

£1.25

The

Vol 125 No 11  
November 2005

# Freethinker

Secular Humanist monthly founded by G W Foote in 1881

## Maryam Namzami Clinches Secularist of the Year Title



Inveterate  
campaigner  
for the rights  
of women and  
refugees in  
Islamic  
countries was  
named last  
month as  
winner of the  
inaugural  
Irwin Prize

Photo: Keith Porteous Wood

Danish newspaper's caricatures of  
Mohammed enrage Muslims – p6

### Also in this issue:

Religious Hatred Bill: Secularists and former Archbishop  
Unite to Defend Freedom of Speech – p3

Religion creates conflict in Irish Muslim school – p5

'Losing my Religion': BBC regrets insertion of religious  
commentary – p8



THE man with the strident voice was still talking remorselessly away... It was just a noise, a quack-quack-quacking... This was not a real human being but some kind of dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck.

– George Orwell, from his novel 1984.

GETTING to grips with duck-speak, although I was not in those days familiar with the term, was an essential part of my training as a journalist in South Africa of the 1960s.

My first job in journalism was on the *Springs Advertiser*, edited by the formidable, feisty, chain-smoking Anne Money, who would speed-read through my reports of speeches by local politicians, attack the paper on which they were laboriously typed with a thick red pencil which she gripped in a fist like a dagger, and snarl "crap, crap and double crap" before throwing my copy back at me. On occasions the pencil would snap in her hand.

"I'm just reporting what the man said", I would mutter. In a school-ma'am manner the former Fleet-Streeter would glare at me over the rim of her spectacles with icy, blue eyes and – trickling smoke from her nostrils – would berate me for not having the intelligence to deconstruct the speeches of politician A or pastor B. "You are a reporter, not a damn stenographer! We don't pay you to parrot the foolish ramblings of the verbally incontinent. Your job is to analyse what they say, and turn their words into sensible, unambiguous English, if that's at all possible. And for christ-sake, keep jargon out of your bloody reports!"

It's cons since I emerged from the Anne Money school of journalism, but the dear old boot still springs to mind whenever I stumble across a particularly ludicrous or mangled piece

of language – common among religious zealots but increasingly being used by the Great and the Good. Hark, for example, at "the excesses of human nature that humanity suffers". This was US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld's explanation last year for the widespread torture of prisoners by American personnel at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

**No longer is Duck-speak the sole preserve of the religious, says BARRY DUKE**



Rumsfeld was also the architect of the following brilliant piece of duckspeak: "As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know."

Each year, the US-based National Council of Teachers of English sponsors the NCTE Doublespeak Award. Established in 1974, the award is "an ironic tribute to public speakers who have perpetuated language that is grossly deceptive, evasive, euphemistic, confusing, or self-centered."

Last year, the US Justice Department received an honorable mention for its ingenious efforts to help Americans avoid facing the shame of its government's engagement in torture. Jay S Bybee, head of the Office of Legal Counsel, advised that, in order for it to be considered torture, the pain inflicted on a prisoner "must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death." Leaving aside the problem of how to quantitatively measure human pain in this way, the memo advised that international laws against torture "may be

unconstitutional if applied to interrogation" of suspected terrorists.

Not surprisingly, in 2004 – and for the second year running – the NCTE Doublespeak Award went to ex-alcoholic-turned-Jesus-junkie George W Bush "for his inspired invention" of the phrase 'weapons of mass destruction-related program activities' to describe WMDs that have yet to be discovered.

Bush also made clear his idea of the principle of democratic discussion at a press conference he gave early in 2004: "As you know, these are open forums, you're able to come and listen to what I have to say."

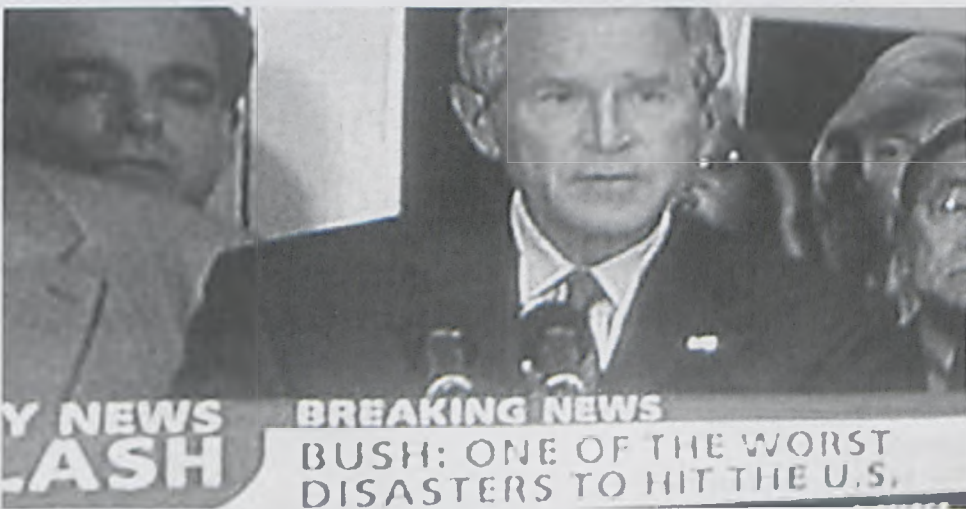
Had Bush been president when 1984 was penned, Orwell would probably have been compelled to add a whole new chapter devoted to Bushspeak – a *melange* of Newspeak, Duckspeak and Dumbspeak, as in "It's totally wiped out. ... It's devastating, it's got to be doubly devastating on the ground." This is what Bush's said to his aides while surveying Hurricane Katrina flood damage from Air Force One, on August 31, 2005.

Newspeak, Orwell enthusiasts will recall, was devised to drastically reduce the number of words in the English language in order to eliminate ideas that were deemed dangerous and, most importantly, seditious to the totalitarian dictator, Big Brother and his ruling elite. "Thoughtcrime", the mere act of thinking about ideas like freedom or revolution, was punishable by torture and brainwashing.

A character in 1984 describes it succinctly: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end, we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible because there will be no words in which to express it... The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact, there will be no thought as we understand it now."

Never was Orwell's vision closer to reality than it is now. And the tragedy of born-again Bush, who perpetually wears the expression of a man bewildered by the "complexificatiousness" of doing up his own flies; who falls off bicycles; who chokes on pretzels; and who has a non-existent deity whispering in his ear, is not that he is palpably delusional, moronic and utterly incompetent, but that he has succeeded – in pursuance of his vision of a more godly America – in creating a worryingly large rump of American society in his own image.

And every word Bush and his battalion of Jesus-loving, science-hating, war-mongering, neo-conservatives (Nerds with Napoleonic Complexes) utter, whether it concerns Intelligent Design, or The Global War On Terror (TGWOT) – hurriedly changed from the original The War Against Terror (TWAT), presumably after someone told Dubya what a twat really was – deserves obliteration with fearsome Anne Money's exasperated cry of "crap, crap and double crap!"



Sky TV unintentionally getting it ever-so-right with this news banner, flashed across the screen when Bush was interviewed in the wake of hurricane Katrina

# Religious Hatred Bill: Government is heavily defeated in House of Lords vote

THE Government suffered a heavy defeat in the House of Lords last month over its plans to outlaw incitement to religious hatred. Peers voted by a majority of 149 in favour of a cross-bench move to put freedom of speech safeguards into the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill.

The defeat follows close on the heels of the National Secular Society declaring last month its support for free speech amendments to the Bill, proposed by the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey. Other co-signatories included QC Lord Lester of Herne Hill (Lib Dem) and Lord Hunt of the Wirral (Conservative).

Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, said: "The Government will be hard pressed to get this Bill through unless it accepts these amendments. It has already failed three times to bring these measures to the statute book through its obdurate refusal to respond to concerns about freedom of speech. There is a huge breadth of opposition to the Bill in Parliament, by human rights campaigners and those in the literary world. Secularists, church leaders and evangelical groups have formed an unprecedented front to oppose the Bill.

"That the National Secular Society and Evangelical Alliance were working together was referred to twice during the Lords second reading debate on October 11, when several peers were speaking from briefings prepared by the National Secular Society. The Society has been the focus for opposition to these measures since they were first tabled in 2001.

Mr Porteous Wood added: "Without these amendments, the Bill will further limit freedom of expression, both directly and through self-censorship. Journalists and commentators confirm freedom of expression is already being eroded, especially over discussion of matters involving minority religions.

"The Bill is draconian. The maximum penalty is seven years in prison, yet prosecution thresholds are very low indeed. The chilling effect on freedom of speech, even if there are no prosecutions, will be huge.

"Without the proposed amendments, the Bill will be counter-productive and will benefit extremists. Rather than differences being resolved by healthy open debate, the Bill will curtail discussion on sensitive religious matters, so differences will simply be pushed underground to fester. It will also heighten community tensions by polarising religious communities against each other in legal disputes. There have been calls for similar legislation in Australia to be repealed because it has brought the previously peaceful relationship between evangelical Christians and Muslim communities to crisis point in litigation going on for years.

## Catholic interference with science

Meanwhile, the NSS has appealed to Tony Blair not to accede to a request for the establishment of a bioethics committee dominated by religious leaders. The NSS has written to the Prime Minister calling on him to reject a proposal from Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor for a national bioethics committee

on which it seems likely that both formal and lay religious opponents from the Catholic Church and other religions would hold disproportionate sway.

The Cardinal has contacted Downing Street, according to a report last month in the *Tablet*, because of his worries that "Britain is moving towards a form of eugenics without public debate."

By going direct to the Prime Minister, the Cardinal is seeking further encroachment of religion into scientific territory without public debate. For a committee so key to the progress of groundbreaking medical research in this country to have disproportionate religious influence would be utterly unacceptable to most people. They know that the Church opposes most of the developments in relation to embryo research that hold so much promise for the alleviation of suffering. The Cardinal uses manipulative language to describe this humanitarian research as "eugenics", "saviour siblings" – revealing the stance he intends his proposed committee to take.

