest at one of the order's schools in Naples – Stefano Cherubini – had been accused of abuse, Calasanz wrote to the headmaster in 1631: "I want you to know that your reverence's sole aim is to cover up this great shame in order that it does not come to the notice of our superiors, otherwise our organisation, which has enjoyed a good reputation until now, would lose greatly."

Leibreich states in her book: "Molesting children was a grave misdemeanour then, yet the authorities, despite innumerable protests, did nothing. It can only be that they did not consider abuse of children by a priest to be a matter of enough gravity to prevent that priest becoming universal superior of a teaching order."

Many more details of this ancient scandal may have emerged but for the fact that another accused priest had burned many of the order's archives in 1659.



"IT IS essential to maintain an internal temper of militant wrath," said one Muslim commentator interviewed in the early days of the Salman Rushdie persecution. This was a fancy way of saying that those Muslims who had got worked up about Rushdie's "insult" should jolly well stay worked up. The phrase is similar in tone to something that the hallucinating "saint" John wrote. He insisted that God only liked the "hot" or the "cold" person. The "lukewarm", John reported (though how he knew remains a mystery) God would "spue out" of his mouth – a charmless but telling image. It is perhaps significant that this expression appears in that old Christian fundamentalist favourite the Book of Revelation (which has always seemed to me the literary equivalent of a hideously prolonged panic attack).

Jesus himself, so the stories relate, was something of an "all or nothing" man. One had, he demanded, variously and amongst much else, to leave or to deny one's family, to sell all one's possessions, to follow him unquestioningly, and to believe in all manner of gibberish without the benefit of anything so trivial as evidence. His own internal temper of militant wrath even impelled him to kill a fig tree whose only crime was failing to provide fruit out of season. He does not seem to have been more than a very intermittently reflective individual.

Religious movements are propelled by passion and directed by conviction. No religion ever flourished that trod warily or enjoined circumspection or compromise. No religion has ever been born of reason – with the difficult exception, perhaps, of Theravada Buddhism, which originated in large part as a philosophical doctrine in opposition to the contradictions inherent in the Vedantic teachings concerning

the "Atman". Even Buddhism, though, soon became overlain with mythic accretions and tales of the spuriously miraculous – to such an extent that it is now enjoyed even by Californians.

**NORMAN PRIDMORE**  
reviews *Fundamentalism – The Search for Meaning* by Malise Ruthven.

**Oxford University Press, May 2004, hardback 248 Pages  
£12.99. ISBN 0-19-284091-6**

In other words, fundamentalism is fundamental to religion.

Given that this is so, readers seeking to learn something about fundamentalism (of the Christian variety at least) might be surprised and a little disappointed when they turn to those places where information might be expected to be gleaned. The well-regarded textbook *Christian Theology*, by Alister McGrath devotes only two out of over five hundred pages to the subject – and then somewhat obliquely. Keith Ward, that doyen of theologians (Regius Professor of Theology at Oxford, no less) neglects to mention the subject at all in his book *God – a Guide for the Perplexed*. No reference whatever is made to it in a recent and important collection of essays by a whole host of religio-luminaries entitled *The Meaning of Life in the World Religions*. Church super-intellectual John Polkinghorne maintains a stern silence. What's going on? Could it be that clever Christians are embarrassed by the subject? Who knows. Strange, though, given its importance. I wonder what Rowan thinks. But then, don't we all?

Fortunately, thanks to Malise Ruthven, this hardly matters. Following on from his essential *A Fury for God – The Islamist Attack on America*, he has written perhaps the best book there is on fundamentalism in all its forms. It is at one and the same time richly factual, deeply insightful, profoundly reflective, and full of objective wisdom. He combines history, politics, and sociological analysis, and does not fear even to intelligently psychologise. He manages to do all this in something under two hundred and 50 pages – and to do so with clarity, enviable succinctness and welcome sanity.

Being a speaker of Arabic it is perhaps not surprising that his previous books have concentrated on Islam. These include, as well as *A Fury for God*, the excellent *Islam in the World and Islam: A Very Short Introduction*. He has also written books on the Rushdie affair and on religion in America. This last, entitled *The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America*, is sadly and unforgivably now out of print. Readers who manage to find a second-hand copy should snap it up.

