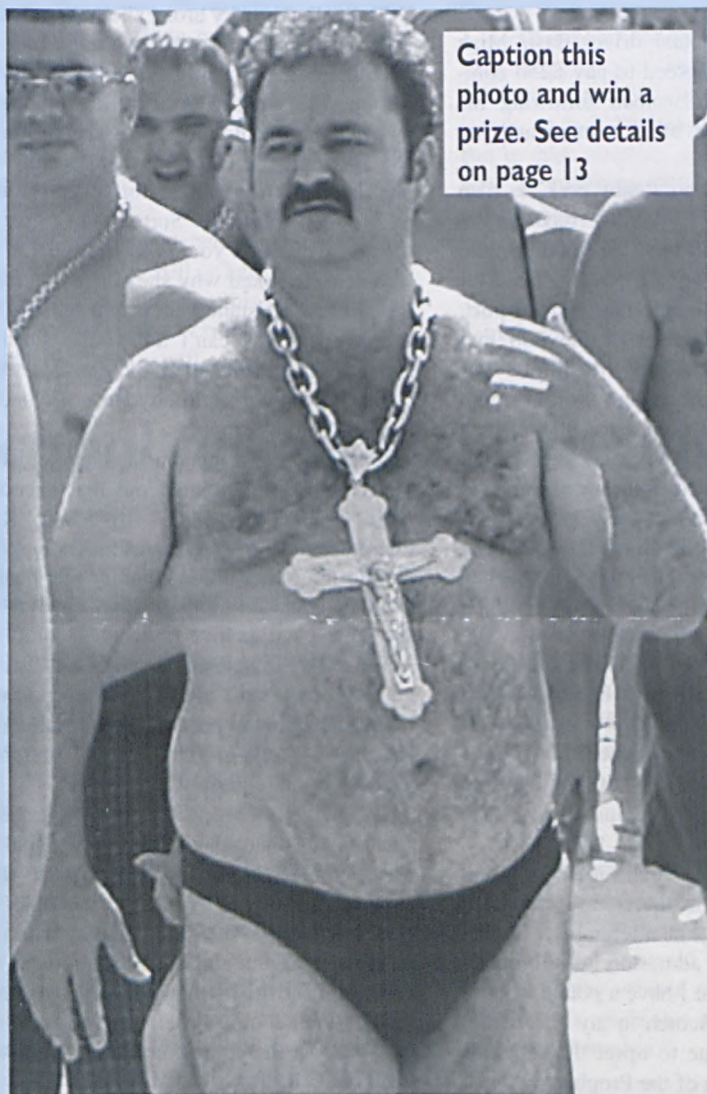


£1.25

# The Freethinker

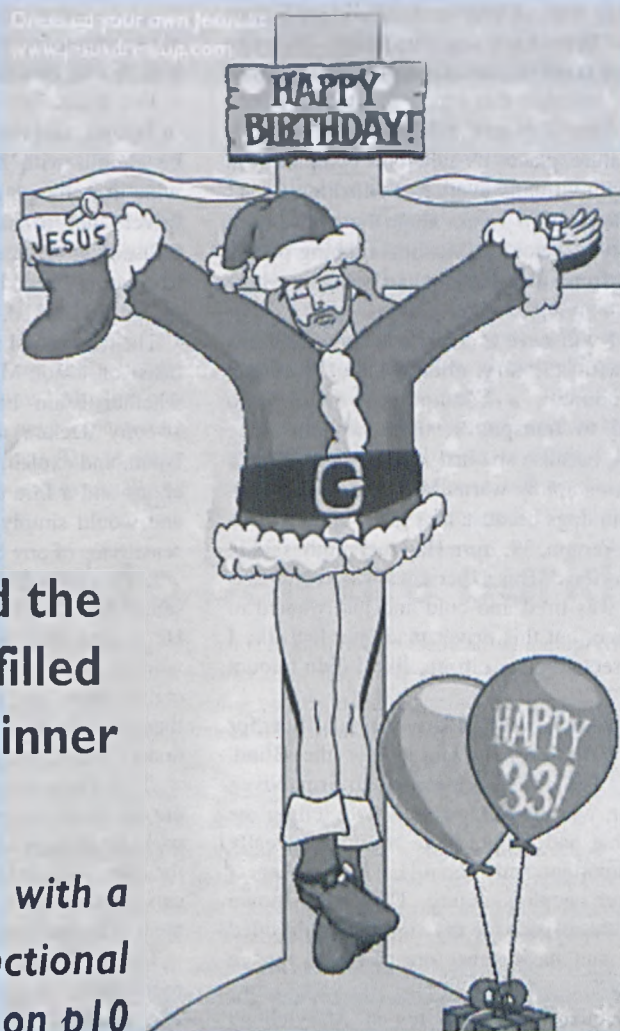
Vol 126 No 12  
December 2006

The voice of atheism since 1881



## Religious symbols in public: The debate heats up

— see page 5



Jesus Christ, it's Christmas! And the bachelor boy from Bethlehem, filled with seasonal gaiety, throws a dinner party for the gods

— Join the festivities with a medley of distinctly dysfunctional and disagreeable deities on p10

LAST month saw the launch of Britain's 13th "Islam Awareness Week". Its theme was "One World", and its objective was to draw attention to the fact that "we share the same humanity ... and such common values as truth, justice and equality as well as the need for peace and a concern for the environment. ..."

"One World", the IaW official website informs us, "reminds us of the global village that we inhabit, that the world's concerns and problems are ours to both share and solve together, and that the things that we have in common are more significant than the differences that are perceived to exist between us."

In presenting its case, IaW says that "sadly, Islam and Muslims are often portrayed as unreasonable, fanatical, intolerant, violators of human rights, and anti-women."

"These popular images come down from age-old myths and fears, often fuelled by political and economic interests and sometimes reinforced by the publicity given to extremists on the margins of Muslim society."

"They have led to prejudices and negative feelings about Islam and Muslims. These misunderstandings breed suspicion, discrimination, racism and even violence. We believe that these misconceptions must be removed if we are to see the development of a truly multi-faith Britain. Only then can we experience the joy of living together."

The IaW is, of course, quite correct in stating that Islam has a negative image – but, like so many other organisations of its kind, it fails to acknowledge that much of this negativity flows directly from the fact that Islam, by its very nature, places its adherents completely at odds with virtually every non-Muslim.

In the past few weeks alone there have been so many instances of Muslims rubbing people up the wrong way that it is hard to know where to begin giving examples.

But I will have a crack at it anyway. Let's start with a story about Abdul Rasheed Majekodumni, a London cab driver who refused to transport a blind woman, Jane Vernon, because she had a guide dog. Islamic tradition stupidly warns Muslims against contact with dogs because they are "impure".

Mrs Vernon, 39, from Hammersmith, said in an interview: "This experience was very upsetting. I was tired and cold and just wanted to get home, but this driver made me feel like I was a second-class citizen, like I didn't count at all."

Mrs Vernon, who works as a legal officer for the Royal National Institute for the Blind, added: "The owner of the minicab firm, Niven Sinclair, was also very insensitive, telling me that what had happened to me wasn't really very important, and I should have more respect for other people's culture. They have shown very little respect for my rights as a disabled person and have never once offered me an apology."

Subsequently, magistrates at Marylebone fined Majekodumni £200 and ordered him to

pay £1,200 for failing to comply with regulations set out under the Disability Discrimination Act. After the case Majekodumni remained defiant and insisted that he would continue refusing passengers accompanied by guide dogs.

**Freethinker Editor  
BARRY DUKE  
has his say on the  
UK's 13th 'Islam  
Awareness Week'**



Last year, London taxi driver Basir Miah was fined £150 and agreed to pay £250 compensation to a blind woman following his refusal to transport a blind woman and her guide dog.

Alcohol, too, and no doubt pork, is also offensive to Muslim cab drivers. According to a report in *The Australian*, a cab ban on people carrying alcohol "has created chaos at Minneapolis-St Paul international airport, where about three-quarters of the 900 taxi drivers are Somali and mostly Muslim".

Airport officials have begun working with taxi drivers to install colour-coded lights on taxi roofs to indicate which are alcohol friendly and which are not. The lights are expected to be introduced by the end of the year.

Ali Culed, a Somali Muslim who's been driving an airport cab for eight years, said the ban was "a religious issue".

Eva Buzek, a flight attendant who grew up in Poland, said that when she asked a driver to be careful with her suitcase because it had wine in it, he dumped her bags and told other drivers not to carry her either. Four more refused her service. "What's next? Will I have to cover my head before I get into a cab?", she indignantly asked.

The next time I need to call for a cab, I shall insist on a non-Muslim driver. If I am asked whether I am being Islamophobic, I shall sweetly declare my adoration of all things Islam, and explain that I have a pound of pork chops and a litre of Scotch in my Tesco bag, and would simply hate to upset the religious sensitivities of any Son of the Prophet.

Let's now move on to Australia's most senior Muslim cleric, Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali. He caused outrage in October when he said women were "weapons" used by "Satan" to control men, and that raped women had only themselves to blame. He likened them to abandoned "meat" that attracts voracious animals.