Poll after poll has shown that the public is in favour of research that will help cure previously untreatable genetic conditions and save children from having to live a life dominated by sometimes severe disabilities. They do not have 'ethical' problems with the embryonic research that is needed to achieve this. They do not support the Vatican line, and under no circumstances must it be permitted to hinder this research.

The NSS pointed to an incident earlier this month in Dublin, where a Catholic hospital, The Mater, halted trials of a new cancer drug because its "ethics committee" dominated by nuns and priests, said that the condition for women on the trial was that they used contraceptives. This was in order to obviate any risks to possible pregnancies that might arise during the trial.

No one is under any obligation to avail themselves of the benefits of such medical research if they do not wish to do so, whether on religious or any other grounds. The Cardinal is seeking to dogmatically deny these wonderful, often life-saving, benefits to the vast majority of the population who want them. He should not be given the opportunity to do so. This dogmatic approach to medicine, research and scientific progress must not be allowed to interfere with the urgently needed developments that will help so many people live fuller and healthier lives. We believe that the present regulatory structure, in the form of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, is perfectly adequate for the job and consists, in the main, of experts in the field.

## Teacher rejects college scarf code

A 32-year-old Amsterdam Muslim is challenging the decision by an Islamic school not to employ her because she refuses to wear a headscarf. Samira Haddad, a teacher of Arabic, has asked the equality commission to rule Islamic College in Amsterdam was wrong to demand she cover her head in order to work there.

The case comes a week after Education Minister Maria van der Hoeven said she is in favour of a ban on wearing the all-covering

burkha in schools. Tunisian-born Haddad argued before the commission that she is not accustomed to wearing a headscarf in public. She said she had not encountered any difficulty when she completed an internship at an Islamic School in Rotterdam.

She never had any problem either when she lived and worked in Islamic countries with her head uncovered. The headmaster of the Islamic College in Amsterdam said the school's statutes state explicitly that the rules of the Koran and the *Summa* must be adhered to. Non-Muslim teachers can be granted an exemption.

"If Miss Haddad was to declare she is not a Muslim then she could, in principle, come and work with us," a member of the school board said.

The equality commission is to deliver its judgement in December.

## God-free funeral for Barker

RONNIE Barker, one of Britain's best-loved comedians who died in October, received a non-religious funeral service at his cremation in Banbury, Oxfordshire, on October 13. The celebrant, Nigel Collins of the British Humanist Association, described the service as a "dignified but not sombre" occasion.



# The Cabinet Minister and Opus Dei

THE *Guardian Weekend* magazine of September 24 published an interview with Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and, at 37, Britain's youngest Cabinet Minister.

Interviewer Decca Aitkenhead revealed that, as a teenager, Kelly didn't join CND, campaign against apartheid or put up posters of Che Guevara. At Oxford University she didn't mix in political circles; and she couldn't recall any political conversations before she was 20, although she did go to a Labour Club once but never returned. She did not become a trade unionist. She only joined the Labour Party after her graduation, and the first politician she met was Tony Blair.

A few days before her interview with Decca Aitkenhead, her special adviser telephoned to "lay down a ground rule": She would be happy to talk about most subjects, but not "her faith". Which is not surprising, as she is a devout Catholic. When she talks, Kelly's voice is "classless". She was, however, born in Limavady, north of Derry in Northern Ireland to Catholic nationalist parents.

According to Aitkenhead, for the first 20 years of her life she did not consider herself to be British at all. During that time she had moved around both Ireland and England. Leaving university, she got a job with the Bank of England. After meeting Tony Blair, Ruth Kelly "discovered" New Labour and, presumably, has never looked back. Since then, she has successfully climbed the greasy pole to the Cabinet. In the words of Aitkenhead, "...in her short Westminster career, Kelly has been tipped as Britain's first female chancellor, if not Labour's first woman prime minister".

Ruth Kelly has not hidden her Catholicism. Indeed, there are no other Catholics in the Cabinet. Cherie Blair is a Catholic, and Tony Blair has been accused of being a "secret" Catholic. In Decca Aitkenhead's view, however, Kelly "appears to be in politics entirely because of God". What has surprised many people have been the reports in the media that Ruth Kelly was a member of Opus Dei. Although somewhat cagey about it, she does not appear to have denied it, and at least admitted to Decca Aitkenhead to having received "spiritual support" from the organisation.

What, then, is Opus Dei?

The late Pope Paul was not, apparently, enamoured by the traditional Catholic Orders, but he thought that Opus Dei embodied the charisma once possessed by the older established Orders. Pope John offended some of the bishops as well as the Jesuits, but appointed others linked to Opus Dei. The *Guardian* (4.4.05) reported that Opus Dei had a privileged place in the Vatican. "Indeed, in 2002, its founder,

Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, was canonised with unedifying speed, especially for a man who had been an apologist for Hitler." And previously, in 1984, Joaquin Navarro Valls, a well-known lay member of Opus Dei, had been appointed the Vatican spokesman. Karol Wojtyla's espousal of Opus Dei is, in fact, well-documented.

## PETER E NEWELL peers into the workings of a 'sinister, secret cult'

Decca Aitkenhead, in her *Guardian Weekend* article, says that Opus Dei "...is a highly secretive sect regarded as an ultra-pious kind of Catholic freemasonry, whose members are said to self-flagellate.

Whether Ruth Kelly has self-flagellated, was not revealed by Aitkenhead!

David Yallop, in his book, *In God's Name*, writes that Opus Dei is a Roman Catholic organisation of international dimensions. Although its membership may only be 60,000 to 80,000, its influence is vast. He says that it is a secret society, something forbidden by the Church; Opus Dei denies that it is a secret organisation, but refuses to publish its membership list.

It was founded by Escriva, a Spaniard, in 1928. It is, says Yallop, on the extreme wing of the Catholic Church, and has attracted many enemies. Its membership is composed of about five percent priests, as well as lay members of both sexes. It seeks to attract people "from the upper reaches of the professional class, including students and graduates who are aspiring to

executive status. Dr Roche, an Oxford University lecturer and former member of Opus Dei, describes it as 'sinister, secretive and Orwellian'. Which, we might add, was why someone like Ruth Kelly would be such a good catch. Influencing, and even getting control, of an organisation such as the Labour Party, rather like the Trotskyist Militant Tendency in the past, could be quite attractive to Opus Dei. Yallop implies that its political philosophy is fascist, and that it intends to take over the Catholic Church.

In the 1980s, according to David Yallop, Opus Dei claimed that worldwide it had its members working in over 600 newspapers, reviews and scientific publications. It had members working in more than 50 radio and TV stations. During the 1950s and 1960s, it largely controlled the government of General Franco in Spain, with three of its members in the Cabinet. Jose Mateos, a member of Opus Dei and one of Spain's richest men, poured millions of dollars into the organisation.

"A considerable amount of this money", adds Yallop, "came from illegal deals" with Roberto Calvi of the Banco Ambrosiano, "perpetrated in both Spain and Argentina."

Whether Ruth Kelly knows, or cares, Opus Dei is above all a capitalist racket working on behalf of a basically obscurantist feudal and anti-democratic Catholic Church organisation.

Traditionally, it was claimed that Old Labour was influenced more by Methodism than by Marxism. Today, it seems that New Labour finds clerical fascism just as acceptable. Democratic, it ain't.

## Calvi's alleged killers to go on Trial

THE trial of five people accused of the murder of Italian banker Roberto Calvi in London in 1982 is due to resume in Rome this month. The five first appeared last month, but the trial was postponed after the defence requested an adjournment.

One of the alleged killers, Pippo Calo, a man known as "the Mafia's cashier", is already serving a life term in jail for unrelated Mafia crimes. Calvi, dubbed "God's banker" because of his ties to the Vatican, was found hanging from Blackfriars Bridge.

Rome prosecutors had reopened the case in 2002 after ruling out suicide.

Businessman Flavio Carboni, his former Austrian girlfriend Manuela Kleinzig, and Ernesto Diotallevi were all charged in connection with Calvi's murder in April this year. But a fifth person, Silvano Vittor, who acted as a driver and bodyguard for the banker on his last journey to London, was told in September he would have to stand trial.

Along with Carboni, he is believed to be the last person who saw Calvi alive. The defence's line is that Calvi took his own life.

The bank Calvi was the chairman of, the Banco Ambrosiano, had close ties to the Vatican and was on the brink of collapse following a devastating scandal. Calo allegedly masterminded Calvi's murder for fear he might reveal secrets that would have harmed Italy's political and religious establishment.

Roberto Calvi was found hanging from scaffolding, his suit stuffed with bricks and thousands of pounds in cash. At the time of his mysterious death, the 62-year-old financier was on bail after being convicted of corruption in Italy.

# Campaigner for Women's Rights in Islamic countries is named Secularist of the Year

MARYAM Namazie, inveterate campaigner for the rights of women and refugees in Islamic countries, was named as the winner of the inaugural Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year on October 8.

Maryam Namazie was given a standing ovation as she was presented with the £5,000 prize by *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee.

Introducing Maryam, Keith Porteous Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society which organised the event, said: "Maryam is an inveterate commentator and broadcaster on human rights, secularism, religion, political Islam and many other related topics. The present revival of Islam has heightened interest in Maryam's work, and at last her writings are gaining a mainstream audience. She has spoken at numerous conferences and written extensively on women's rights issues, particularly violence against women."

In her acceptance speech, Namazie acknowledged Mansoor Hekmat's role in inspiring an entire generation of secularists, and spoke of the rise of the political Islamic movement and its attempts to silence opposition using Human Rights language. She went on to say: "We need an uncompromising and shamelessly aggressive demand for secular-

ism, but again this is only a minimum if we are to ensure that human values are safeguarded and that the human being is put first and foremost. Today, more than ever, we are in need of the complete de-religionisation of society as well."