The term fundamentalism, as any fule kno, originated in the USA in the early years of the last century and refers to that movement which sought to return Christianity to what its progenitors saw as the basic and essential elements of doctrine and belief. Two rich Christian brothers (and there's a paradox to savour), outraged by the incursions into their simple-minded theology of the findings of (especially) the German critics, and alarmed by the possible consequences, produced a series of tracts called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth*. Some three million were distributed free of charge. The term fundamentalist was first used by a conservative Baptist who wrote (quotes Ruthven) that fundamentalists are those who are "ready to do Battle Royal for The Fundamentals". The tone of belligerence is curiously prophetic. And where did the Stewart brothers get their idea for the free distribution of these tracts? Why, from the American Tobacco Company. This exemplary organisation was spending, says Ruthven, "millions of dollars distributing free cigarettes in order to give people a taste for them". As one pious brother wrote to the other – "Christians should learn from the wisdom of the world". It is probably now impossible to determine which of these free distributions, the fags or the tracts, caused more harm.

Though the word fundamentalism is of comparatively recent origin, the constellation of attitudes it defines is very far from modern. This is actually very helpful for anyone trying to gain some understanding of its modern manifestations. Ruthven, displaying a sure touch for what is likely to be most illuminating, does not hesitate to draw upon historical examples or to compare and contrast, in all their hideous manifestations, the whole range of present fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes. In doing so he shows very clearly that there are indeed an abundance of "family resemblances" (a helpful notion drawn from the later Wittgenstein) that even the most doctrinally different "fundamentalisms" share. This certainly helps to empty of content those arguments that religions have with each other which assert, essentially, "my fundamentalism good – yours bad". Ruthven shows all to be roughly equal in terms of their toxicity.

Karen Armstrong in her analysis of fundamentalism in *The Battle for God* made much of a distinction between two (rather debatable) modes of knowing called *mythos* and *logos*. *mythos* was not concerned with practical matters, but was that which provided individuals and societies with their context and pretext. *logos* was about the practical, the rational, and the scientific. She contended that these two "sources of knowledge" were once healthily kept apart, and that pre-moderns knew (presumably by some instinctive means) the place and purpose of each. It is only in modern

**Croatia clergy resist drink curbs**

"HALF of Croatia's clergy could wind up behind bars for drink-driving offences," an irate Catholic priest is quoted as saying when it was announced last month that the authorities intended tightening up the law.

According to a BBC report, Croatian priests are seeking exemption from a tough new drink-driving bill on the grounds that they must sip wine on the job. Many travel between parishes to say Mass, which includes ritual drinking.

"Consumption of wine is the main component of the Eucharist," priest Zivko Kustic said. "We need to agree on at least a bare minimum of tolerance since we serve Mass daily, sometimes up to three times a day."

Kustic added that he was not calling for clergy to be allowed to drive drunk. "We need to agree on at least a bare minimum of tolerance," he said.

Another priest said: "It could happen that we enter the category of the worst offenders."

times, she suggested, that one has become confused with the other. It is reminiscent in some ways of the late Stephen Jay Gould's equally fallacious insistence upon the existence and value of "Non-Overlapping Magesteria" (the best explication of which is in Gould's book *Rocks of Ages*).

As Ruthven writes, "The implication of Armstrong's analysis is that people in pre-modern societies were somehow less prone to take action on the basis of 'mythical' ideas ... Her argument flies in the face of historical evidence that many pre-moderns (howsoever defined) enacted their myths in rational terms." He goes on to suggest that "a more fruitful approach to modern fundamentalisms would focus on the empowering dimensions of myths as self-validating expressions of the sacred in a pluralistic world in which real power and authority have become diffused and anonymous ... Modernity is not so much characterised by faith in 'science' as on trust in anonymous abstract systems ... Trust in abstract systems provides for the reliability of day-to-day living, but by its very nature cannot supply either the mutuality or intimacy offered by relations of personal trust."

In other words, fundamentalism can be seen as a reaction to the alienating effect of much of modern life, and as a response to our apparently deep-rooted human need for meaning, coherence and purpose. Carl Jung and Rollo May, both fearless irrationalists, believed that it would only be by reconnecting in some way with the 'mythic' that meaning might be imparted to our lives. It's a seductive notion – but an obvious question concerning the truth of it quickly arises: did they arrive at, justify and defend their conclusion by rational means or in some other way? If the former, then it seems to

destroy their own argument by asserting the primacy of reason. If the latter, then its ultimate effect is to force its proponents into an ever more extreme subjectivism and solipsism. This is precisely what fundamentalism does – but with one essential difference. The true fundamentalist not only submits to irrationality, but also, and blindly, to authority. It is because of this that, wherever fundamentalism is found, also to be found are charismatic leaders and unquestioned authority figures. This is also why it is especially dangerous, since each movement tends to acquire the character flaws of its leader and goes on to recycle them in the actions of its followers.