"If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park, or in the backyard without a cover, and the cats come and eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem."

The sheik then said: "If a woman was in her room, in her home, in her *hijab*, no problem would occur."

Back in England, another Muslim cleric hit

the headlines when he apparently endorsed the murder of homosexuals in Islamic countries. Arshad Misbahi, 38, a leading imam at the Manchester Central Mosque, was reported to have made the comments to a local psychotherapist, Dr John Casson, who revealed that Misbahi had insisted that, in a true Islamic state, the death penalty for homosexuality was part of Islam, and was justified. "They may result in the deaths of thousands but if this deterred millions from having sex, and spreading disease, then it was worthwhile to protect the community."

Soon after, a story broke about the refusal of a Muslim pharmacist in Rotherham to give a customer a morning-after pill. Jo-Ann Thomas, 37, went to her local Lloyds pharmacy in October, but when she asked for the pill she was told she would have to speak to the pharmacist. After waiting for several minutes an assistant told her: "Sorry I can't give you the pill, why don't you go to your GP?"

When she asked why she was being denied the pill, the assistant went bright red and after a pause said "I can't tell you". When she insisted on an explanation, the assistant replied "Don't say anything to anyone – it's because of his religion."

A Lloyds spokesperson later apologised to Ms Thomas, but pointed out that a code of ethics put in place by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society states that if supplying the morning-after pill is contrary to a pharmacist's personal religious or moral beliefs they are entirely within their rights not to supply it."

The latest example of Islam deliberately creating discord and strife in a secular setting occurred when a Muslim lawyer at an immigration court hearing in Stoke-in-Trent refused to remove her veil at the request of a judge.

The judge, George Glossop, adjourned the case, saying that what Shabnam Mughal, 27, was saying through her face curtain, which covered all but her eyes, was inaudible. The case was resumed the following day with a different lawyer, but subsequently the head of a network of British immigration courts ruled that lawyers should be allowed to wear full-face veils in the courtroom unless it prevents them being heard.

The guidance from Sir Henry Hodge, head of the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, came after the provocative Mughal insisted she had the right to wear a black veil, and had worn it at many previous hearings.

Hodge said that if a lawyer wishing to wear a veil "has the agreement of his or her client and can be heard reasonably clearly by all parties to the proceedings, then the representative should be allowed to do so."

These examples, and a thousand more that I could weave into a hefty tome entitled *Oh, Those Crazy Muslims*, demonstrate – if any demonstration was needed – that it is non-Muslims, and atheists in particular, who are the ones being marginalised, demonised and treated with suspicion, discrimination and contempt.

# National Secular Society warns of further restrictions on freedom of speech

IT WOULD be catastrophic for freedom of speech for the Government to rush to further tighten the law on religious hatred as a result of the acquittal of BNP leader Nick Griffin, says the National Secular Society.

The Society's Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood said: "It would be a dire mistake to dash to create even more restrictive laws on free speech, when the last legislation isn't even in force yet.

However repugnant Nick Griffin's opinions might be, the Government must not rush into more ill-conceived lawmaking as a knee-jerk reaction. All the arguments that were employed during the debates on the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill when it was going through Parliament earlier this year still apply. Any attempt to outlaw criticism of Islam – or any other religion – will cause more problems

than it solves.

In Australia, where similar legislation has been introduced, there have had to be modifications, and the Islamic leaders who were most enthusiastic for its introduction are now asking for it to be repealed. They have, in fact, found themselves to be the main focus of it.

"Communities Minister Ruth Kelly has sensibly declared that Britain needs a genuine "dialogue and open debate" on controversial issues, such as the role of religion in society. But to curb freedom of speech further would have the opposite effect. One of the reasons it took decades for it to emerge that our multi-cultural policies were not working was that the topic was regarded as off limits.

"The new law on incitement to religious hatred, which was brought in earlier this year but is not yet in effect, has therefore not been

tested. There is therefore no justification for even more draconian laws.

"This Government has tried three times over the last five years to bring in legislation on religious hatred. Each time Parliament wisely thwarted the Government, but still it comes back for more.

The final version of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act passed in January was shorn of its most draconian powers by the Lords and the Commons, to the Government's fury.

"Tighter curbs on freedom of speech will be exploited by extremists to curb moderates speaking out. They could also drive extremists – whether religious or racist – underground. It is much more healthy for us to hear what they have to say and defeat it in open debate than to suppress their frustrations and drive dissent underground where it will fester."

## School forced to abandon *halal* Christmas dinner

FLYING in the face of increasing demands in the UK for the banning of the religious slaughter of animals, the head of a Yorkshire school last month announced her intention of replacing the traditional Christmas turkey dinner for pupils with *halal* chicken in an attempt to include Muslim children.

But Jan Charters' attempts at "an integrated Christmas" hit the buffers when parents of children at Oakwood School in Rotherham expressed fury over her plan for the *halal* meal.

According to a *Daily Express* report, furious parents accused the school of undermining the Christian faith. They were backed by Labour MP Denis MacShane who demanded to know why the children were not being offered a choice. Mr MacShane said: "No child should be obliged to eat food that is contrary to their personal convictions or religion. Schools should offer a choice and not allow the joyous celebrations of a Christmas dinner to become a divisive issue.

"I hope all the children can join in this fun and if I am invited I would be delighted to sit down with all the children for a Christmas dinner, *halal*, non *halal* or the healthy option, vegetarian."

After Mr MacShane's intervention, Ms Charters backed down, and youngsters will now be offered a choice of *halal* chicken or a traditional turkey dinner, costing £1.75.

Campaigners and religious organisations said the ban on traditional Christmas celebrations was making Britain a more divided society. John Midgley, of the Campaign Against Political Correctness, said: "It seems as though the parents have made the school see sense. Until com-

mon sense prevailed the school was creating a problem when there was no problem."

Nick Seaton, chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, said: "Headteachers and school governors should not make this sort of mistake in the first place.

"There are a lot of these silly people around who undermine British culture. This is a victory for common sense. It is good these mad politically-correct people have been made to think again."

Abdul Dean, ethnic minorities officer for the Christian People's Alliance, said: "There is a political agenda here. Who are these people speaking on behalf of Muslims? Muslim parents themselves would not have objected to children being offered a choice. The teachers should have taken this on board especially in this time of tension."

*Halal* meat is slaughtered in accordance with strict Muslim laws with a single cut to the throat. A sharp knife is used to sever all the vessels in the animal's neck, causing blood to drain completely.

The practice has been criticised as inhumane by The Farm Animal Welfare Council which has called for it to be banned.

A 15-year-old pupil, who did not want to be named, said: "I have no objections to including Muslims in celebrating Christmas but it is quite wrong to offer us only *halal* meat. A lot of my friends feel the same and say there should be a choice. They were thinking of boycotting the Christmas meal.

"I also think a lot of people will be horrified to know that *halal* meat is often served at school without a choice. I will not be staying for any more school dinners."

## Holland set to ban the burkha

THE Dutch Government announced last month that it would outlaw the head-to-toe burkha worn by some Muslim women, as well as other face-concealing apparel in public places.

Once considered one of Europe's most welcoming nations for immigrants and asylum seekers, the Netherlands is deeply divided over Government moves to stem the tide of new arrivals and compel them to adopt Dutch ways.

A Muslim leader denounced the proposal as "a big law for a small problem", in a country where, by his estimate, as few as 30 women wear burkhas.

Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk said the ban was to promote security. "The cabinet finds it undesirable that face-covering clothing — including the burkha — is worn in public places, for reasons of public order, security and protection of citizens," Ms Verdonk said in a statement.

"From a security standpoint, people should always be recognisable, and from the standpoint of integration, we think people should be able to communicate with one another," Ms Verdonk said.

She added that the ban would include not only the burkha but also full-face helmets and ski masks.

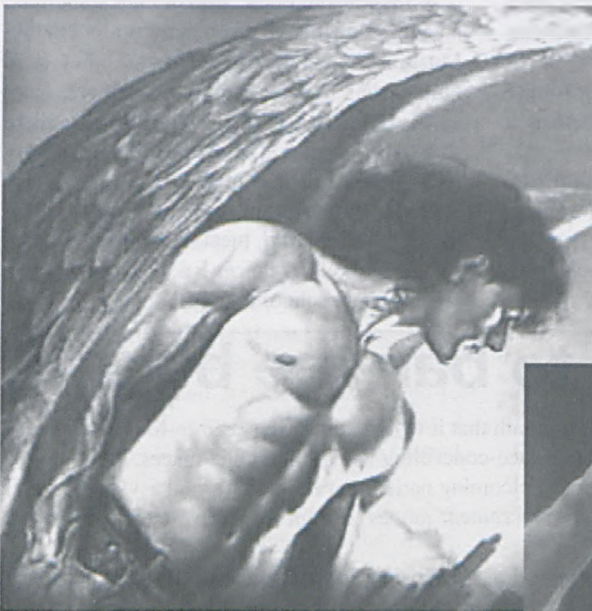


# Another one bites the dust: Haggard joins the swelling ranks of disgraced evangelists

IN February last year, *Harper's Magazine* devoted 14 pages to Pastor Ted Haggard and his super-sized New Life Church in Colorado Springs, USA. According to the American magazine, *Christianity Today* (November 2005) *Harper's* depicted Haggard and his neighbour James Dobson "as the two most powerful (and therefore dangerous) evangelicals in America".