Namazie is a well-known campaigner for refugee and women's rights and against political Islam. She is host of TV International, a Central Council member of the Organisation of Women's Liberation, and director of the International Relations Committee of the Worker-communist Party of Iran amongst others.

Seven others had been nominated, including the Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who has highlighted violence against Muslim women, and Nicholas Hytner, director of Britain's National Theatre, who came under fire for staging the musical *Jerry Springer - The Opera*, which many Christians regard as blasphemous.

Stephen Green of Christian Voice narrowly missed nomination for single-handedly bringing into disrepute those seeking to stifle freedom of speech on religious grounds.

Also present at the event were Dr Evan Harris MP, the journalist and novelist Joan Smith, cartoonist Martin Rowson and broadcaster Jonathan Meades. Hilarious entertainment was provided by Stewart Lee, co-author of *Jerry Springer - The Opera*.



Keith Porteous Wood holding Maryam's cheque

## Religion creates conflict in Irish Muslim school

A MUSLIM school in Ireland is under scrutiny after several disturbing allegations arose, leading to an investigation by the Education minister.

The *Sunday Independent* carried a report last month on the claims being made about the management of The North Dublin Muslim National School Project, including that a soccer match with a local multi-denominational school was cancelled when the Muslim school discovered there were two girls on the other school's team.

It is also claimed that some outside religious teachers refuse to go into the staff room if there are women teachers present. Further allegations relate to pupils covering their ears when certain types of music are played and that break-time is being disrupted because some pupils, who perform purification rites in school which others do at home, are taunting children that they are "impure".

Last month it was reported that inspectors at the school had already warned the head that too much time was being spent studying the Koran and too little on the national curriculum. Sources from within the school told the

*Sunday Independent* that pupils' education had been frequently disrupted by pupils leaving class for *wudu*, the cleansing ritual used for preparing for religion classes which could often take up to 20 minutes.

It was not unknown for those pupils to come back to class and taunt other pupils about not being "clean". In some cases other pupils would then insist on leaving to prepare in the same way, causing further disruption.

Meanwhile, teachers' unions have been forced to act when members in the school raised issues of concern including contractual problems, health and safety, lack of resources, and consultation.

Shahzad Ahmed, chairman of the school's board of management, said: "The department has no problem with the children praying during the school day and children learning Koran.

You know that Muslims pray five times each day. One of these times occurs during school hours and the children in 4th, 5th and 6th class perform the afternoon prayer with Muslim staff.

Do people seriously object to our children

praying to God each day during school hours? We find these allegations conducive to spreading further Islamophobia."

### The God Who Wasn't There

*THE God Who Wasn't There*, a film the Los Angeles Times calls "provocative - to put it mildly" is exclusively available on DVD in the UK from the National Secular Society.

What *Bowling for Columbine* did to America's gun culture, and *Super Size Me* did to fast food, *The God Who Wasn't There* does to religion.

During the course of this astonishing documentary, presenter - former Christian fundamentalist Brian Fleming - reveals that the early founders of Christianity were wholly unaware of the idea of a human Jesus; that Jesus of the Gospels was based on the figureheads of pagan cults - and that God simply isn't there.

You can buy the DVD for £16.99 (inc p&p) by credit card from the NSS's online shop at [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk), or by post from NSS DVD Offer, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1 4RL.

Following the appalling terrorist attacks of 7 July, a debate has raged about multiculturalism and the influence of religious belief within the UK. It focuses on the increasing tension that many believe lies at the heart of this country's policy of encouraging each immigrant community to maintain its cultural mores, allegedly at the exclusion of a sense of belonging and loyalty to the host country.

I believe that among the clamour to comment on debates around the 7/7 attacks, the issues have not been analysed from a humanist, secular point of view. Surprisingly, when I thought about the issues, I felt like going to church but not any church. I was reminded of the church attended by an ex-girlfriend of mine and so began the following chain of thought ...

The church is called *Unitarian Universalist*. According to her, the philosophy of this church is a particularly novel and simple one. It is that people of all faiths and no faiths are equally welcome. This would surely be near to "heaven" for an atheist! Joking aside, I was intrigued by tales of this universalist, mono-polytheistic, agnosto-devout, Judeo-Islamic, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Catholic-Methodist inclusivity. Apparently, the congregation would turn up and discuss an aspect of one particular faith, or of life generally. I was amazed by what I heard. As I grew up and began to think about religion (in my case the

Anglican Christianity of my schools and of my parents), I had grown increasingly agnostic. My doubts increased through school, culminating in a rejection of all things religious by the time I had finished studying philosophy at university.

Much religious doctrine had seemed to possess an inherent lack of logicity, peppered as it is with notions and practices such as petitionary prayer, with its implied acceptance of the mutual compatibility of a benevolent, interfering God, widespread suffering, human evil and complete freewill. Such juvenile musings drove me from religion, but larger fault lines loomed. I was struck by the behaviour of some religious practitioners and congregations.

I witnessed much hypocrisy among the "religious" organisations I came into contact with, notable exceptions being the missionaries, aid workers or anyone who truly practises what their human-transcribed version of the supposedly divine preaches. I saw Christians of the West, sitting in church for an hour or two on Sunday, listening patiently to a man (in most cases), dressed often in ornate and expensive robes, within a church filled with images and statues, preaching about another man who eschewed wealth, made a point of talking to and concerning himself with society's outcasts, forbade all killing, preached the turning of one's cheek, and forbade worshipping idols.

## Muslims in Denmark are outraged by caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed

IT SEEMS that Denmark could be heading for its own Salman Rushdie affair, as several thousand Islamists marched through the streets of Copenhagen last month protesting at cartoons of the prophet Mohammed commissioned and published by Denmark's largest newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*.

Imam Raed Hlayhel criticised publication of the caricatures, saying: "This type of democracy is worthless for Muslims. Muslims will never accept this kind of humiliation. The article has insulted every Muslim in the world. We demand an apology!"

Lars Refn, one of the cartoonists, agreed with Hlayhel. As *Jyllands-Posten* reports, "his cartoon did not feature the prophet Mohammed, but a normal Danish schoolboy Mohammed, who had written a Persian text" saying with Arabic letters "*Jyllands-Posten's* journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs" on his schoolroom blackboard.

However, cultural editor Flemming Rose denied that the goal was to provoke Muslims, but rather a reaction to artists and writers censoring themselves out of fear of radical Islamists.

"Religious feelings cannot demand special treatment in a secular society. In a democracy one must from time to time accept criticism or becoming a laughing stock."

About 150,000 Muslims live in Denmark. They represent 2.8 percent of the country's population of 5.4 million. With a circulation of 158,000, *Jyllands-Posten* is Denmark's mostly widely-read newspaper. Fortunately, Denmark does not have an equivalent law to the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill, which these cartoons would possibly have breached.



# A Church our Time

I'm sad to say that the comparatively great wealth possessed by these people in the face of the vast levels of international poverty is but one reason why the word "hypocrisy" entered my mind.

Yet these quandaries for religion are still not as damaging as my central complaint. Not the horrendous manner in which men (yes, men) have taken most religious messages and corrupted them, distorting them into methods of control and political influence over their flock, over wider society and especially over women. Enlightenment, Reformation, Crusade, Islamic

**JOHN SLINGER** wonders whether the Unitarian Universalist Church is the answer to religious divisiveness

Revolution, evangelism, orthodoxy, democracy and communism all came and went and may well come and go again.

While religions in the West are currently in the descendant, their internal and external power structures remain, even when tiny proportions of the population belong to them.

None of this constitutes the biggest danger posed by organised religions. Not their predominantly homophobic nature. Not the pain and the suffering unleashed when religious manmade doctrine prevents safe sex, or prevents a young girl from attending school. Not the burkha, nor papal infallibility, nor the "leadership" of the Archbishop of Canterbury on gays in the Church of England. Not the attitude of some Muslims to female emancipation and gay rights. Not "Islamic" suicide bombers, nor the precision munitions whose launch was ordered by deeply religious Christians. Not Hindu vs Muslim nukes, or Israeli vs Iranian WMDs. None of this is the greatest danger posed by organised religion.

Mankind's greatest weakness, it seems to me, is that which he believes to be his greatest strength – his certainty that his world view is correct and true. When you are right, and benefit from having the full rhetorical, moral and philosophical arsenal of God on your side, where is the space for your fellow human, with

# Search for Times?

their version of the truth, with their God on their side?

**M**ost religious belief is developed during childhood. I was baptised a Christian, and had I accepted what I was taught, I would be one now. Jesus, the Prophet Mohammed and Buddha were clearly amazing people, much of whose behaviour is worthy of emulating. It is the organised structures of the past 2000 years or so that seem to me to dishonour the memory of these "deities", in whose name much mess, confusion and damage has been made out of much human truth and much potential. How many Christians throughout history have killed one another, or sanctimoniously slaughtered those subscribing to other faiths, during their crusades and imperial conquests? How many Muslims have been slain by fellow Muslims? Saddam Hussein commanded an army of Muslims who killed over one million fellow Muslims. The numbers are huge, and we should not forget that people who claim to be devout Muslims are currently murdering Shia Muslims daily in their hundreds in Iraq, and attacking innocent civilians throughout the world. It is utterly depressing.

With few exceptions, people are mostly indoctrinated with religious belief at an age when their intellect is often incapable of understanding the concepts or resisting the prevailing power dynamic. Organised religions teach children many things, often for the good.

But one thing they invariably teach is that the boy or girl, the man or woman, is different from his or her fellow citizen by virtue of one key aspect – religion. Worse still, many organised religions teach their flock that they are better, nearer God, more holy, more moral and more civilised. It is difficult to overcome the damage this does. For while teaching a child that skin colour is an insignificant difference without any moral consequence, it is difficult to square the circle of the following statement: "Your friend's religious belief is different, he thinks our view of the world is totally misguided and will result in sin and lack of salvation..." Secularists such as me feel compelled, rightly, to accord the religious with a great deal

more respect than the religious often accord those of a different sect, creed, denomination or faith.