One of the most interesting and perhaps provocative points that Ruthven makes (amongst many others) is that in which he outlines the strong similarities between fundamentalism and nationalism. On the whole, rationalists have also been internationalists and less inclined than most to espouse simple, and simple-minded, patriotism. One curiosity of fundamentalism is that whilst it insists upon transnationality (the "world-wide community" of Islam, the church as a "community of believers") it is in practice intensely nationalistic. Ruthven suggests that where fundamentalists are in control, state power and the machinery of internal repression are vastly increased – and demonstrates that this has less to do with the application of theology than with the application of pragmatism to power-politics. In the case of Islam the point is obvious. Elsewhere, one only has to look at the declared policies of (say) the BJP in India, Jewish fundamentalists in Israel, or to imagine what a fundamentalist theocracy in the USA would look like to understand his point.

No book on fundamentalism would be com-

plete if it did not tackle questions of sex and sexuality. Ruthven, though always clear-minded, is both powerful and angry in those sections in which he explores fundamentalist repression and abuse of women and of sexual minorities. Indeed, one of the great values of the book is its demonstration that no form of fundamentalism anywhere is capable of viewing women and sexual minorities as anything other than either deficient or entirely deviant, or of behaving with anything less than strict and ferocious rigidity towards them.

However understood, fundamentalism is first and foremost dangerous. But what are its prospects for survival? How may it be fought against? Ruthven analyses the options but does not prescribe. This is certainly wise, given the multifaceted nature of the problem. Crucial, he suggests, are information and education. Isolation is increasingly less of an option for fundamentalist regimes, or for fundamentalist groups within host societies. This would seem to be a powerful argument against those who call for (say) segregated education, and supportive of those who insist that (for example) visible religious symbols should be confined to the domestic realm. These are uncomfortable arguments for libertarians to address, or for anyone sympathetic to the goals of multiculturalism – but they must be faced and freely discussed. So far the debate has hardly begun. Malise Ruthven's book, in demonstrating so clearly the nature of fundamentalism, has made a major contribution to our understanding of it. And its publishers, the Oxford University Press, have made it even more useful by making sure that it is well indexed, annotated and printed. Despite having read it three times already, I feel that a fourth does not seem remotely excessive.

### Secular Saints

IN his article "Secular Saints & Godless Greats", Peter Richards (*Freethinker*, July) had some difficulty deciding whether, or not, Thomas Jefferson was really secular. He also included Epicurus and Lucretius (who was a follower of Epicurus), amongst the alleged "godless".

Jefferson was influenced by Epicurus. This may have been why he felt able to call himself a "Deist". Epicurus said that the gods exist, but they have no interest in human affairs, so there is no need to fear them.

The gods are not out to get us for moral reasons. The Epicurean philosophy is atomic (materialist), but not determinist. Epicurus said that an "atomic swerve" introduced indeterminacy. He believed that the gods are made of a finer type of atoms, so it is difficult for people to perceive them. Lucretius portrayed the gods as personifications of natural forces (at least, this is how I interpret his poetry). The

## Points of View

original Epicureans believed that natural forces are also composed of atoms. They didn't have the knowledge of physics and chemistry that we have nowadays.

It was probably Jefferson's readings of Epicurus that inspired him to include the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in the Declaration of Independence.

It seems there are more possible ways of looking at the world than a simple division between religion and atheism.

BILL FARNABY  
Norwich

### Criticism where it is due

I AM sorry to have saddened Alun Lewis, especially as he is a new subscriber, but methinks he doth protest too much. Of course one should be polite when visiting a foreign country, but that shouldn't stop one from being

critical where appropriate. I personally consider religion to be harmful, and I think that one way of countering it is by ridicule, but I wouldn't dream of criticising or ridiculing in that country.

Many Muslim countries forbid the practice of Christianity, let alone humanism. Does Mr Lewis seriously suggest that we should not even criticise that, let alone ridicule it?

As for the Thai rule of not pointing your feet at anyone, whether a Buddha or a human, how do you exist without doing so? It derives, apparently, from the ancient Hindu belief that the head is the most sacred part of the body and the feet the most unclean. When sitting on a temple floor you must tuck your legs beneath you, but your feet are still pointing somewhere, at some of the many other people in the temple.