"The piece by Jeff Sharlet," said *CT*, "was mostly scary atmospherics – he made much of the muscular warrior angels that adorn Haggard's World Prayer Centre ..."

*Hmmm*. Muscular warrior angels. What could that be all about. I wondered when I originally read the *CT* piece. Well, we now know what it was all about. Haggard, 50, head of the 30-million-strong National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), surrounded himself with images of muscular warrior angels, not because they were religiously inspirational, but because they were homo-erotic! The liar and the hypocrite who had spent so much of his life railing against homosexuality was himself homosexual. His outing just two days before the American mid-term elections left millions of his followers in a state of shock – shock compounded further by the huge set-backs the religious right suffered at the hands of an electorate fed up to the back teeth with the malign manner in which evangelicals had taken control of the US administration during "born-again" George W Bush's tenure as President .



Disgraced homophobe Haggard, right, decorated his prayer centre with homo-erotic pictures of muscular angels, like the one pictured above, and paid a real-life muscled hunk, Mike Jones, far right, for sex and drugs. At the time of his exposure, the self-confessed deceiver and liar was spearheading a campaign against same-sex marriage in Colorado.

Haggard was outed by a male escort, Mike Jones, who said he decided to go public with his claims in protest at Haggard's vigorous campaigning against laws legalising same-sex marriage. After the scandal broke, *Harper's* writer Jeff Sharlet spoke to Jones. He claimed that the escort "was motivated simply by being a gay man who's been around long enough to know how Ted's politics play out in the ordinary lives of people Jones cares about. That's about as good a motive for outing someone as I've ever heard."

## ANDREA THOMPSON reports on the downfall of a liar and hypocrite

Initially, Haggard – often credited with rallying crucial votes for President George W Bush during the 2004 election campaign – admitted buying the drug crystal meth from his accuser, but denied taking it, thus unleashing a torrent of "I did not swallow" jokes across the internet. He also denied paying for monthly sex sessions with Jones over a three-year period.

But shortly after this denial, the man whom *Time* magazine named as one of the top 25 most influential evangelicals in the US in 2005, confessed in a letter read out at a service of the New Life Church that "I am guilty of sexual immorality. I am a deceiver and a liar."

Haggard, married and a father of five, was immediately expelled from the 14,000-member church after an internal investigation concluded he was guilty of sexual misconduct.

Although Haggard did not specify in his letter what "sexual immorality" he was guilty of, he confessed to grappling with "urges" throughout his life.

"There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark and I've been warring against it my entire adult

life", Haggard said. "Not all of the allegations by this man are true, but enough of them are," Haggard said, urging followers of the megachurch that he founded in 1984 not to direct their wrath at Jones.

"He didn't violate you, I did," Haggard said.

The *CT* magazine piece of November, 2005, revealed that *Harper's* "placed Haggard somewhere on the spectrum between the Grand Inquisitor and William Jennings Bryan" and commented "you might expect Haggard to treat the press stiffly ... on the contrary, Haggard and his staff tell reporters to go anywhere, film anything, and talk to anybody.

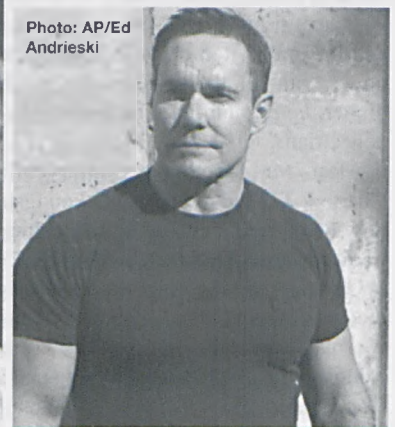
"Early this year, Haggard sent a memo to his congregation, tutoring them in proper behaviour with TV reporters. 'If a camera is on you during a worship service, worship; don't dance, jump, etc ... Jumping and dancing in church looks too bizarre for most to relate to. Don't talk about the Devil, demons, voices speaking to you. Instead, tell your personal story in common-sense language. Don't be spooky or weird. Don't switch into a glassy-eyed heavenly mode'.

"Haggard believes in territorial spirits, demonic oppression, visions, and voices from heaven. New Life worship is free and physical. Yet Haggard was coaching his congregation to act the way he does, which is anything but spooky or weird," observed *CT*.

But less than two months later, Haggard appeared both spooky and weird when he was filmed being confronted by Richard Dawkins. All sweetness and light, and oozing unctiousness to begin with, Haggard rapidly began losing his cool. After a bad-tempered exchange centred on creationism – filmed as part of Dawkins' *The Root of all Evil!* programme for Channel 4 TV – the evangelist's mask slipped and he accused Dawkins of "intellectual arrogance". Later, while Dawkins and his crew were packing up to leave the sprawling New Life Church, Haggard bellowed: "Get off my land, or I'll have you thrown in jail!"



Photo: AP/Ed Andrieski



# Islamic hot-head guilty of stirring hatred

A MAN who called for the killing of British troops has been found guilty of stirring up racial hatred at a rally. Mizanur Rahman, of Palmers Green, north London, was arrested after a protest at the UK's Danish Embassy over cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed.

The Old Bailey jury was unable to reach a verdict on a separate charge of inciting murder. They had spent two days considering the charges.

Web designer Rahman, who had denied both charges, is to be retried in January on the second charge of inciting murder.

During his trial Rahman apologised for his words on the day of the protest, saying he felt "almost ashamed". He added: "I didn't think anyone would take me seriously."

The 23-year-old was arrested after a rally in London on February 3 which was attended by some 300 Muslims. The Old Bailey heard he addressed the protest on the issue of UK troops in Iraq, saying: "We want to see their blood running in the streets of Baghdad."

David Perry QC, prosecuting, told the jury Rahman had also called for more 9/11-style

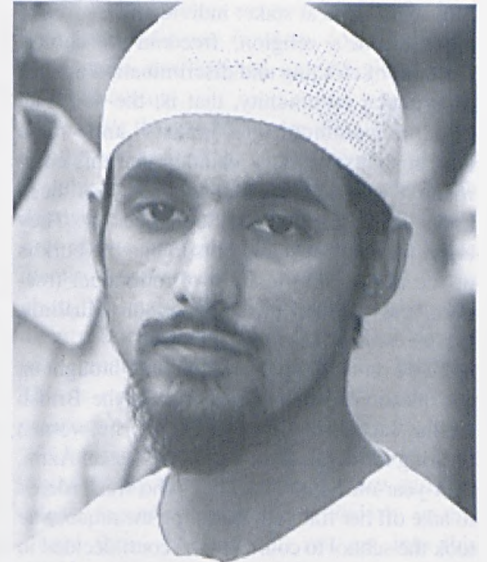
attacks. "What he said was this: 'Oh Allah, we want to see another 9/11 in Iraq, another 9/11 in Denmark, another 9/11 in Spain, in France, all over Europe'," Mr Perry said.

The prosecution said Rahman was filmed calling for troops to be brought back to the UK in body bags. He was also photographed holding placards which said: "Annihilate those who insult Islam."

In his defence Rahman said he had no intention of anyone carrying out the actions he called for. His counsel, John Burton, told members of the jury it was not enough for them to be "offended, shocked and distressed" by the comments. "It is a matter of whether a serious crime has taken place," he added.

Mr Burton likened the defendant's comments to those heard at Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park.

Labour MP Shahid Malik said he was "extremely pleased" at Rahman's conviction, adding it was "a good day" for community relations. The Dewsbury MP said: "I'm very satisfied with the verdict and hope that it will send out the signal that whilst we may indeed be fortunate enough to live in a free society, it



Mizanur Rahman: "Annihilate those who insult Islam".

does not give people the freedom to stir up racial hatred, and that those who do so will be dealt with by the courts accordingly."

## Furore over religious symbols and dress intensifies in the UK

THE latest volley of shots in Britain's fast escalating, religious symbols wars were fired outside MP Jack Straw's Blackburn office last month when around 60 protestors chanted: "The veil is freedom! The veil is liberation! The veil is choice!"

Then into the fray stepped the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, Rowan Williams and John Sentanu, with warning that politicians and companies should not interfere with people's right to wear visible symbols of their faith. Williams said that to ban veils, turbans, crosses or other pieces of clothing would be "politically dangerous". He expressed concern at the apparent direction of British society, cautioning against increased secularism along French lines. Shortly afterwards, Sentanu launched a campaign against British Airways' refusal to allow uniformed staff to wear religious symbols.

While this was going on, a Muslim teaching assistant, Aishah Azmi, lost a case against her suspension for refusing to remove her *niqab* in class. The school in Kirklees said her pupils found it hard to understand her during English language lessons. Azmi was been suspended pending the outcome of an employment tribunal, due to make its decision in a few weeks.