I for one have as many faults as any other person, but I believe one thing to be true with all the certainty of a religious person. It is that I am not "different" from my fellow humans. I am the same. We are the same. No one will shake my faith in this universal concept. I am English, I am British, I am European and I am a citizen of the world. I am endowed with human rights by virtue of being a human being, not because I was created by God. These rights are enshrined (although sadly not sufficiently protected) by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. What does that really mean? Nothing more than that I was born to my parents at that moment in space and time. I don't deny that I landed a very good deal in this cosmic life-chance lottery, but I am the same as anyone else on the planet. No better, no worse.

Why the government of an advanced democracy like Britain supports, and will shortly enhance, the ability of religious people to set up "faith" schools, which will surely indoctrinate children into the religious beliefs of their parents, is beyond me. We wouldn't allow state schools to indoctrinate children into the belief structures of a political party. Leave that to the North Koreans.

Why is religion different? It is still, ultimately, just one of many competing belief systems, whether one believes in the divine or not. And before people scream that there is no harm in children being so indoctrinated, I should explain that I am not imagining overt, immediate, physical or mental harm. Indeed, much of what religious schools teach is a sense of purpose, a sense of spirituality and understanding about the world. The harm is more subtle, and affects both the child and wider society. I do not like the fact that we human beings, in a world in which "difference" lies under the surface everywhere, in some places more than others, have a propensity to perpetually divide ourselves up into groups which accentuate our supposed differences, be they racial, political, national or religious.

These issues are ever more prescient today, with Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, warning the Government of the danger of the "ghettoisation" of ethnic minorities within the UK. This brings me back to where I began – with the debate about multiculturalism, and the debate about the influence (or not) of fundamentalist Islam, or indeed any extreme version of other religious belief, on impressionable minds. I shuddered at the cold certainty of the statements in the posthumous suicide-bomber Mohammed

Sidique Kahn's recent video. He clearly describes how the perceived injustices committed against the Muslim *umma* (global community) compelled him, with the righteousness that I believe only religious belief can provide, to callously murder innocent civilians (including, ironically, several Muslims). Such hatred knows no bounds.

This young man clearly thought that he had God on his side. He, and many others like him, had lost his humanity, his belief in the sacred nature of all human life. He was concerned only with "Muslim" human life and the perceived injustices being committed against the Muslim *umma*. His warped view of life was as extreme as can be, and was in no way representative of the genuine, peaceful view of Islam held by the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

It is, however, indicative of the dangers posed when people are imbued with a perverted religious zeal. In the interests of fairness, I need only remind readers of the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas, or bizarre religious suicide cults such as Heaven's Gate, or the Maronite Christian Phalangist thugs who committed the Sabra and Shatila massacre of the Palestinians in 1982, or the Orthodox Christian Serbs who butchered the Muslims of Bosnia and Kosovo. These examples show it may be the peculiar nature of religious belief, *per se*, not solely Muslim beliefs, that can, in *extremis*, lead to misplaced certainty in the committing of inherently evil acts.

For me, no one has a monopoly on the truth – not the religious scholars, the scientists, the agnostics, the atheists and, certainly not I. But when I see the debate about the hijab-wearing, or about religious sectarianism in Kashmir or Northern Ireland, or the debate about the supposed need for more "religious" schools throughout the UK, I think to myself there is a church somewhere in Massachusetts, New England, called the Unitarian Universalist church, which anyone of any and no faith is welcome to attend.

This is a place where all that is encouraged is the exploration of shared human truths *together*, not from within the exclusive, self-styled religious sects that we humans seem to like creating.

On occasions such as this, whenever I am faced with arguments which, however subtly, result in the greater accentuation of difference, this church is where I want to go. I gather that there are a few churches like this in the UK and throughout the world, but they are a tiny, tiny minority. Perhaps a few more might do some good, for such messages of tolerance and inter-faith dialogue are much needed in these dark times, as is respect for common humanity over religious dogma.

"FOR one reason or another, people begin to question their religion, challenge it and, occasionally, lose it altogether." Thus began a documentary entitled *Losing My Religion*, which was broadcast by BBC Radio 4 on September 19 this year – and which subsequently led Barbara Smoker, one of the contributors, to complain to the BBC about the inclusion in the documentary of named religious commentators, especially as she had not been warned of this.

In a letter to Sara Conkey, the programme's producer, Barbara raised this point, as follows.

"I know you will say that it was done in the cause of 'balance'; but there are thousands of religious programmes on Radio 4 every year, and I cannot recall a single case of non-believers being brought in on them to comment on the phenomenon of belief. This suggests that you (or your bosses) regard religious faith as the norm and atheism as an aberration; in fact, however, non-believers are the largest single group in this country after nominal C of E, and the largest group in the world after Christians of every sect (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, etc) lumped together.

"It is more than three decades since the daily Radio 4 programme *Lift up your Hearts* changed its name to *Thought for the Day* in order to widen its brief, but never once has a non-believer been allowed on it. What sort of 'balance' is that?"

After receiving Barbara's letter, Sara Conkey responded with the following explanation: "We only decided to include religious spokespeople very near the end of production. I am very sorry, we should have told you. It wasn't our original intention when making the programme. We had been warned, anonymously, that Islam teaches that those who leave their faith are required to be killed, and we felt it was necessary to hear a Muslim explaining that scripture, and why it has questionable authority. To do this we needed to ask a Muslim spokesperson, and then felt if we had to do this with one faith, we would need to do it with the others. We then decided, trying to make a virtue out of a necessity, it might be interesting to hear how the various religions responded to those who had lost their faith.

"We certainly did not think that belief is the 'norm' and non-belief a deviation from the norm. It was interesting to note that the religious spokespeople (possibly with the exception of Rabbi Lionel Blue) found it difficult to enter the mind-set of non-belief, but we hoped that the audience could make their own judgements about these comments, and certainly did not consider them to have more weight than yourself or the other non-believers.

"I think you are right, that the programme would have been stronger without their response ... I really do apologise again for not informing you. You came across fantastically

well, and I hope you heard your 'Father Christmas' story repeated on *Pick of the Week*."

Here is an edited version of what Barbara said on the programme.

"I was born 82 years ago into a devout Catholic family. People think that if you are born into that sort of atmosphere, religion was drummed into you, but it wasn't really like that. I lapped it all up – it didn't have to be drummed into me. I did more than was required of me.

"But sometimes I did ask a few searching questions. I remember being told as a little girl that God put the rainbow in the sky after the deluge, and said it was a pledge that there wouldn't be another deluge. I thought, well, surely there is a scientific explanation for rainbows, which must have pertained before the deluge. I don't think I asked anyone about that, but that was one of the things I remember wondering about.

"I believed what people told me, and



**Barbara Smoker, pictured with the award she received from IHEU earlier this year for her lifetime contribution to humanism**

# 'Losing my Religion'

## insertion of religious

besides, there were so many intelligent people, people who were much cleverer than me and they seemed to believe it all.

"We used to have family competitive games, and the number one rule in our family was always no praying, because that was thought to be an unfair advantage. That shows how much we thought that prayers really were answered.

"I told my mother when I was about 15 that I was going to be a nun. One of my favourite

**Jesus is supposed to have said 'Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed'. Why? If we were made by God, why did he give us intelligence if he didn't want us to use it? It's just nonsense, isn't it?**

books at that time was the autobiography of St Therese of Lisieux, who became a Carmelite nun, and I was wanting to go then. But my mother was a bit more sensible, and she said "Look, you must wait until you're nineteen in case you change your mind." And of course, by the time I was nineteen, I had changed my mind.

When I went abroad during the war, I went to countries that were non-Christian countries. In the WRNS I met girls who were Protestants and so on, and out East I went into Hindu temples and Buddhist temples and so I got a wider aspect. When I got back I wasn't so sure I was going to be a nun, though I still believed in the tenets of the Church. Then, doubts began creeping in and multiplying, and I suppressed them because I didn't want to give up the faith. It seemed terrible to me; I'd always thanked God that I was a Catholic – I thought I was privileged, you see. I think it was a priest who suggested to me that I should go in for a course of reading – Catholic apologetics – so as to boost my faith. I think I began with Cardinal Newman, and he mentioned various non-believing writers, atheist and agnostics, so as to refute them. So I thought I had to read those books as well, and the more I read the less I could believe.

"One day, I was in a turmoil about it all, and I remembered things in some of the books I'd read, the particular points they'd made, so I went to the library, and I stood



# ion': BBC regrets ous commentators

there in front of the philosophy and religion shelves and started taking down one book after another, reading this, reading that, and suddenly, I said to myself, "I'm no longer a Catholic." And I had a flood of relief – almost like a sexual orgasm, really.

"I realised that this was a crucial turning point in my life, and I thought I want to register this time, and I looked up at the library clock: it was just about midday – the time of the angelus, which we always said every day at school, and the date was Saturday, November 5, 1949. My next thought was, well this can't be the end of all my mental turmoil: I'm going to start doubting my disbelief. But you know I can honestly say that never for one moment have I done that.

"I suppose some people have this desire for the comfort and everything, stronger than their demand for evidence. After all, if a close friend or relative dies, and you can believe that you are going to meet them again in a better life – I mean, it's wonderful, isn't it? Whereas, I suppose, I'm the sort of person that demands evidence, and if there isn't any evidence I won't believe things. Jesus is supposed to have said 'Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed'. Why? If we were made by God, why did he give us intelligence if he didn't want us to use it? It's just nonsense, isn't it?"

"When I look back now at my young self in my memory, it doesn't seem like me at all, it seems I'm thinking of another person, because I can't believe how I just went on believing these things. It just seems so absurd to accept things – it's as though one goes on believing in Father Christmas all one's life – or something like that.