And what about the rule that because the left hand is used for cleaning after defecating, it should not be used for passing food or shaking hands? This is odd, because there must be

many people (like me) who use their right hand for cleaning after defecating, and most people then wash both hands. Is this ridiculous, or just a quaint local custom?

ANTHONY CHAPMAN  
Wendover

### Methadone for the ex-religious

I SUSPECT that Paul Stevenson, in his article "What shall we do for Methadone?" (*Freethinker*, June), is aiming rather too high in talking about "a religion-free tomorrow", and that perhaps the majority of people will always be subject in some degree to magico-religious thinking. Never mind the ever-deepening and ever-specialising nature of modern science, a large proportion of the population after over a century of free education still believe the sun goes round the earth, etc., in true hunter-gatherer fashion. And it has to be confessed that much pre-scientific thinking frankly has a certain humanistic charm about it, with an ancient cultural pedigree to back it.

What I judge to be the normal religious and superstitious content of thought in the majority, when it is not being stirred up by literalists and evangelicals, is I think overwhelmingly harmless. It is perhaps even necessary, to allow them to keep in touch with their humanity in an increasingly technological civilisation. If you think about it, an entirely rational and scientific culture might well be finally rather an inhuman one, as far as our understanding of our species goes.

The only problem is, of course, that the aforementioned zealots in the monotheisms can exploit this core of irrationality in their reactionary revival plans, to (temporarily) crank up congregation numbers and support for their assaults on civil and human rights. It's these anachronistic loonies that have to be controlled, for the sake of progress, including secularisation, in society at large.

BRIAN KING  
Cornwall

### The roots of religion

JAMES McKenna, in his article (*Freethinker*, July), ably avoids failing into the trap. Many historians and anthropologists do, as does historical docu-drama, which is to endow *rational* abstract reasoning on people whose language didn't have it. Northern Cro-Magnons? furs, spears, leaky shelters, full conscious deliberation, women leading the hunt. They cannot be blamed, the writers, that is, for we understand our remote ancestors by projecting back our own self-conscious – and lately politically corrected – interpretations of reality, the limits of which, reversing Wittgenstein's definition, is the limits of language. This is why the origin of religion is so difficult to grasp.

Archaeological digs provide ample evidence for pan-cultural belief in an afterlife.

For the reasons Mr McKenna eloquently describes, such belief is a likely major causal component of all religions. That there is a duality in consciousness between the physical world and the inner world of thoughts is true, though there is linkage through thought-engendered feelings and emotions, and vice-versa. For people unaware of this connection, fear of the end of bodily life – death – because it so contradicts their entire experience that it is unimaginable, could cause belief in the continuance of a mystical analog in a "spiritual" afterlife. But whence came imagination? "At the dawn of self-awareness" is unclear. It might not have been fear of one's own death – fanatical Muslims aren't – but grief from the death and loss, not just of close family members, but of leaders and their authority, that was the genesis of belief in an afterlife. The burial evidence from the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs and Chinese emperors and less grandiose burials elsewhere, and translations of ancient inscriptions and text, depict this god-king worship.

Something other than fear of death or grief must have caused it. It has been proposed that there was a neurological causation of god-king worship during the evolution of consciousness and in the subsequent 'religious' practices of idolatry and sacrifice concomitant with belief in an afterlife. This proposed neurological function in archaic humans was stress-induced and caused memory-composited auditory and visual hallucinations of authority figures – leaders and kings – who were thought of as gods, in this world or, when the person died or the hallucinations waned, in the next, or spirit world. As consciousness developed, the people who under duress hallucinated the most were, I think, more likely to be killed in battle, or die in other ways, and less likely to pass on their genes, which is why so few modern humans suffer the symptoms. For most believers today, God is no longer heard, "he/it" is imagined (confirmed for some by "inner" sensations, which are misunderstood). The major reasons for the persistence of religion, besides belief in an afterlife, are now psychological. Not least that it is an ameliorative for stress, served by dependence on an authority figure for guidance and protection. God, however delusional, fulfils this need. Belief is also a handy banner to grab land in this world, and for suicide bombers to hasten their departure to the next.

For all my criticism, it is a pleasure reading and pondering speculation such as Mr McKenna's in the *Freethinker*, the only public forum that has the courage to publish radical secular views.