A Kirklees Council spokesman said her suspension was "nothing to do with her religion" but an issue to do with her making herself understood. "Both pupils and teachers raised concerns because they were finding it difficult to make out what she was saying during lessons. We asked this young lady to remove

her veil when she was teaching English, but she refused."

Dewsbury MP Shahid Malik has supported the school's stance. "In schools the top priority has got to be the education of our children. I fully support the decision of the education authority."

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, threw his hat into the ring too, saying he'd like to see Muslim women stop wearing the veil. "Getting Muslim women to give up the veil – which I suspect is something most people would like to see in the long term, including myself – is not going to be done by old white male politicians telling them to do it. It will be change from within. That is why it's important we should engage with the progressive elements and leaders in the Muslim community."

Meanwhile a British Airways employee, Nadia Eweida lost her case against her employer, because the airline had insisted that, by displaying her crucifix in public, she was breaching rules and regulations about uniforms. BA insisted it was simply upholding their rule that all jewellery had to be worn beneath a uniform, and the fact that the jewellery in question was a cross was irrelevant. BA went on to say that other articles with a religious connotation – such as turbans, hijabs or Sikh bracelets – could all be worn "as it is not practical for staff to conceal them beneath their uniforms".

Eweida's fight quickly spilled over into the political arena. Vince Cable, the deputy LibDem leader, backed Eweida, who is one of

his constituents. Cable wrote to the airline's chief executive, Willie Walsh, asking for the matter to be resolved amicably, but the reply he received was both "quite forceful" and "bureaucratic nonsense", the MP said.

Tory MP Ann Widdecombe weighed into the fight, warning BA that it could face a loss of profits over its behaviour. She described the situation as "absolutely crazy", and said that Christians who were "suffering" should "resist", adding: "It is we who are being persecuted."

But the NSS's Keith Porteous Wood said: "BA are entitled to enforce a uniform ban on jewellery, and should not be bullied for doing so, especially by Government ministers. It is perfectly reasonable, and indeed sensible, for staff handling baggage to be prohibited from wearing jewellery over their uniforms. It is also understandable for front-line staff with such an international clientele not to want employees to wear religious symbols. It is clear that Nadia Eweida is motivated by a wish to evangelise at work."

"This is the latest *putsch* by Christianity pretending to be a victim but in fact becoming much more aggressive, egged on by John Sentanu. It is completely inappropriate for Government ministers or politicians to interfere publicly in the internal affairs of a company and damage it commercially. This is not a religious issue as far as BA is concerned. Yet it has been turned into a religious confrontation by activists determined to push religion to the front line of British life, even though most people are indifferent to it."

The question of the veil has become a heated debate in the British media. In this debate some fundamental principles seem to be at stake: individual freedom to practise one's religion, freedom of choice, freedom of clothing and discrimination against a particular community, that is, the so-called Muslim community. Islamists and some human rights activists maintain that this community is being stigmatised and has been under racist attack since September 11. They argue that the latest attempts to ban the burkha or the niqab is a violation of individual freedom and another racist attack on Muslims. Let's examine these issues closer.

Two events following one another brought up the question of the Islamic veil in the British media: Jack Straw's comment on the women wearing the niqab and the case of Aishah Azmi, a 24-year-old support teacher, who was ordered to take off her full veil, including the niqab. She took the school to court and the court decided in the school's favour, and so she appealed against the decision.

In my opinion, defending the right to wear the veil in any form or shape and in any circumstances as freedom of choice is fallacious. It overlooks other, just as important, rights recognised by modern civil society. In unconditionally defending the right to wear the veil, one comes, at best, in collision with other sets of rights, ie children's rights, women's rights, societal rights, and the principle of secularism. In debating about the freedom of wearing the veil, one must take different circumstances into consideration: 1) the age of the person wearing the veil, 2) the extent of the veil, and 3) where the veil is worn.

#### *Why are these factors relevant in the discussion?*

First and foremost it is important to define what the veil is. Is it only a fashion item, a mere clothing style? The argument that classifies the

veil as a style of clothing is totally misleading. The veil is a religious ritual, a religious costume. Moreover, nowadays the veil has become the political banner of a political movement, namely, political Islam. The veil has become the symbol of Islamic power. Wherever Islamists gain power, they force the veil on women, as a sign of their victory and supremacy.

Why is this argument relevant to our discussion? It may be argued that irrespective of its religious or political character and significance, one must be free to wear any "political or religious symbol" one chooses to wear.

**AZAR  
MAJEDI**  
examines  
the  
complex  
issues  
involved



My response, and I believe many others', to this is a categorical NO. It must be said that in most countries, including Western democracies, there are certain dress codes at workplaces, and wearing different political symbols or religious ones is not allowed in the workplace. Therefore, the veil must also be viewed in this light. We should tear out all this romantic falsification surrounding the veil. The veil is a religious and political symbol of a religion and movement that degrades and deprives women.

#### *The veil as a symbol of women's subjugation*

The veil is both the symbol and the tool for women's subjugation. Islam, as, in fact, all other religions, is a misogynist ideology. Islam is a direct product of sheer patriarchy. Islam, particularly, due to its earthly characteristics, penetrates every aspect of private and social lives of men and women. A woman, according to Islam, is an extension and subject of a man. She does not have an independent identity and is defined by her master. The veil has been prescribed to hide men's property from potential violators. A "free" woman, according to Islam, is considered an open and free target, a free ride.

It is absurd to regard the veil as a fashion item, or a dress style. We should define the veil as it really is, and as it really functions in the lives of many women under the rule of Islam: a symbol of servitude and subjugation.

Nevertheless, it may be argued that, if one chooses a life of servitude, one should be free to do so. Modern civil society has a different answer to this argument. In a free, modern civil society, when safeguarding human rights, children's rights or women's rights, there are laws limiting an individual's right to harm oneself or to deprive oneself of certain rights and privileges. By the same token, there must be some limitations imposed on the use of the veil. This

# Must the veil

is perhaps where disagreements arise. This is where those above-mentioned circumstances come into the picture.

#### *The veil must be banned for underage girls*

One of the achievements of the modern civil society is the recognition of society's responsibility to safeguard children from any kind of abuse. The society must be responsible for a child's safety, happiness, health and their normal growth and development. Past decades have witnessed a great struggle by decent, human-loving individuals to establish the concept of children's rights, to recognise a child as an individual and not the property of their parents. This is a landmark achievement, which contradicts the essence of religion. According to Islam, the child is the property of the father or grandfather and they even have the right to take the child's life. Therefore, the modern children's rights charters are in basic contradiction to religious laws and customs. They, in fact, nullify certain religious or "divine" rights. This must extend to girls living in Islamic communities.

The veil is a pure discrimination against girls. It hampers their physical and mental development. It segregates them from the rest of the society. It restricts their growth and future development. It assigns to them a prescribed social role according to their gender and a division of labour. Therefore it must be banned. Society is duty-bound to safeguard free, healthy and normal development of these girls. It is a crime to ignore this obligation. Freedom of choice is purely nonsensical regarding the veil for underage girls. "A child has no religion". It is the parents' religion that is imposed on the child. The society must respect the child's right to a free development. Just the same way that modern society recognises the undeniable right to education for all children, bans child labour and regards physical abuse of children as a major crime, it must also ban the veil for underage girls. This must be added to all international children's rights charters. The veil is a physical, mental and social abuse of girls and it must be recognised as such by the international community.

#### *Secular society versus the veil*

In a secular society, religion must be a private affair of any individual. The state must be separated from religion and stay away from promoting any religion. A secular society can better defend individual rights and civil liberties. Contrary to the commonly held belief, religious hatred or communal stigmatisation can better be avoided in a secular society. In a secular society wearing or carrying any religious symbol at state institutions and in the place of education must be prohibited. By doing this, the state and the educational system do not promote any particular religion.



A Dutch cartoon entitled "Afghanistan Westernised". The puzzled man is saying "A mini-burkha?"

# il be banned?

Religion remains in the private sphere and clashes between followers of different religions is avoided. Therefore, I believe that the recent legislation in France regarding the banning of wearing any religious symbols in state institutions and schools is an appropriate step in the right direction.

However, I believe that its main shortcoming is to still allow private religious schools to operate. This leaves the girl's fate in the hands of religiously-fanatic parents to send her to a private religious school and ghettoise her life completely. This is not respecting individual freedom and civil liberties; this is discrimination against a group of girls who are isolated from the society at large and their lives are ghettoised by their parents and so-called leaders of their communities. The society must defend the right of children; girls living in Islamic communities are no exception. The society and the state have responsibility for their normal, healthy and happy development. **Burkha or the niqab, an individual right or a societal right?**

The veil comes in different forms and shapes, from a scarf, to a robe-like loose garment that covers the woman's whole body (it looks somewhat different in different countries, or according to different Islamic sect's rules) and finally the burkha or the niqab. The burkha has become known as the symbol of Taliban, the most severe restriction imposed on women's appearance.

Must a woman be allowed to cover herself under this most severe form of the veil? In my opinion: NO! The banning of the burkha or the niqab can be argued from two angles – 1) the societal right and 2) the women's right.