"When I discovered that there was no Father Christmas, I was so annoyed that I'd been conned I said to my mother 'You've been lying to me all these years about Father Christmas, haven't you?' And she said 'Well it's not really lying. Father Christmas is a sort of personification of generosity and giving.' I said 'That's not what you told me. You told me that he was an old man who came down the chimney.' And I went out and spoke to kids all round the neighbourhood – and some of them were younger than I was – to tell them that there was no Father Christmas. And this got to the ears of one of the parents, and I was in trouble. He said, 'But you're spoiling it for the children.' I thought 'Spoiling it? How can it be spoiling it to prevent

them from being conned like this? I'm giving them back their dignity.'"

The second apostate's voice was that of a Muslim woman who said: "I remember going to the mosque every Sunday, and a van would come round and pick up all the Muslim children from around the area and we would go to the mosque and learn Arabic. There'd be rows of children sat at benches all with their copy of the Koran reading through it. They'd be rocking back and forth as they read it, and if you hear somebody who can read it very well it's like music – it's like a song.

"You're told not to ask certain questions at the

**I'm not really willing to let people know that I'm no longer a Muslim ...I've watched documentaries about Israel and Palestine, and there have been people on there who've been asked the question 'How do you view people who were Muslims but don't believe in it any more?' And the guy on the TV – a Muslim guy – said 'Well, those people should be killed'**

mosque, that it's disrespectful to question the religion too much because it is the word of God.

"When I was about 16, I think, I was going through what all teenagers go through – not sure about your self-image, not sure about your friends, whether you fit in, or what the right thing or the wrong thing is to do, pushing the boundaries, and that manifested itself, in my case, as becoming *more* religious and withdrawing from a lot of things. I started praying five times a day, I began covering my head, which I never previously did. I read the Koran a lot more. It was almost like not taking part in the real world, really. I just assumed that God was real, but, rather than feeling this wonderful warm glow, as though I'd discovered something amazing, it wasn't like that at all. But it made me feel that I had a purpose, that if nothing else worked out, if I never had a career or never got married, never had children, I'd still

have done the things that I needed to do to get eternal happiness.

"I slowly moved out of that more extreme faith; I think I just got a lot more comfortable with myself, but I was still a Muslim. And then I went on to do my post-graduate, and mixed with a whole new group of people – and discovered me.

"I had met somebody I was sharing a house with who didn't believe in God, and then somebody on my course who was actually a devout Christian. As I found out a bit more about Christianity, I thought, 'Well, it makes as much sense as Islam. How can Islam be the only right way?' I had a thought that if religion was real and I really believed in it, I needed to test it, and the only way to test would be to live a life without religion for a while. If religion was real, and really did mean something to me, I would go back to it. So I thought I've got six months left of my post-graduate, I'll try and live without religion. I'm just going to put it on a shelf for a while and see what happens to my life.

"So that's what I did. I put it on a shelf, and started discovering things, like being able to connect with people without having to think religious thoughts and not feeling guilty for not praying. I felt like I'd left this great big burden of guilt behind and the fantastic thing was I suddenly realised I was completely responsible for all my actions. That was a little bit scary but really great as well, because it just meant that I could try things – I could try clubbing, I could just do it and see what happened. I could try a glass of wine. Or I could choose not to. At least the choice was mine.

"I'm not really willing to let people know that I'm no longer a Muslim; that I used to be one and I'm not anymore. It's quite a scary thing. I've watched documentaries about Israel and Palestine, and there have been people on there who've been asked the question 'How do you view people who were Muslims but don't believe in it any more?' And the guy on the TV – a Muslim guy – said 'Well, those people should be killed.' And if there are people out there with such extreme views, I'd rather they didn't find out about me. I don't believe in God anymore. I definitely don't.

"It's such a comforting idea to think that you would be able to meet all those people that have been taken away from you, but I don't think it's real: I think it's just there to make people feel better. I think the important thing is that you live your life the right way whatever happens afterwards, so what more can you do than live your life?"

The third apostate, a Jewish woman, rejected her religion, not so much because she found herself at odds with the basic tenets of Judaism, but because being identified as Jewish separated her from her peers. After living in France, Israel and the United Kingdom,

she felt that her Jewishness required her to remain aloof from others of different faiths and of no faith at all. In rejecting segregation she finally moved completely away from "the confines of religion".

A transcript of the programme was made by National Secular Society member Barry Thorpe, who afterwards wondered whether the apostates were asked specific questions about how they came to deconvert, or simply asked to reminisce?

"I feel that a tighter and more informative programme would have resulted if some impartial interviewer had read these reflections beforehand and then asked some focused questions."

His verdict: "A good opportunity largely wasted."

Commenting on the insertion of religious voices, Barry Thorpe said "of the three, the least vacuous and irrelevant was Farooq Siddique, Community Regeneration Officer working for the Bristol Muslim Cultural Society, who at least gave a definitive answer to the question of apostasy (not that many Muslims would accept it). All three were, of

course, superfluous."

Siddique had this to say about apostasy in Islam: "An apostate is somebody who was either born a Muslim and leaves, or who comes into Islam and then leaves Islam. The idea that you can kill a person who leaves Islam comes from the Hadith – this is not part of the Koran, it's something that the Prophet Mohammed is supposed to have said during his lifetime. There is one Hadith which says, 'Kill whoever leaves his religion.' There is serious objection to that particular Hadith as it contradicts a particular verse of the Koran. Not only does it contradict 'Let there be no compulsion in religion', but it contradicts another very specific verse which says, 'Whoever comes into Islam and then leaves, and then comes into Islam and then leaves, and then increases in disbelief, God will increase in disbelief'. If we are supposed to kill you the first time you leave there's no possibility of you coming back into Islam: in fact you're allowed to leave again and still you're allowed to come back into Islam. So I'm not quite sure why it is that Muslims today seem to jump up and down

when somebody leaves Islam."

While it is true that the Koran does not explicitly state that apostates should be murdered, there are a number of Koranic verses that address apostasy, and they refer to punishment for apostasy. For example Sura 9:73, 74 states "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: an evil fire. They swear by God that they said nothing. Yet they uttered the word of unbelief and renounced Islam after embracing it ... If they repent it will be better for them, but if they give no heed, God will sternly punish them, both in this world and the world to come. They shall have none on this earth to protect or help them."

**Editor's Note: I believe that the issue of apostasy is an important one, and should be viewed in a wider context. For that reason I have chosen to reprint, on page 11, *Apostacy, Human Rights, Religion and Belief*, a paper presented by Ibn Warraq at the 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva on April 7, 2004.**

IN the film *Contact*, near the end, there is a scene in which astronomer Dr Eleanor Arroway (played by Jodie Foster) is being interviewed by a US Senate committee; it is assessing her suitability as the first human to be sent to contact an alien civilisation. Ultimately, she is asked if she believes in God. This is an expression of a sub-plot in which science and religion are contrasted and compared and of course there is an implication that only the religious are good enough for important tasks.

Arroway prevaricates, wanting to say "no", but realising that this would prejudice the committee against her. In fact, even her failure to give a direct "yes" lost her the place, although she later gained it after the selected candidate was killed in an accident. Although this is fiction, in the religious climate in the USA it could just as easily be fact.

Perhaps the director of the film did not want to get distracted by a theological dispute, but, had it been a real inquisition, Arroway lost an opportunity to strike a blow for reason. She could have replied "Which god?!" No doubt the committee member who asked the question would then have replied "Surely there's only one God". Arroway could then have pointed out that she knew of very many and listed Yahveh, Allah, Jesus, Brahma, Vishnu, Sira, Krishna, Ahuru Mazda, but almost certainly she would have been stopped before she got to the numerous gods of the ancient world. Her questioner is likely to have asked "Surely, all these are the same God".

If she knew Genesis, Arroway could then have pointed out that, in his ten command-

## Which God?

ments, the god of the Israelites (Yahveh) is alleged to have instructed them to "have no other gods before me". So if even Yahveh acknowledged the existence of other gods, there could not be only one god. If God knows of other gods, who are we to disagree?

**Need a god? There are plenty to choose from, says STEUART CAMPBELL**

At this point, I would expect general uproar and abandonment of further questions. The committee's questions were predicated on an acceptance of monotheism: the belief that there is only one God and that he/she/it has different names in different religions. This is a persistent myth for which there is absolutely no evidence. It is clear that not only is God made in man's image, different gods are made in the image of different cultures. As for the name of this universal "God", he/she/it seems not to have one. The Hebrew name "Yahveh" may just mean "he who exists" and Islam appears to have a god with no name ("Allah" just means "the god"). If the Christian god is that of Jesus, then it is Yahveh, although most Christians would not be aware of this. Indeed, most Christians would not be able to name

their God.

So next time you are asked if you believe in God, just say "Which god?"

**Editor's note: Jodie Foster is, in fact, an atheist who found great empathy with the character Eleanor Arroway, in the 1997 film based on Carl Sagan's novel. Sagan, an agnostic, died in 1997. In the film, Foster's character says: "What is more likely? That an all-powerful mysterious God created the Universe and then decided not to give any proof of His existence, or that He simply does not exist at all?"**

In an interview she gave to the *Georgia Straight* after the film's release, Foster said: "I absolutely believe what Ellie believes – that there is no direct evidence, so how could you ask me to believe in God when there's absolutely no evidence that I can see? I do believe in the beauty and the awe-inspiring mystery of the science that's out there that we haven't discovered yet, that there are scientific explanations for phenomena that we call mystical because we don't know any better. Asked in another interview if she ever prayed, Foster replied: "No, absolutely never."



# Apostasy, Human Rights, Religion and Belief

**T**he very notion of apostasy has vanished from the West where one would talk of being a lapsed Catholic or non-practising Christian rather than an apostate. There are certainly no penal sanctions for converting from Christianity to any other religion. In Islamic countries, on the other hand, the issue is far from dead.