With regard to the article by Peter Richards, I would agree that modern atheists, great or small, because of traditional church-led preju-

dice against their name, unfortunately do have a public relations problem. The softening qualifier "humanism", as Mr Richards explained, is little understood by the general public. The proposed alternative "bright", used as a noun, to popularise atheists has, I think, doubtful efficacy. As an atheist I decline to call myself a "bright" because, although secular rationalism turns me on, I am not a light-bulb. My brain chemistry does not, unlike St Paul's in the past and some unfortunate religious epileptics in the present, generate a shining light.

GRAHAM NEWBERY  
Southampton

### Defining humanism

I HAVE some sympathy with Jack Hastie's problems over "humanism" (*Points of View*, May). For reasons including but beyond those he mentions, it's an unsatisfactory description. However, there are problems in escaping it.

I share his view that humanity is inadequate for the job it ought to be doing, a job it has largely created for itself. But I doubt if we can look forward to the emergence of a new and superior species. Humanity itself has become counter-adaptive because of its capacity to control its own culture and use that culture to resist change of outlook and behaviour. It also has the perception to identify at an early stage any emergent superior species. Further, it has the power, and almost certainly the inclination, to obliterate any such species before it has reached a stage at which it could represent a threat to humanity. So, much as we need further evolution, I doubt if we are going to get it except through a consciously organised improvement of humanity.

I doubt whether we are going to achieve that improvement, but attempting it is the only course offering any ground for hope. Waiting for evolution ignores the fact that evolution in a certain field now has an obstacle it never had before.

JIM ROSS  
Scotland

### Faith schools

EDWARD Goodman's letter (June 2004) poses the question whether faith schools "should continue to receive state assistance". Of course they should not. However, this begs the question. Who is going to champion such a campaign? The British Humanist Association has a tolerant and inclusive membership which would find it inappropriate in its ideology. The National Secular Society has forsaken its radicalism and on admissions to faith schools now fawns to the agenda of the Liberal Democrats. So who does this leave?

Maybe readers of the *Freethinker* are the only radicals left who could organise to grasp the nettle.

JOHN BOLTON  
London



**Cranks at the helm of the *Freethinker***

YOUR loony *Freethinking Allowed* (July 2004) bit was real crank stuff. 100 percent. But that's what has always been expected of editors of the *Freethinker*. Part of the job description. How's Bill McIlroy [a former editor and a member of the Council of Management of the National Secular Society]? Still barking?

So, you don't like Mrs Thatcher, a woman who gave 100 percent to the country and freed us from union tyranny, allowed us to buy our council houses, fought our corner in Europe, and gave us more freedom, etc. Who would you have preferred?

Neil Kinnock – the Welsh windbag who admitted that he would allow unlimited immigration (pretty much as Blair has done – and we all know that he would have given everything away to the EEC/EU), or maybe John (all my party think I'm crap) Smith? Or any other of the many loonies of the Labour Party? Or the Social Democrats who have done the impossible and are even worse?

Still, you have Saint Tony now (he of the mad-staring eyes and lying promises) and Gordon (Bennett) Brown who has cost us three days' pay in extra taxes for every year that Labour has been in power.

And Reagan? What did you expect him to do with two dictators selling America drugs on his doorstep? Why did this bother you? Brighton is known for two things. You are one. Are you into the other, too, perhaps?

Mandela was a communist stooge as well as a terrorist. Talk about history having been rewritten. This is a man whose bodily wastes now smell better than the best perfumes. He could have walked free at any time – the only reason he stayed in prison was that he refused to renounce violence, and wanted to keep on killing (as in Bin Laden). I suppose you liked his partner too, the vile little hate-monger Archbishop Desmond Tutu? Mandela was forced to ditch his wife on the way to sainthood as she was openly involved in the neck-lace killings of young blacks, and he didn't do that any more.

Saddam Hussein was used against the religious madmen in Iran. From your criticism, you would obviously have preferred them. Sanctions didn't work in South Africa or here either since it is only ever the poor who suffer and never the leaders. All the loonies criticise Reagan's intelligence, but no imbecile, as the dullards called him, could have ever made it to President. His jokes and self-deprecation gave people the wrong idea about him, so few took him seriously. But he did help bring about some world peace.