Firstly, in my opinion, when dealing with the burkha or the niqab, we surpass the sphere of individual rights. Here, we enter the sphere of what I call societal rights. The person under this kind of veil has no identity in the face of fellow citizens. The society cannot work with faceless humans. At a workplace, and I mean any workplace, it is the right of the fellow workers and customers to see the face of their colleagues or the personnel. There is also the issue of trust at stake. You cannot trust the person who has covered their face. Eyes and facial expressions are the key to communication; if you hide these, there can be no real communication. Therefore, wearing the burkha or the niqab must be banned at the workplace.

I believe that the question of trust and identity goes further than the workplace. It is just as important on the bus,

in the park, in the recreation ground, etc. that you can see the face of the person in your immediate surroundings. Here it is the question of individual rights versus societal rights. There are instances where the society rightfully decides to deprive certain individuals of certain rights for the benefit of society as a whole. For example, banning smoking in public places and imposing severe restrictions on smokers, limits the individual rights of smokers, but it is defended on the basis of health benefit for the whole society. The burkha or the niqab must be banned for the benefit of society.

Secondly, we argued above, that the veil is a symbol and a tool for women's subjugation and degradation. This is one of the main reasons for demanding that it be banned for underage girls. Nevertheless, we agreed that in a free society an individual has the right to choose servitude, if he/she chooses to do so. However, we also argued that there are certain limitations imposed on self-harming practices by individuals.

Female circumcision, which after a long and hard battle became known as what the practice really is, being female genital mutilation, is now banned by many Western governments. Women rights activists had to fight vigorously in order to bring consciousness about this

brutal religious practice and succeeded to ban it in these countries.

There are many different religious sects and not all their practices are permitted by the law. Therefore, religious freedom does not mean freedom to practise just any religious command or custom.

I believe that the burkha or the niqab should also be categorised as those religious practices prohibited by law. The burkha or the niqab deprives a woman of any identity. By allowing its use, we recognise the existence of some identity-less women who walk around like a ghost-like shape. This is a real insult to human dignity. Society should not permit such degree of degradation and humiliation of humans. This is outrageous. This must fall under the category of the limitations society imposes on self-harming practices. I add in passing that I doubt deeply the nature of voluntary and free choice regarding the veil, particularly in this severe form. But we will not get into this debate here.

We should redefine the veil. We should debate this question widely and openly. Hopefully, we will come to the agreement that certain limitations must be imposed on the veil: we should ban all forms of the veil for underage girls, and the use of the veil in public, at workplaces and educational institutions.

There should be a total ban on the burkha and the niqab.

• Azar Majedi was born in Iran. She finished her university education abroad and returned to Iran at the time of the 1978 revolution. In 1982 when the Islamic Republic had begun brutal attacks against all left-wing and opposition groups, torturing and killing thousands, she and her husband were forced to escape from the security forces, and left for Kurdistan. Azar moved to Europe in 1984. There she continued her activities both as a women's rights activist and as a political activist against the Islamic Republic. She has worked with the International Campaign for the Defence of Women's Rights in Iran.

She co-founded the Centre for Women and Socialism. She has published many articles in different journals. She has both organised and participated in different international conferences relating to women's rights issues, political Islam, and wider political issues.

She has worked in alternative media, she was the editor of Medusa, a journal dealing with women's issues, for three years from 1999-2002, she was the director of Radio International, a station broadcasting to Iran, which can also be heard in Europe and on the internet. Azar Majedi now lives in the UK with her three children



**What a scream! This horror-show of a garment is a niqab. Earlier this year a purveyor of niqabs in Egypt invited bids for this "One-size-fits- all Saudi Spring Niqab" on the internet auction site, eBay, saying it was being sold "in the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful". The removal of the model's eyes by the seller made the thing look even more creepy. Two people placed bids for this horrible item. The winner got it for \$7.99 (£4.22 at current rates). Whether the top bidder wanted it for a bank raid, Hal-lowe'en, or to attend a Ku Klux Klan funeral, is anyone's guess.**

Jesus threw a Christmas party in heaven last December. I wasn't privileged to be present, but I did overhear two conversations he had, one just before, the other just after the do. I report them here.

**Before the party:**

Jesus said, "Verily, verily I have decided to celebrate my birthday this year by throwing a dinner party for all the gods. I haven't entertained on this scale since I offered a limited menu of loaves and fishes to a multitude at Capernaum 2,000 years ago."

"Do you think that wise my dear?" asked Mary, his mother. "The gods are a quarrelsome lot. What is known as an awkward group back on Earth, particularly in the tabernacles of Westminster."



The Egyptian ram-headed god Re, getting horny over two female party guests

"Fear not," he answered and said "Be of good cheer. After all I am the Prince of Peace."

Being a woman, and practical, Mary wondered, "What will be on the menu?"

"As I'm on a diet since I had that accident with a spear in my stomach on Calvary, I'll stick to locusts and wild honey, drizzled with manna. But for the guests it'll be the usual fare: ambrosia soup, ambrosia steaks, ambrosia trifle, biscuits and ambrosia cheese."

"Bit monotonous", suggested Mary mildly.

"Yea verily. Suppose I should vary it a bit."

"Well, bear in mind that Vishnu and Buddha are vegetarians. Allah won't eat pork and that dreadful fellow from Mexico, Huitzilopochtli, only eats human hearts ripped still palpitating from their bodies. Oh, and Dagon the Philistine will be grossly offended if you serve fish, because he is a fish."

"Have to make it *a la carte*. Give them a choice. My last supper was *table d'hote*. We had a nice piece of roast lamb then, served with nan bread and bitter herbs."

"Oh no", gasped Mary. "You surely wouldn't be so insensitive as to serve mutton when Re the Egyptian will be there."

"Why not?"

"Because he has a ram's head."

"And," the mother continued, "there's the question of drinks."

"Nectar of course."

"Problem there too. Allah's



The Hindu god Ganesh gets into the Christmas spirit and prepares to Hoover up a dish of ambrosia vindaloo

# All hell breaks loose Jesus hosts a party for

teetotal. Odin and Thor will probably want draft lager. Mithras drinks bull's blood, and Bacchus is certain to insist on wine."

"He'll probably get pissed too," reflected the son, beginning to foresee problems with his catering arrangements. "But I do like the idea of wine. I remember once at a wedding feast in Cana ..."

## JACK HASTIE reports on the social gathering of the year

"Bacchus isn't the only one," Mary interrupted his reverie. "Verily I say unto you Indra's bound to get pi – become inebriated on soma, that frightful stuff they brew in India, and when he gets a skinful he becomes aggressive."

"We'll have to have a free bar and let them choose for themselves. Get a few Titans in as bouncers in case Bacchus or Indra gets out of order. I'll put the archangel Michael in charge of security."

Mary was clearly still unhappy. "Have you given any thought to the seating arrangements?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can't have your dad, Jehovah, sitting next to Baal. Or Zeus next to any of the goddesses, or you'll have a case of sexual harassment on your hands. You'd better keep that militant feminist Athene – she's likely to turn up brandishing a spear – well away from Allah; you know what a male chauvinist he is. And you simply can't have Eris there at all."

"Why? Who's she?"

"Don't you remember? The one who caused all the trouble at that wedding on Mount Olympus when she offered a prize for the most beautiful goddess. That started the Trojan War, that did."

"OK we'll leave her out."

"Now there's one other, rather delicate matter." Mary blushed and lowered her eyelids. "Will you be inviting any – er – homosexuals?"

"Well," said the son doubtfully, "Zeus is certainly a womaniser, but there have been rumours – you know about him and his cup bearer, Ganymede Still, I suppose that's his business – consenting adults you know."

"But don't you realise," explained Mary patiently, "that your dad and Allah are notori-



# ks loose when a Christmas r/the gods

ous gay bashers. Haven't you read their autobiographies, the Old Testament and the Koran? If Zeus gets up to anything like that there'll be big trouble. And verily, Allah has a habit of beheading those he disapproves of."

"Just have to make sure we *do* seat Zeus with the goddesses then. Lesser of two evils. I suppose. Pity Mary Magdalene wasn't a goddess."

### The morning after:

"You were right, Mum. Verily, verily they were impossible."

"Your dad started it. Throwing a tantrum and crying out with a loud voice because he wasn't served first. I mean, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not serve them for I the lord thy god am a jealous god'."

"OK, OK. Cut it Mum. I should have left the old boy out. But the goddesses were worse than the gods."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Aphrodite and Isis clawing and spitting at each other because they both wanted to snog Adonis under the mistletoe. And Hera. Queen

of heaven no less, making an idiot of herself over Hanuman, that monkey-faced fellow from India."

"That was only because Cupid, a *male* by the way, shot that stupid arrow into her heart."

"Well, what about that hysterical outburst from Vesta?"

"You can hardly blame her for that. What in heaven's name possessed you to seat her next to Ganesh? How could you be so socially inept as to put a prim old maid like Vesta next to a god with the head of an elephant? And his table manners are simply disgusting. Squirting half chewed ambrosia vinaloo all over the table with his trunk! No wonder she emptied her sacred hearth full of eternal fire over his head."

"Well, perhaps you're right." Jesus was having doubts about his omniscience. "But you must admit it was a goddess who started the final barney."