The Arabic word for apostate is *murtadd*, the one who turns back from Islam, and apostasy is denoted by *irtidat* and *riddu*. *Ridda* seems to have been used for apostasy from Islam into unbelief (in Arabic, *kufur*), and *irtidat* from Islam to some other religion. A person born of Muslim parents who later rejects Islam is called a *Murtadd Fitri* – *fitri* meaning natural; it can also mean instinctive, native, inborn, innate. One who converts to Islam and subsequently leaves it is a *Murtadd Milli*, from *milla* meaning religious community. The *Murtadd Fitri* can be seen as someone unnatural, subverting the natural course of things whose apostasy is a wilful and obstinate act of treason against God and the one and only true creed, and a betrayal and desertion of the community. The *Murtadd Milli* is a traitor to the Muslim community, and equally disruptive.

Any verbal denial of any principle of Muslim belief is considered apostasy. If one declares, for example, that the universe has always existed from eternity or that God has a material substance, then one is an apostate. If one denies the unity of God or confesses to a belief in reincarnation, one is guilty of apostasy. Certain acts are also deemed acts of apostasy, for example treating a copy of the Koran disrespectfully, by burning it or even soiling it in some way. Some doctors of Islamic law claim that a Muslim becomes an apostate if he or she enters a church, worships an idol, or learns and practises magic. A Muslim becomes an apostate if he defames the Prophet's character, morals or virtues, or denies Mohammed's prophethood and that he was the seal of the prophets.

It is clear, quite clear, that under Islamic Law an apostate must be put to death. There is no dispute on this ruling among classical Muslim or modern scholars, and we shall return to the textual evidence for it. Some modern scholars have argued that in the Koran the apostate is threatened with punishment only in the next world, as for example at XVI.106, "Whoso disbelieveth in Allah after his belief – save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with the Faith but whoso findeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allah. Theirs will be an awful doom." Similarly in III.90-91, "Lo! those who disbelieve after their (profession of) belief, and

afterward grow violent in disbelief, their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray. Lo! those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, the (whole) earth full of gold would not be accepted from such an one if it were offered as a ransom (for his soul). Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers."

**IBN Warraq is among the most prominent and outspoken Muslim apostates alive today. This is a paper he delivered last year at a conference organised by the UN Commission on Human Rights**

However, Sura II.217 is interpreted by no less an authority than al-Shafi'i (died 820 CE), the founder of one of the four orthodox schools of law of Sunni Islam to mean that the death penalty should be prescribed for apostates. Sura II.217 reads: "... But whoever of you recants and dies an unbeliever, his works shall come to nothing in this world and the next, and they are the companions of the fire for ever." Al-Thalabi and al-Khazan concur. Al-Razi in his commentary on II:217 says the apostate should be killed.

Similarly, IV. 89: "They would have you disbelieve as they themselves have disbelieved, so that you may be all alike. Do not befriend them until they have fled their homes for the cause of God. If they desert you, seize them and put them to death wherever you find them. Look for neither friends nor helpers among them..." Baydawi (died c 1315-16), in his celebrated commentary on the Koran, interprets this passage to mean: "Whosoever turns back from his belief (*irtada*), openly or secretly, take him and kill him wheresoever ye find him, like any other infidel. Separate yourself from him altogether. Do not accept intercession in his regard". Ibn Kathir in his commentary on this passage quoting Al Suddi (died 745) says that since the unbelievers had manifested their unbelief they should be killed.

Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), the founder of the *Jamat-i Islami*, is perhaps the most influential Muslim thinker of the 20th century, being responsible for Islamic resurgence in modern times. He called for a return to the Koran and a purified *sunna* as a way to revive and revitalise Islam. In his book on apostasy in Islam, Mawdudi argued that even the Koran prescribes the death penalty for all

apostates. He points to sura IX for evidence: "But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then are they your brethren in religion. We detail our revelations for a people who have knowledge. And if they break their pledges after their treaty (hath been made with you) and assail your religion, then fight the heads of disbelief. Lo! they have no binding oaths in order that they may desist." (IX: 11,12)

In the *Hadith* we find many traditions demanding the death penalty for apostasy. According to Ibn Abbas, the Prophet said "Kill him who changes his religion," or "Behead him." The only argument was as to the nature of the death penalty. Bukhari recounts this gruesome tradition: "Narrated Anas: Some people from the tribe of Ukl came to the Prophet and embraced Islam. The climate of Medina did not suit them, so the Prophet ordered them to go to the (herd of milch) camels of charity to drink their milk and urine (as a medicine). They did so, and after they had recovered from their ailment they turned renegades (reverted from Islam, *irtada*) and killed the shepherd of the camels and took the camels away. The Prophet sent (some people) in their pursuit and so they were caught and brought, and the Prophet ordered that their hands and legs should be cut off and that their eyes should be branded with heated pieces of iron, and that their cut hands and legs should not be cauterised, till they die."

**A**bu Dawud has collected the following saying of the Prophet: "Ikrimah said: Ali burned some people who retreated from Islam. When Ibn Abbas was informed of it he said, 'If it had been I, I would not have them burned, for the apostle of Allah said: 'Do not inflict Allah's punishment on anyone.' But he would have killed them on account of the statement of the Apostle of Allah, 'Kill those who change their religion.'"

In other words, kill the apostates (with the sword) but certainly not by burning them, that is Allah's way of punishing transgressors in the next world. According to a tradition of Aisha's, apostates are to be slain, crucified or banished.

Should the apostate be given a chance to repent? Traditions differ enormously. In one tradition, Muadh Jabal refused to sit down until an apostate brought before him had been killed "in accordance with the decision of God and of His Apostle".

Under Muslim law, the male apostate must be put to death, as long as he is an adult, and in full possession of his faculties. If a pubescent boy apostatises, he is imprisoned until he

comes of age, when, if he persists in rejecting Islam, he must be put to death. Drunkards and the mentally disturbed are not held responsible for their apostasy. If a person has acted under compulsion he is not considered an apostate, his wife is not divorced and his lands are not forfeited. According to Hanafis and Shia, a woman is imprisoned until she repents and adopts Islam once more, but according to the influential Ibn Hanbal, and the Malikis and Shafites, she is also put to death. In general, execution must be by the sword, though there are examples of apostates tortured to death, or strangled, burnt, drowned, impaled or flayed. The caliph Umar used to tie them to a post and had lances thrust into their hearts, and the Sultan Baybars II (1308-09) made torture legal.

Should attempts be made at conversion? Some jurists accept the distinction between *Murtadd fitri* and *Murtadd milli*, and argue that the former be put to death immediately. Others, leaning on sura IV.137, "Lo! those who believe, then disbelieve and then (again) believe, then disbelieve, and then increase in disbelief, Allah will never pardon them, nor will he guide them unto a way," insist on three attempts at conversion, or have the apostate imprisoned for three days to begin with. Others argue that one should wait for the cycle of the five times of prayer and ask the apostate to perform the prayers at each. Only if he refuses at each prayer time is the death penalty to be applied. If he repents and embraces Islam once more, he is released.

The *murtadd*, of course, would be denied a Muslim burial, but he suffers other civil disabilities as well. His property is taken over by the believers, if he returns penitent he is given back what remains. Others argue that the apostate's rights of ownership are merely suspended, only if he dies outside the territory under Islam does he forfeit his property to the Muslim community. If either the husband or wife apostasises, a divorce takes place *ipso facto*; the wife is entitled to her whole dower but no pronouncement of divorce is necessary. According to some jurists, if husband and wife apostasise together their marriage is still valid. However if either the wife or husband were singly to return to Islam then their marriage would be dissolved. According to Abu Hanifa, legal activities such as manumission, endowment, testament and sale are suspended. But not all jurists agree. Some Shi'i jurists would ask the Islamic Law towards apostates to be applied even outside the Dar al-Islam, in non-Muslim countries.

Finally, according to the Shafites, it is not only apostasy from Islam that is to be punished with death, but also apostasy from other religions when this is not accompanied by conversion to Islam. For example, a Jew who

becomes a Christian will thus have to be put to death since the Prophet has ordered in general that everyone "who adopts any other religion" shall be put to death.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR, 1948] states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The clause guaranteeing the freedom to change one's religion was added at the request of the delegate from Lebanon, Charles Malik, who was a Christian. Lebanon had accepted many people fleeing persecution for their beliefs, in particular for having changed their religion. Lebanon especially objected to the Islamic law concerning apostasy. Many Muslim countries, however, objected strongly to the clause regarding the right to change one's religion. The delegate from Egypt, for instance, said that "very often a man changes religion or his convictions under external influences with goals which are not recommendable, such as divorce." He added that he feared in proclaiming the liberty to change one's religion or convictions the Universal Declaration would encourage, without wishing it, "the machinations of certain missions well-known in the East, which relentlessly pursue their efforts with a view to converting to their faith the populations of the East".

Significantly, Lebanon was supported by a delegate from Pakistan who belonged to the Ahmadi community which, ironically, was to be thrown out of the Islamic community in the 1970s for being non-Muslim. In the end, all Muslim countries except Saudi Arabia adhered to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

During discussions of Article 18 in 1966, Saudi Arabia and Egypt wanted to suppress the clause guaranteeing the freedom to change one's religion. Finally a compromise amendment proposed by Brazil and the Philippines was adopted to placate the Islamic countries. Thus, "the freedom to change his religion or belief" was replaced by "the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice." Similarly in 1981, during discussions on the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, Iran, under the new regime reminded everyone that Islam punished apostasy by death. The delegate from Iraq, backed up by Syria, speaking on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, expressed his reserve for any clauses or terms that would contradict the Islamic Sharia, while the delegate from Egypt felt that they had to

## Apostasy, Human Rights

guard against such a clause being exploited for political ends to interfere in the internal affairs of states.

The various Islamic human rights schemes or declarations – such as the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (1981) are understandably vague or evasive on the issue of the freedom to change one's religion, since Islam itself clearly forbids apostasy and punishes it with death. As Elisabeth Mayer says, "The lack of support for the principle of freedom of religion in the Islamic human rights schemes is one of the factors that most sharply distinguishes them from the International Bill of Human Rights, which treats freedom of religion as an unqualified right. The [Muslim] authors' unwillingness to repudiate the rule that a person should be executed over a question of religious belief reveals the enormous gap that exists between their mentalities and the modern philosophy of human rights."