He went to meetings with Gorbachev, and for hours Gorbachev would rant at him and call him

a liar, but he stayed the course. I know you criticise his religion too, but that is like a gun. It is only bad in the wrong hands. I am sure that it was Reagan's religion that kept him there, keeping his patience, telling jokes and talking to a very angry and very suspicious man. It would have been easy for a man in Reagan's powerful position to rant and threaten to walk out of the meeting and never come back.

When he came to power, he was told that Russia had more men in the field, more planes, missiles, more weapons of every kind including twice as many nukes, and that they didn't stand a chance. So he asked if there was anything that America had that Russia didn't. He was told, "Deeper pockets!" So, this man all the dullards call an imbecile had the smart idea of outspending Russia and driving her towards bankruptcy, which is what happened in the end.

He was backed up by Mrs T (unlike Pillock, sorry Kinnock, who, with the other CND nutters, wanted to dump all our nuclear weapons and hide in mud trenches if attacked by a nuclear power. Gorbachev called him and the other CND nutters "naive"!, and even Socialist Mitterand told Gorbachev that France would not give up its nuclear weapons.

Faced with this, Gorbachev gave in and started talking. Reagan knew what all the freaks of the Left thought of him but allowed it. He was inherently good, as shown in his letters to Mrs T and many others. Stopping in the street to chat to a group of ordinary people was the sort of thing he did. It was unfortunate that you were all "fags", and the reason why Reagan ran was the same reason why any politician would have run.

A President chatting to fags in the street! The tabloids would have had a field day if they had found out, and possibly wrecked his career with unfounded rumours.

Your article doesn't belittle the great man, it demeans you!

MICHAEL HILL  
Kent

**Near-death experiences**

A CONSCIOUS individual experiences physical death during surgical proceedings.

He/she moves away from the clinically dead body. (The eyelids of which are shut.)

A detailed awareness of the resuscitation attempts of surrounding medical staff, nonetheless ensues.

The disembodied being (ie one of thousands over recent decades in medical history) progresses further within the proximity of their physical body. Later, incidents and details of events from within the wider vicinity of the operating theatre are recounted (at time of "death").

With conscious existence beyond physical constraints established, unfamiliar realms of

discovery are further explored through an extra-sensory awareness. The more lengthy and protracted the experience, the more likely the realisation that eternal verities, within the world's religious traditions, are indeed beneficial facts of life.

The "corpse" awakens with a vastly increased sense of understanding from their sub-atomic soul journey, only to be met with mandatory denial and derision from a "free-thinking" minority clinging to a cherished, if outdated belief system.

Atheism requires faith these days.

STEVE DRISCOLL  
Cardiff

**Cut-off point**

WHAT a relief! The long-drawn-out correspondence about circumcision has at last reached your editorial cut-off point.

BARBARA SMOKER  
Bromley

**The  
Free thinker**

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## Events & Contacts

**Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group:** Information: Ivor Moll, 6 The Brooklands, Wrea Green, Preston PR4 2NQ. Tel. 01772 686816.

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Group:** Information on 01273 461404.

**Bristol Humanists:** Information: Margaret Dearnaley on 0117 904 9490.

**Bromley Humanists:** Meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, 8 pm, at Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley. Information: 01959 574691. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com).

**Chiltern Humanists:** Information: 01494 771851. Wendover Library, High Street, Wendover. Tuesday September 14, 8pm. Frank Jordans: *New Ways of Spreading the Message That There is No God*.

**Cornwall Humanists:** Information: Patricia Adams, Sappho, Church Road, Lelant, St Ives, Cornwall TR26 3LA. Tel: 01736 754895.

**Cotswold Humanists:** Information: Philip Howell, 2 Cleavelands Close, Cheltenham GL50 4PZ. Tel. 01242 528743.

**Coventry and Warwickshire Humanists:** Information: Tel. 01926 858450. Roy Saich, 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB.

**Devon Humanists:** Information: Roger McCallister. Tel: 01626 864046. Email: [info@devonhumanists.org.uk](mailto:info@devonhumanists.org.uk). Website: [www.devonhumanists.org.uk](http://www.devonhumanists.org.uk).

**Ealing Humanists:** Information: Secretary Alex Hill Tel. 0208 741 7016 or Charles Rudd 020 8904 6599.

**East Cheshire and High Peak Secular Group:** Information: Carl Pinel 01298 815575.

**East Kent Humanists:** Information: Tel. 01843 864506. Talks and discussions on ten Sunday afternoons in Canterbury.

**Essex Humanists.** Meetings on the third Sunday of each month. Information: 01268 785295. Summer newsletter available.

**Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):** Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel. 01926 858450. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1. Friday, July 9, 7.30pm. Fire and Brimstone Productions present *Martyr to the Cause*.