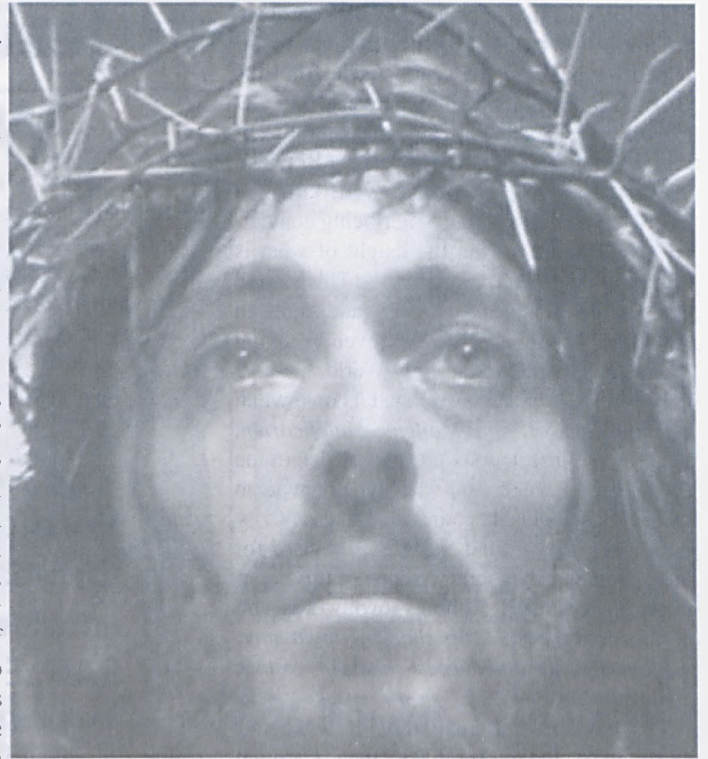
"I warned you not to invite Eris."

"I didn't invite her. She gate-crashed. Michael had Saint Peter on the door with a Titan, a Cyclops and three Gorgons, plus a couple of Valkyries to frisk the goddesses, but somehow it came to pass that she managed to slip past them, and when she shouted, 'A prize for the god with the biggest gong' all hell broke out."

"I didn't actually see who started it," admitted the mother.

"It was the thunder gods. Indra, who was half pissed on soma when he arrived like you said he'd be, started an argument with Thor and then, behold, he speared him with a flash of lightning. Thor retaliated and hit Indra with his hammer, Mjólnir the Mighty, and, lo, that was the ball up on the slates.

Zeus, who'd been quietly groping Freya, that blonde bird from Sweden we put him beside to distract him from Ganymede, straight-away jumped up and threw a thunderbolt at Thor. Then all the boys from Valhalla



Jesus wept after seeing his Christmas party descend into chaos

got stuck in. One of them, think it was that troublemaker Loki, called Baron Samedi, the voodoo godfather from Haiti, a black bastard. Buddha and I besought them to turn the other cheek and do as they would be done by, but..."

Mary interrupted. "Verily I say unto you, your dad was in the thick of it again."

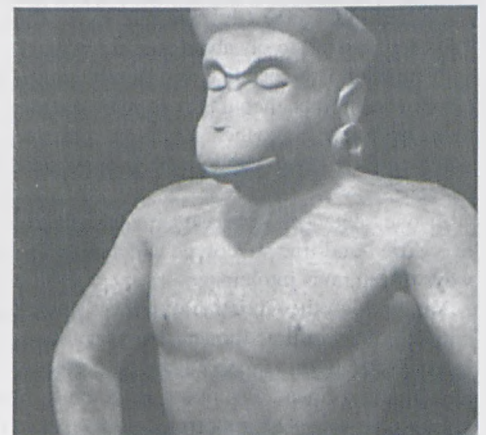
"Yea verily. I heard him banging on about thundering out of Sinai and smiting the first born of Egypt. That got right up Re's nose and he just put his ram's head down and charged. The table splintered. All the ambrosia went up in the air." Jesus wept.

"Verily, verily it's no good crying over spilt nectar," said his mother comfortingly.

"Yea, verily. I won't repeat the experiment," said the son between sobs. "Oh, by the way, it has come to pass that I had an interesting prayer from a chap on earth. He's got exactly the same problem with a disorderly group that trespasses against him and vexes him sore. Must make a note to send him a guiding star or something. Fellow by the name of Tony Blair."



The voracious Norse God Thor demands an entire tray of hors d'oeuvres with menaces from a passing waiter



The monkey god Hanuman has a post-coital snooze after his conquest of Hera

# Jesus the Witch

MODERN Christianity has not backed down from a stance against witchcraft it has maintained for hundreds of years. Aside from the Crusades, more people have died at Christianity's hands from accusations of witchcraft than anything else. Between 200,000 and 500,000 people were killed in various excruciating ways after being convicted of witchcraft during the height of what is known as the "Burning Times". This period extended from 1550 to 1675 and touched countries throughout Europe, even reaching across the Atlantic to the New World.

In 1486, Christianity even had its own witch burning manual, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which gave instructions on how to determine the guilt of a witch, and what type of woman would most likely become one. The description of the tortures and executions devised for these women is beyond the scope of this document. Historian R.H. Robbins' own words sum up this period best: ... *the shocking nightmare, the foulest crime and deepest shame of western civilization...*

The Christian fascination with witchcraft exists even today. In 2003, then Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) wrote a letter responding to a concern over a popular book series for children:

"It is good that you shed light and inform us on the Harry Potter matter, for these are subtle seductions that are barely noticeable and precisely because of that deeply affect (children) and corrupt the Christian faith in souls even before it (the Faith) could properly grow and mature."

Indeed, the whole of the Harry Potter book series has been under fire since the publication of its first volume. The chief complaint from Christians is the presence of witchcraft portrayed in a positive manner. Children were supposedly being lured into practising witchcraft by reading a book.

Witchcraft has even remained a curse among Christian leaders. To accuse someone of witchcraft, though not taken as seriously by the secular world, still counts as a heavy insult among Christians. The ancient excuses for calling a woman a witch are still employed, namely, any woman of independence from the power of men. Pat Robertson, of the Christian talk show The 700 Club, had this to say about feminist women: "Feminism is a socialist, anti-family, political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practise witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

In one sentence, Robertson invokes nearly every tried-and-true stereotype which mark the ways of religious intolerance.

Yet, with all the Christian bitterness toward witchcraft and its practitioners, the very founding of the religion is marked by the presence, blessing, and financial support of the craft, in the form of three wizards from the East who visit an infant Jesus.

(Matthew 2: 1) "After Jesus was born in

Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod. Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him'."

(Matthew 2: 9-11) "After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was."

"When they saw the star, they were over-

## Witchcraft and Christianity are closely entwined, says BRIAN RAGLE

joyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

The Greek word used for the Latin Magi is *magoi*. It is translated as "sorcerer, wizard, or astrologer", and is the root for "magician". The three men mentioned in the above passages are, quite literally, male witches from the pagan countries to the east of Israel.

The birth of Jesus was portended to them by the appearance of a certain star and, following that star, they reached the newborn Jesus.

This story is portrayed every year in churches around the world, celebrated as confirmation that Jesus was recognized by "kings" just after he had been born. To his later followers, this meant he was destined for great things, above and beyond other humans.

However, there is still the matter of witchcraft in play at these earliest days of Jesus' existence. Not only was his birth sanctioned by

practitioners of magic, the gift of gold undoubtedly financed Jesus's family for years after. Further still, following their sanctioning of his birth, the wizards' magic apparently worked in conjunction with the Jewish god's own later warnings to Joseph concerning King Herod and the massacre of babies which followed in Bethlehem.

(Matthew 2: 12) "And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."

Apologists will most likely downplay the significance of the wizards, as with the more colloquial title of "wise men", though ignoring "wizard" is the very root for the term "wise man". However, considering these events in the context of the time in which Jesus lived, is it any wonder why the Jewish authorities found reason to be suspicious of him?

(Jeremiah 10:2-10) "This is what the LORD says: 'Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them, they can do no harm nor can they do any good.'

"No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you. They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols. Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the craftsman and goldsmith have made is then dressed in blue and purple – all made by skilled workers. But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath."

Interestingly enough, this passage also addresses the pagan practice of "holiday trees", more commonly known today as Christmas Trees. It would seem that no matter how hard Christianity has tried to excise witchcraft from its ranks, it cannot escape the pervasive influence of pagan ways starting with Jesus Christ, their Savior.

• *Brian Ragle was born into a fundamentalist Christian home in Anderson, Indiana.*

*Heavily involved with church, he also expanded his education early in life by reading voraciously. Years, books, and unanswered questions later, he abandoned the trappings of religion and has since spent his time researching the origins and belief systems of superstitious thought. He cheerfully engages in debates whenever zealots come knocking on his door, usually serving tea as his guests make futile attempts at conversion.*

## 'Bad' Apple insults Islam

AN Islamic website has posted a message urging a boycott of Apple computer's stunning centre in Fifth Avenue New York, because it has been dubbed the "Apple Mecca". The website claimed that it "is intended to be open 24 hours a day like the Ka'ba, and moreover, contains bars selling alcoholic beverages."