Islamic Human Rights Schemes are clearly not universal since they introduce a specifically Islamic religious criterion into the political sphere, whereas the UDHR of 1948 places human rights in an entirely secular and universalist framework. The Islamic human rights schemes severely restrict and qualify the rights of individuals, particularly women, non-Muslims, and those, such as apostates, who do not accept Islamic religious orthodoxy.

As for the constitutions of various Muslim countries, while many do guarantee freedom of belief (Egypt, 1971; Syria, 1973; Jordan, 1952), some talk of freedom of conscience (Algeria: 1989), and some of freedom of thought and opinion (Mauritania: 1991). Islamic countries, with two exceptions, do not address the issue of apostasy in their penal codes; the two exceptions are the Sudan, and Mauritania. In the Sudanese Penal Code of 1991, article 126.2, we read: "Whoever is guilty of apostasy is invited to repent over a period to be determined by the tribunal. If he persists in his apostasy and was not recently converted to Islam, he will be put to death." The Penal Code of Mauritania of 1984, article 306 reads: "...All Muslims guilty of apostasy, either spoken or by overt action will be asked to repent during a period of three days. If he does not repent during this period, he is condemned to death as an apostate, and his belongings confiscated by the State Treasury." This applies equally to women. The Moroccan Penal Code seems only to mention those guilty of trying to subvert the belief of a Muslim, or those who try to convert a Muslim to another religion. The punishment varies between a fine

## ights, Religion and Belief

and imprisonment for anything up to three years.

The absence of any mention of apostasy in some penal codes of Islamic countries of course in no way implies that a Muslim in the country concerned is free to leave his religion. In reality, the lacunae in the penal codes are filled by Islamic Law. Mahmud Muhammad Taha was hanged for apostasy in 1985, even though at the time the Sudanese Penal Code of 1983 did not mention such a crime.

In some countries, the term apostate is applied to some who were born non-Muslim but whose ancestors had the good sense to convert from Islam. The Baha'is in Iran in recent years have been persecuted for just such a reason. Similarly, in Pakistan the Ahmadiya community were classed as non-Muslims, and are subjected to all sorts of persecution.

There is some evidence that many Muslim women in Islamic countries would convert from Islam to escape their lowly position in Muslim societies, or to avoid the application of an unfavourable law, especially sharia law governing divorce. Muslim theologians are well aware of the temptation of Muslim

women to evade the Sharia laws by converting from Islam, and take appropriate measures. For example, in Kuwait an explanatory memorandum to the text of a law reform says: "Complaints have shown that the Devil makes the route of apostasy attractive to the Muslim woman so that she can break a conjugal tie that does not please her. For this reason, it was decided that apostasy would not lead to the dissolution of the marriage, in order to close this dangerous door."

Just to give you one recent example among many, others are discussed in my book, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out* (Prometheus Books, 2003): "A Somali living in Yemen since 1994, Mohammed Omer Haji, converted to Christianity two years ago and adopted the name 'George'."

He was imprisoned in January, 2000 and reportedly beaten and threatened for two months by Yemeni security police, who tried to persuade him to renounce his conversion to Christianity. After he was re-arrested in May, he was formally put on trial in June for apostasy, under article 259 of Yemen's criminal law. Haji's release came seven weeks after he was given a court ultimatum to renounce Christianity and return to Islam, or face execution as an apostate.

Apostasy is a capital offence under the Muslim laws of 'sharia' enforced in Yemen. After news of the case broke in the international press, Yemeni authorities halted the trial proceedings against Haji.

He was transferred on July 17 to Aden's Immigration Jail until resettlement could be finalised by the UNHCR, under which Haji had formal refugee status. One of the politicians who tabled a motion in July 2000 in the British House of Commons was David Atkinson. "Early Day Motion on Mohammed Omer Haji. That this House deplores the death penalty which has been issued from the Aden Tawahi Court in Yemen for the apostasy of the Somali national Mohammed Omer Haji unless he recants his Christian faith and states that he is a Muslim

before the judge three times on Wednesday 12th July; deplors that Mr Haji was held in custody for the sole reason that he held to the Christian faith and was severely beaten in custody to the point of not being able to walk; considers it a disgrace that UNHCR officials in Khormaksar stated they were only able to help him if he was a Muslim; and calls on the British Government and international colleagues to make representations immediately at the highest level in Yemen to ensure Mr Haji's swift release and long-term safety and for the repeal of Yemen's barbaric apostate laws."

Amnesty International adopted Haji as a prisoner of conscience in an "urgent action" release on July 11, 2000 concluding that he was "detained solely on account of his religious beliefs". The government of New Zealand accepted Haji and his family for emergency resettlement in late July after negotiations with the Geneva headquarters of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

However, charges of apostasy, unbelief, blasphemy and heresy whether upheld or not clearly go against several articles in UDHR of 1948, and the legally binding International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] of 1966 to which 147 states are signatories. General comment No 22, adopted by the UN Human Rights Commission at its 48th session (1993) (HRI/GEN/1/Rev. 6 of 22 May 2003, pp 155-56) declares: "Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The term 'belief' and 'religion' are to be broadly construed".

As with my statement to the UN Human Rights Commission delivered by the President of the IHEU, I urge the UN Human Rights Commission to call on all governments to comply with applicable international human rights instruments like the ICCPR and to bring their national legislation into accordance with the instruments to which they were a party, and forbid fatwas and sermons preaching violence in the name of God against those holding unorthodox opinions or those who have left a religion.

### Quotable quote

"A T H E I S T" is really a thoroughly honest, unambiguous term, it admits of no paltering and no evasion, and the need of the world, now as ever, is for clear-cut issues and unambiguous speech."

— Chapman Cohen,  
Freethinker editor from 1915 to 1951



### All things bright and Beautiful

THURSDAY morning again! The dreaded school hymn practice session. We work in pairs – one to teach the words by rote to the whole school, the other to keep crowd control.

The roster tells me it is my turn with the words. First on the list, that old favourite of the sentimentally twee – “All Things Bright and Beautiful”. I go through the motions. The boys would rather be doing almost anything elsewhere. The girls would prefer to be rendering “Puppet on a String” *a la* Sandie Shaw of Eurovision Song Contest fame. (Yes, this was many years ago!)

As I struggle on, my concentration strays and I call to mind that somewhere I have heard a rogue version of the first verse. That evening I think I have recalled it. I decide to add a few more verses. Later I present my Head with an ultimatum. I will teach “All Things B & B” if I may also teach my flip side. Not surprisingly my offer is turned down and I eventually exercise my right to opt out of teaching all things religious, both “B & B” and otherwise.

My “unacceptable” version went thus:

*All things blight and horrible  
All creatures drab and squat  
All things daft and meaningless  
The Lord God made the lot.*

*Each cancer cell erupting  
Each little child in pain.  
He sees their tragic torment  
He lets them pray in vain.*

*He gave some eyes, so blinded  
Their lips will want to tell  
How cruel is God Almighty  
Who made their lives a hell.*

*The hurricane and earthquake  
Relentless burning sun  
The floodings and the famines  
He caused them, every one.*

BETTY JUDD  
Essex

### What is religion?

PROFESSOR John Radford’s answer to his rhetorical question “What is Religion?” (*Freethinker*, October), analyses concisely the public role of religion. But his observations don’t explain, in the clinical sense, why there is religion.

That is a question for 21st-century scientists to answer. In the meantime, advances in the neurological sciences are providing clues towards an eventual explanation; the neurology of irrational beliefs is already a subject of research under the direction of Professor Susan Greenfield at the University of Oxford. Complete lack of evidence for the contrary

clearly shows that religious belief is all in the mind (the proof is that beliefs depend on where and when you were born and how you were raised and educated) and that the mind, with its power of imagination, is solely a product of the brain, the unconscious repository of learning and the source of emotions and “spirituality”, our feel-good-feel-bad barometer of the senses. The trouble is that, even when not stressed, the default state of the mind of believers is magic-dependent, or schizotype, thinking, the genesis and ongoing basis of all religions; when stressed, relative to genetic disposition, it can lead to madness (schizophrenia could be a regression to an earlier mentality when effigies were worshipped to prompt hallucinations to divine their “authority”, the precursor of “religious” worship).

Secular education and social controls are helping to alleviate the manic extremes of religious fervour, but it is sobering to read that many Western leaders with publicly reasoned secular aims still privately believe in supernatural agency, that their thinking is not wholly anchored in reality.

Others are trying to face it. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, in a recently televised conversation with Professor Melvyn Bragg, conceded that God [contrary to biblical description] could be a metaphor. Which is welcome wisdom, for it indicates at least a partial acceptance of Jaynesian reasoning. It’s a pity other influential believers in the Christian camp don’t follow his example and entertain a new *gestalt*.

GRAHAM NEWBERY  
Southampton

### Freethinker circulation

THE drive to increase the circulation of the *Freethinker* is surely well timed.

Two suggestions. First, how many libraries, public or college, take it and are there any (apart from the statutory British Library) which collect it: and which others might reasonably be asked to do so? We need to bring its content (an annual index would help) into greater public awareness and status.

Second, it might strengthen the readership if we could communicate laterally as well as through these pages. Perhaps comments and encouragements addressed to authors could be forwarded?

Recent new members at our King’s Lynn group remarked that they had never before felt able to talk directly, and without fear of disapproval, about their beliefs. In a society where the worship of gods is a minority practice, we have an astonishingly long way to go to dislodge the ridiculous presumption of religion.

EDWIN SALTER  
King’s Lynn

Editor’s note: Around 50 libraries in the UK are sent copies of the *Freethinker*, as a

result of subscribers sponsoring the libraries in question. If anyone is interested in taking out a sponsored library subscription, they can do so at a cost of £10.00 per annum.