**Greater Manchester Humanist Group:** Information: June Kamel 01925 824844. Monthly meetings (second Wednesday) Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester.

**Hampstead Humanist Society:** Information: N I Barnes, 10 Stevenson House, Boundary Road, London NW8 0HP.

**Harrow Humanist Society:** Information: 020 8863 2977. Monthly meetings, December – June (except January).

**Havering & District Humanist Society:** Information: Jean Condon 01708 473597.

**Humanist Association Dorset:** Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506. Moordown Community Centre, Coronation Avenue, Bournemouth. Saturday, July 10, 2pm. Public meeting. Subject: *Ceremonies for the Non-religious*.

**Humanist Society of Scotland:** Secretary: Ivan Middleton, 26 Inverleith Row, Edinburgh EH3 5QH. Tel. 0131 552 9046. Press and Information Officer: Robin Wood, 37 Inchmurrin Drive, Kilmarnock, Ayrshire. Tel. 01563 526710. Website: [www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Humanist Society of Scotland – Dundee Group:** Contact secretary Ron McLaren, Spiershill, St Andrews, Fife KY16 8NB. Tel: 01334 474551. Email: [humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk](mailto:humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk).

**Glasgow Group:** Information: Alan Henness. Tel. 07010 704776.

Email: [alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:alan@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Edinburgh Group:** Information: 2 Saville Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 3AD. Tel 0131 667 8389.

**Perth Group:** Information: [perth@humanism.scotland.org.uk](mailto:perth@humanism.scotland.org.uk)

**Humanist Society of West Yorkshire:** Information: Robert Tee on 0113 2577009. Summer social at 15 Victoria Crescent, Horsforth, Tuesday, July 6, 4pm-8pm.

**Leicester Secular Society:** Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. Tel. 0116 262 2250. Website: <http://homepages.stayfree.co.uk/lss>. Public meeting: Sunday, 6.30pm. Programme from above address.

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com).

**Mid-Wales Humanists:** Information: Jane Hibbert on 01654 702883.

**Musical Heathens:** Monthly meetings for music and discussion (Coventry and Leamington Spa). Information: Karl Heath. Tel. 02476 673306.

**North East Humanists (Teesside Group):** Information: C McEwan on 01642 817541.

**North East Humanists (Tyneside Group):** Information: the Secretary on 01434 632936.

**North London Humanist Group:** Monthly meetings. Information: Anne Toy on 020 8360 1828.

**Norwich Humanist Group:** Information: Vincent G Chainey, Le Chene, 4 Mill Street, Bradenham, Thetford IP25 7PN. Tel. 01362 820982.

**Reigate & District Humanist Group.** Information: Roy Adderley on 01342 323882.

**Sheffield Humanist Society:** Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, August 4, 8pm. Annual General Meeting. Wednesday, September 1, 8pm. Public Meeting.

**South Hampshire Humanists:** Information: 11 Glenwood Avenue, Southampton, SO16 3PY. Tel: 02380 769120.

**South Place Ethical Society:** Weekly talks/meetings Sundays 11am and 3pm in the library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Tel: 020 7242 8037/4. Monthly programme on request.

**Somerset:** Details of South Somerset Humanists' meetings in Yeovil from Wendy Sturgess. Tel. 01458 274456.

**Sutton Humanist Group:** Information: 0208 773 0631. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com). E-Mail: [BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net](mailto:BrackenKemish@ukgateway.net).

**Welsh Marches Humanist Group:** Information: 01568 770282.

**West Glamorgan Humanist Group:** Information: 01792 206108 or 01792 296375, or write Julie Norris, 3 Maple Grove, Uplands, Swansea SA2 0JY.

**West Kent Secular Humanist Group:** Information: Ken Allen . Tel: 01892 863002. E-mail: [ken@kallen14.fsnet.com](mailto:ken@kallen14.fsnet.com).

**Ulster Humanist Association.** Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264.

E-mail: [brianmcclinton@btinternet.com](mailto:brianmcclinton@btinternet.com)

website: [www.ulsterhumanist.freeservers.com](http://www.ulsterhumanist.freeservers.com)

Please send your listings and events notices to:

Bill McIlroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,  
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.

Notices must be received by the 15th of the month preceding publication