This "new insult to Islam" is a cube-shaped building where customers can test various Apple computers and peripherals in an ultra-modern but cosy environment.

Within the store, they can stop by the "Genius Bar" – not for a shot of alcohol, but to benefit from the knowledge of an expert Apple support representative.

Apple does not officially refer to its building as its "Mecca".

# Jesus shoos off pesky Colombian Christian



A young Colombian farmer, seeking a miracle cure for his epilepsy, last month scaled a 45-foot-tall statue of Jesus to pray for a cure for his condition. But the only miracle he experienced was not being killed when Jesus gave him the brush off. The man had apparently climbed the statue on a previous occasion and come down safely. He is now recovering from multiple injuries.

## Egyptian authorities deny mass sex attacks on women

"DRESS modestly. Don the veil and you will be safe from sexual predators." Not a day goes by without this Muslim mantra being repeated with monotonous regularity in mosques, madrassas and on websites, but in reality garments like the *burkha* or *niqab* offer no protection against sex-crazed young men, as an appalling series of incidents in Egypt during the festival of Eid in October demonstrates.

What happened in central Cairo during the five hours between 7.30 pm and 12.30 am on October 23 and 24 was detailed by an internet blogger called Sandmonkey, whose account was corroborated by dozens of eyewitnesses – some of whom provided photographic evidence.

"It was the first day of Eid", wrote Sandmonkey, "and a new film was opening downtown. Mobs of males gathered trying to get in, but when the show was sold out, they decided to destroy the box office. After accomplishing that, they went on what can only be described as a sexual frenzy: They ran around grabbing any and every girl in sight, whether a *niqabi*, an *hijabi* or uncovered. Whether Egyptian or foreigner. Even pregnant ones.

"They grabbed them, molested them, tried to rip their clothes off and rape them, all in front of the police, who didn't do shit. The good people of downtown tried their best to protect the girls. Shop owners let the girls in and locked the doors, while the mobs tried to break in. Taxi drivers put the girls in the cars while the mobs were trying to break the glass and pull the girls out. It was a disgusting pandemonium of sexual assaults that lasted for five hours, and it turns my stomach just to think about it."

Immediately after, the Egyptian Government imposed a blanket ban on media reporting of the attacks, and no newspaper or TV station made any mention of them. But, thanks to

the internet, more and more details began to leak out until, finally, the Eid incidents became headline news worldwide.

Under the heading "Silence and Fury in Cairo After Sexual Attacks on Women", the *New York Times* reported that "in the culture of Egypt's one-party state, the charges were received as a critique of the security services. There was no collective soul-searching, no government call for an investigation. There was, instead, adamant denial followed up by state-sponsored intimidation of potential witnesses."

### EMMA WILLIAMS reports on an appalling incident in Egypt during the festival of Eid

The paper quoted an official from the Egyptian Interior Ministry, who asked not to be identified: "What those sick people described humiliates all Egyptians. You think Egyptians would see something like this happening and stand back and watch?"

The paper said "There is still uncertainty over what exactly happened in the streets that day. What is certain, though, is that the police have been adamant that very little occurred, and that anyone who suggests otherwise is degrading Egypt's reputation."

"An individual called Wael Abbas who has an Internet site called 'The Egyptian Conscience' is the one who invented this lie," reported a pro-government newspaper, *Rose Al Youssef*.

Abbas is a young man who never goes anywhere without his digital cameras. He said he witnessed packs of young men hunting down young women, grabbing at their bodies.

"I saw two girls wearing those *khaliji abaya*," he said referring to the black flowing

gowns favoured by women in the Persian Gulf region. "Guys surrounded them and pulled their clothes and veils and groped them."

But the authorities say none of it happened. Minor disturbances, a few cases of harassment, they said, but nothing like what was reported. And the authorities were determined to silence those who sought to validate the more offensive accounts.

"What they wrote is not only an exaggeration; they are complete fabrications and they are trying to make a case and issue out of a non-issue," the Interior Ministry official said. "Not one woman reported one case to any official body."

Human rights groups say it is not surprising that women – who did speak to the media when they were promised anonymity – would not file police reports. In this society, women are often blamed when they are the victims.

Family dignity can be lost no matter who initiated the contact, no matter how violent it may be. The government understands that reality, and has tried to use it at times to press people to cooperate. Last year, the police watched as thugs sexually assaulted women who protested against a referendum to change the way the President is elected.

Following the attacks, small groups of women have been trying to stage demonstrations to voice their outrage, not only over the gropings but also over the official response to the attacks. These demos have all been thwarted or disrupted by the police.

"This [the Eid attacks] is not the first time this has happened, but the dangerous part is that it is the first time that it happened in such a collective way," said Nesreen Khaled, one of a large number of demonstrators who took to the streets of Cairo to voice their anger.

# A useful book: *The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism*

THE following review is based on the 2004 edition, from a different publisher and with the different subtitle, *Why God Didn't Have a Thing to Do With It*. The opening chapter with quotations from 50 famous people has been deleted from the 2006 update, and a new chapter on "Intelligent Design" replaces the earlier chapter, "Answering Creationists' Objections to Evolution." Other than that, the new edition is virtually unchanged, although the cited errors could conceivably have been corrected. This review of the 2004 book is relevant to the 2006 version.

According to the author's web page ([www.davidmills.net](http://www.davidmills.net)), "*Atheist Universe* became Amazon's best-selling book on atheism." That is unfortunate, not because *Atheist Universe* has sold well, but because more informative books have sold less well. Mills' book is almost (but not completely) devoid of misinformation, and offers logical and coherent arguments against creationism and theism that should be required reading for every schoolchild. But it is the output of a well-meaning amateur, and as such generates the impression that this is the strongest argument against religion that can be formulated.

That is so far from the reality, that Mills simultaneously does humankind a service in spelling out the facts, and a disservice in creating the impression that he typifies or even represents biblical scholarship. Peter Angeles, S T Joshi, George Smith, and Michael Martin have all written books justifying nontheism, or "atheism", a word the ignorant have learned to view as pejorative, much more effectively. Unfortunately, all of those scholars take a philosophical approach that John Q Public is likely to find incomprehensible. On that score,

Mills' book is more useful than theirs.

Particularly useful is Mills' quotations from fifty prominent persons who criticized religion, almost all of them familiar Names that

**WILLIAM HARWOOD reviews David Mills' book, republished by Ulysses Press, PO Box 3440, Berkeley, CA 94703, 2006, ISBN 1-56975-567-1, 272 pp, ppb, \$14.95**

only hardcore biblical literalists refuse to recognize as top-ranking scholars in their various fields. If Einstein, Asimov, Sagan, Watson and Crick lived as nontheists, while the opposing view was and is espoused by the likes of Falwell, Buchanan, Robertson, Bush Junior, and let us not forget Osama bin Laden, that comparison alone carries a message that even incurables must have difficulty shutting out.

On the subject of perceived miracles, Mills cites "the fallacy known as 'Selective Observation,' a perceptual error also referred to as 'Counting the hits and ignoring the misses.'" He points out that the tobacco industry uses the same selectivity when they commission fifty studies that investigate whether tobacco kills people, suppress the forty-seven that answer "Yes," and promote the three that found insufficient evidence for the majority conclusion. He writes, "It never seems to occur to anyone that a God powerful enough to miraculously deliver the survivors could just as easily have forestalled the disaster altogether and spared the innocent victims."

All of that would be totally trivial, since the same point has been made in dozens of previous books, perhaps even hundreds or thousands. But the brainwashed masses are, amazingly, unaware of the selectivity factor in miracle claims, and for that Mills places the blame firmly on the news and entertainment media that headline pretended miracles and pointedly ignore the atrocities of which their imaginary playmate must be guilty in order for the survival of an individual to be a miracle.

On the downside, Mills makes factual errors that a high-school student could not expect to be overlooked by his marker. He puts into Jesus's mouth the message, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." That passage does appear in a parable that the anonymous author of Luke (19:27) attributed to Jesus, for the purposing of conscripting his dead messiah to damn the individual who spoke the words, and whom the Luke author himself detested. That person was Herod Antipas. Gospel authors indeed attributed sermons to Jesus that could only have been

preached by a monster (Luke 16:1-9 comes to mind), but Luke 19:27 was not one of them.

Mills lists *homo erectus* as a human ancestor rather than a dead end. While that taxonomy is still held by many competent anthropologists, it is no longer as widely believed as Mills implies. While he recognizes that it was Bishop Ussher who dated creation to 4004 BCE, and that Jewish-testament "begats" indeed gave the patriarchs' ages at the birth of the next generation, he blatantly states that the Christian testaments "continue the genealogy from David to Jesus, again specifying the age at which each male descendants 'begat' the next generation." All he needed to do to discover that this is totally WRONG was open any bible. Is the rest of the book a combination of inferences drawn as much from his fallible memory as from legitimate reasoning?