### The root cause of Islamic extremism

I READ with interest in October’s edition the long piece about Islamist fundamentalists in the USA and the UK and the question it raised about whether their motives were political or religious. In his letter Mat Coward wrote that some alleged bombers stressed that their cause was political.

Did these terrorists say what they wanted us to hear? A few years ago I watched a BBC televised interview with a Pakistani soldier fighting in Kashmir. When asked whether he was fighting for Pakistan or Islam, I distinctly heard him reply, without any hesitation, “Islam”. Nationality clearly meant little to him.

BRIAN WHITELAW  
Chelmsford

### Penguins and ‘family values’

TO my mind, the key point about the cuddly emperor penguins in *March of the Penguins* is that they have achieved their exemplary lifestyle without the aid of priests, going to church or reading a holy book.

Or are we to believe that Dr Doolittle-style missionaries have been going round Antarctica showing the uncivilised ones the error of their ways and leading them into the way of righteousness?

MARTIN STONER  
London

I MUCH enjoyed your tale about Christians misguidedly latching on to penguins for moral guidance. But so used are our religious brethren to sifting out the cosy bits from Bible or Koran that they can’t help giving penguins the same treatment. I can vouch for the accuracy of the editor’s description of penguin society not quite living up to exacting Christian standards. In the Gloucestershire village of Bourton on the Water there is a sizeable penguin colony.

Recently there has been an addition to the family, apparently quite a rare event in captivity. The new baby, a delightful, downy creature by the name of Scampi, is being housed in a separate enclosure along with his father Bob. They are kept separate because Scampi’s mother has abandoned him at birth and given half a chance will give him a good pecking. Elsewhere in the colony there are several inseparable homosexual and lesbian assignments – by and large a much more accurate reflection of modern human society than the much vaunted religious model. The message to the “family values” people



must be: open your eyes and realise that in both the animal and the human world sex is on a continuum, ranging from heterosexual to neutral to homosexual with a lot of gradations in between.

Nobody should care too much as long as there is individual contentment.

**TONY AKKERMANS**  
Shropshire

### Apes and Humans

I'D like to thank Graham Noble for his courteous response to my letter about apes and humans. However, if readers can bear any more, I am not a zoologist, but I have consulted a colleague who is, and various authoritative sources.

The consensus seems to be that we are considered to be more closely related than formerly. Apes were classified as belonging to the family pongidae, humans to hominidae. Now we are all in the latter, which consists of four genera and five species, viz. Genus Gorilla, species gorilla; Pan, paniscus (bonobo) and troglodytes (chimpanzee); Pongo, pygmaeus (orangutan); and Homo, sapiens (human). The first four species are called apes. I don't understand what Richard Dawkins means by a "natural category". I should have thought that both genera and species were natural categories.

**JOHN RADFORD**  
London

GRAHAM Noble (Letter October 2005) is mistaken in supposing that, because there is no natural category of apes that does not include humans, the word "ape" is a nonsense. If mammals and birds are descended from reptiles, then there is no natural category of reptiles which does not include mammals and birds. But it is still meaningful to speak of reptiles as a class (excluding mammals and birds), provided we do not confuse this *descriptive* classification with a *natural* category or clade. If our meaning is clear, it is not nonsense to classify things any way we find useful.

**DONALD ROOUM**  
London

### Catholics and animal cruelty

CARDINAL Joseph Ratzinger becomes Pope Benedict XVI. An interesting clue to the Chosen One's capabilities were furnished in *The New Abolitionist* (newsletter of 'The British AntiVivisection Association Autumn 1917) which shows a photograph of a vivisected dog, along with the message:

"In the name of 'progress' for our society, have the paws of this dog been amputated and their skin removed. Only 'alive' is the

animal of interest to the experimenter. What does the church say to the horror of vivisection? Under the responsibility of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who has been nominated by the Pope to chairman of the Catechism commission, it is written in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2417: 'Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice.'

I suggest that every thinking human being should form his own opinion: on the worldwide crime of vivisection, as well as on the mediaeval, incompetent, unacceptable, position of Catholic Church representatives, and react accordingly.

**FREDERICK BACON**  
Notts

### Violent pornography

THE Libertarian Alliance, the radical free market and civil liberties think-tank and pressure group, condemns the proposals by the British Government to make possession of "violent pornography" a criminal offence.

There is no proven connection between pornography and sexual violence. There have been dozens of reputable studies. Not one has shown any connection. Indeed, the evidence is that access to pornography reduces sexual violence by providing an alternative release.

Even if there were a connection, it is only a prompting. Between prompting and action, there must still be some process of deliberation.

Anti-porn campaigners accuse adults of being robots who cannot resist any external impulse.

In any event, if there is a connection between pornography and sexual violence, there is exactly the same kind of connection between reading the Koran and letting off bombs on the London Underground. Are we to censor the Koran on that argument?

No – the anti-porn campaigners are anti-sex fanatics who will use any excuse to make other people as unhappy about sex as they are themselves.

As for criminalising possession, this is a sinister extension of a sinister principle established by the last Conservative Government. It is not the business of the State to tell us what literature we can have at home. At the least, it gives another opportunity for the Police to plant evidence.

The Libertarian Alliance denounces all censorship – whether of erotic material or of material deemed racist or sexist or homophobic or islamophobic. There should be no controls on the availability to adults of any literature. We believe in freedom of speech.

**DR SEAN GABB**  
Director of Communications,  
Libertarian Alliance.

### Brainwashing

ACCORDING to at least one newspaper, the Home Secretary has now recognised that extremists are the subjects of brain washing.

He should now go a step further and acknowledge that most religion is similarly acquired, albeit only through family, local or national culture. How else can one explain its geographic distribution?

Being a religious European almost equates with being a Christian, likewise the Middle East with Islam. It needs no stretch of the imagination to realise that had the Archbishop of Canterbury been adopted at birth and brought up in Iran by a Muslim family we would probably now be addressing him as Ayatollah Williams. Likewise, had Osama Bin Laden been brought up in the US bible belt by Christian foster parents, he would in all probability now be one of Bush's closest allies or even a millionaire evangelist.

**ALAN WATMORE**  
London

## The Free thinker

UK ISSN 0016-0687

Editor Barry Duke

Views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

Letters, subscriptions, book orders and fund donations to the publisher:

**Freethinker/G W Foote & Co Ltd**  
P O Box 234  
Brighton BN1 4XD  
Tel: 01273 680531

E-mail: [fteditor@aol.com](mailto:fteditor@aol.com)

Website: <http://www.freethinker.co.uk>

#### Annual postal subscription rates

12 months: UK £15.00 or £10.00 unwaged. Overseas surface mail (including Republic of Ireland) £18.00 sterling. Air mail £25 sterling. Overseas subscribers are requested to obtain sterling drafts from their banks, but if remittance is in foreign currency (including Republic of Ireland) please add the equivalent of £5.00 sterling or USA \$8.00 to cover bank charges. Alternatively, send at your own risk currency notes, convertible in the UK, plus bank charges equivalent to USA \$3.00

Special trial subscription for readers' friends and contacts: £5.00 for six months. Send name and address of recipient with £5.00 cheque or postal order made payable to G W Foote and Company to the Freethinker, PO Box 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD.

Printed by Derek Hattersley & Son  
Sheffield

## 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 227549/461404. [www.stovold.v21hosting.co.uk/humanist.html](http://www.stovold.v21hosting.co.uk/humanist.html). The Farm Tavern, Farm Road, Hove. Tuesday, December 6, 7.30pm. Anne Mitchell: *Romantic and Secular Poets*.

**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).

**Central London Humanist Group:** Contact Jemma Hooper, 75a Ridgmount Gardens, London WC1E 7AX. E-mail: [rupert@clarity4words.co.uk](mailto:rupert@clarity4words.co.uk). Tel: 02075804564.

**Chiltern Humanists:** Information: 01494 771851.

**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. E-mail: [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:** Programme available, Details: 01268 785295.

**Fens and King's Lynn.** New group being formed. Information: Edwin Salter on 01553 771917.

**Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA):** Information: 34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth CV8 2HB. Tel. 01926 858450.

**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. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thursday, December 1, 8pm. Andrew Curtain: *The Arts in Havering*.

**Humanist Association Dorset:** Information and programme from Jane Bannister. Tel: 01202 428506.

**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. E-mail: [humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk](mailto:humanist@spiershill.fsworld.co.uk).

**Glasgow Group:** Information: Alan Henness. Tel. 07010 704776. E-mail: [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. Swarthmore, 3-7 Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Tuesday, December 13, 8 pm. Martin Schweiger: *Marriage Today: Great Expectations or Hard Times?*

**Isle of Man Freethinkers.** Information: Muriel Garland, 01624 664796. E-mail: [murielgarland@clara.co.uk](mailto:murielgarland@clara.co.uk). Website: [www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk](http://www.iomfreethinkers.co.uk)

**Isle of Wight Humanist Group.** Information: David Broughton on 01983 755526 or e-mail [davidb67@clara.co.uk](mailto:davidb67@clara.co.uk)

**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.

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com). Friends Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford. Thursday, December 15, 8pm. Winter Solstice Party.

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

**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: Linda Wilkinson, 0208 882 0124.

**North Yorkshire Humanist Group.** Secretary: Charles Anderson, 01904 766480. Meets first Monday of the month, 7.30pm. Priory Street Centre, York.

**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:** Information: 0114 2309754. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, December 7, Annual Dinner. Wednesday, January 4, 8pm. Frank Abel: *That was 2005, That Was*.

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

**South Place Ethical Society.** Weekly talks/meetings/concerts Sundays 11am and 3pm at Conway Hall Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Tel: 0207242 8037/4. E-mail: [library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk). Monthly programmes 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. Website: [www.wmhumanists.co.uk](http://www.wmhumanists.co.uk). E-mail: [rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:rocheforts@tiscali.co.uk). Meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at Ludlow, October to June.

**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 McLroy, Flat 3, Somerhill Lodge, Somerhill Road,  
Hove, Sussex BN3 1RU.

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