Mills capitalizes possessive adjectives and pronouns that refer to Christianity's Big Daddy, Junior and the Spook, clearly unaware than virtually all skeptical scholars and even a majority of liberal theologians have abandoned the practice as offensive to proponents of correct English.. And he accuses the bible authors of legitimizing such concepts as unicorns and dragons, apparently unaware that those blunders should be attributed to translators. Tanakh authors may well have *believed* in unicorns. But scholars are generally agreed that the word translated as *unicorn* in the King James Bible probably meant a musk ox.

Since the bible authors did believe in superstitious hogwash, it does the cause of nontheism no service to accuse them of specific pieces of ignorance of which they cannot legitimately be convicted. And it only takes one factual error to discredit a whole book in the eyes of devout unteachables: "You're going to believe anything from an author who thinks that...?" The converse, of course, "You believe that a bible that says in fourteen places that the earth is flat is nonfiction?" would only work on persons with functioning human brains, and that is one attribute creationists have never been accused of possessing.

*Atheist Universe* says nothing new or profound, and has little to offer persons who are already free from the brainwashing of religion. But for anyone who has been conditioned by the Big Lie that a nontheist is more motivated to commit an injurious act than a theist (in which case nontheists would be over-represented in prisons rather than significantly under-represented as is actually the case) this book will not eliminate their ignorance. But it might conceivably prompt them at least to question their autonomic acceptance of mind slavery as a norm.

## Why Intelligent Design is Stupid and Evolution is Clever

STEVE Jones, Secularist of the Year, and Professor of Genetics at University College London, will give the 2006 SPES Conway Hall Lecture, 2006 on Friday December 15 at 7.30pm in the main hall of Conway Hall. His address is entitled "Why Intelligent Design is Stupid and Evolution is Clever."

Entry is free, and all secularists are very welcome to attend the event at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1R 4RL.

For more details telephone 0207 242 8034/7. Email: [library@ethicalsoc.org.uk](mailto:library@ethicalsoc.org.uk)

# New study exposes the dangers of Islam

"ISLAM is a religion of peace." Bush has said so many times, and Blair has echoed this view. Contradict them, and others who insist that the War on Terror is an attempt to put the "true, peaceful Islam" back in control, and you will be dismissed as an "Islamophobe".

But what if this "understanding" of Islam is based not on fact, but instead on equal parts wishful thinking and Islamic deceit? It would mean that the entire War on Terror is based on a faulty – and increasingly deadly – premise.

In a disturbing but thoroughly researched new book, *Religion of Peace? Islam's War Against the World*, author and filmmaker Gregory M Davis rebuts the notion that Islam is a great faith in desperate need of a Reformation. Instead, he exposes it as a form of totalitarianism, a belief system that orders its adherents not to baptise all nations, but to conquer and subdue them. Islamic law's governance of every aspect of religious, political and personal action has far more in common with Nazism than with the tenets of Christianity or Judaism.

Davis details how Islamic thought divides the world into two spheres locked in perpetual combat: There is *dar al-Islam* (House of Islam, where Islamic law predominates), and *dar al-harb* (House of War – the rest of the world). This concise yet thorough book leaves no doubt as to why most of the world's modern conflicts are connected to Islam – and calls into question why Western elites refuse to acknowledge Islam's violent nature.

Virtually every contemporary Western leader has expressed the view that Islam is a peaceful religion and that those who commit violence in its name are fanatics who misinterpret its tenets. This widely circulated claim is false, says Davis.

Davis said recently: "The mistake Westerners make when they think about Islam is that they impose their own views of religion onto something decidedly outside Western tradition. Because violence done in the name of God is "extreme" from a Western/Christian point of view, they imagine that it must be so from an Islamic one. But unlike Christianity, which recognises a separate sphere for secular politics ("Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's"), Islam has never distinguished between faith and power. While Christianity is doctrinally concerned primarily with the salvation of souls, Islam seeks to remake the world in its image. According to orthodox Islam, Sharia law – the codified commandments of the Koran and precedents of the Prophet Mohammed – is the only legitimate basis of government. Islam is in fact an expansionary social and political system more akin to National Socialism and Communism than any "religion" familiar to Westerners. Islamic politics is inevitably an all-or-nothing affair in

which the stakes are salvation or damnation and the aim is to not to beat one's opponent at the polls but to destroy him – literally as well as politically.

Davis received his Ph.D. in political science from Stanford University and is managing director of Quixotic Media and producer of the feature documentary, *Islam: What the West Needs to Know*.

Relying primarily on Islam's own sources, *Religion of Peace? Islam's War Against the*

*World* demonstrates that Islam is a violent, expansionary ideology that seeks the subjugation and destruction of other faiths, cultures and systems of government. Further, it shows that the *jihadis* that Westerners have been indoctrinated to believe are extremists, are actually in the mainstream.

*Religion of Peace? Islam's War Against the World* is a powerful and jarring wake-up call to all civilised nations – and one they ignore at their peril.

## Caption contest attracts dozens of hilarious entries



THERE were so many chuckle-raising entries in our October caption contest that the judges had a hard time selecting the winners. But in the end they chose Eric Sinclair's deliciously wicked offering, shown above. Mr Sinclair, of Bradford, receives a copy of *H L Mencken on Religion*.

The runner-up prizes of a year's free subscription to the *Freethinker* goes to Iain Bartlett of London, and Peter Bailey, of Worthing. Iain's entry was "Mr al Rashid is delighted with his new camera's anti-red-eye feature". He also suggested "Kabul feminists flaunt the new modesty laws" and "Iraqi *Vogue* announces that wrists are the new ankles."

Peter's was "Ardent jihadist Osama is delighted with his latest intake of blow-up dolls, and photographs them before their departure for paradise." Peter shares the runner-up prize with Alister Rankin, of Fife, who submitted "Do you want this photo blown up?" and "Don't cut our heads off!" Dozens of entries simply said, "Say cheese." But there were a few notable variations on that theme. Keith Dixon, of North Yorkshire submitted "Come on ladies, say 'cheese' for Mr Straw" and B Whitman produced "Say 'cheese', but for f\*\*\*'s sake, not Danish Blue!" He also submitted "Fatima, stop flashing your foot, you shameless hussy!" We also liked Alan Watmore's "A group of Dalek wives enjoy a day trip to planet earth", and Tony Akkermans' "Post Office reveals new multicultural letterbox design."

We are now inviting entries for an amusing caption for our front page picture of the man wearing nothing but an outsize gold cross and chain, and a skimpy bathing costume. The winning entry will receive a copy of *I Think the Nurses are Stealing My Clothes: The Very Best of Linda Smith*. This is an hilarious compilation of the late comedian's funniest quotes – many of them strongly anti-religious. Linda Smith was President of the British Humanist Association at the time of her untimely death earlier this year. Please send your entries to: **Freethinker Caption Contest, PO Box 234, Brighton BN1 4XD. Entries must reach us by January 15, 2007. There will be two runner-up prizes of a year's subscription to the *Freethinker*.**

**Hypocrisy of the Left**

DIESEL Balaam (October *Freethinker*) is right to point out the hypocrisy of many trendy lefties who defend Muslims regardless of their actions and tend to see them as victims, never as perpetrators of crime.

Indeed there is some hierarchy defining who is allowed to criticise whom, with the Muslims right at the top. Secular humanists are, however, lower on that scale than indicated by Diesel, for most religious communities do regularly criticise atheists and get away with it.

But he is completely wrong when defining ASBO thugs as "most are probably atheists". What evidence is there for that? Have there been any polls or surveys? By saying that, Diesel supports the common prejudice of many theists who believe that only god-fearing people can live moral lives. In the absence of any such statistics, my gut feeling is that the majority of such thugs are neither theists nor atheists, but are indifferent as regards theological and ethical issues, though they may nominally belong to the religion of their parents (ie theists).

ALEX HILL  
London

BRETT Lock's lively rebuttal of the points raised in my October *Freethinker* article about the Gay Police Association's Christian gay-bashing advertisement, is certainly a brave attempt to shift the argument about anti-gay attacks back into his comfort zone of anti-Christian zealotry, yet he continues to sidestep the more serious and long-term threat from other religionists. It also shows how desperately defensive the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) has become, since this notorious London left activist took over the reins of its publicity.

Though he pays lip-service to freedom of expression, Brett is hardly a freethinker – in fact, like a one-man *Pravda*, his version of the truth is always skewed by his far-left agenda. Consequently, his letter is full of sly distortions: he claims my *Freethinker* article said that "people motivated by Christian-based religious fervour" are more likely to "turn the other cheek", offer "forgiveness" and "love their enemies". What I actually said, was that the average Christian was more likely to do this (and therefore be unlikely to attack homosexuals, as the GPA implied). Brett Lock probably doesn't know any average Christians, but in my experience, while they may cleave to some pretty daft ideas, in Britain at least, they are usually willing to accept pluralities of existence, including

homosexuality, whether they approve or not. That's good enough for me.

Like many a shrill gay activist, who has spent too much time in the company of other shrill gay activists, Brett launches into a near-hysterical rant, listing all the Church-sponsored woes and humiliations heaped upon lesbians and gay men, though few of them – let's be honest – actively impinge on our everyday lives. Most are simply attempts to protect their own schools, charities, or church weddings from incursions by the militant gay rights lobby. Prejudiced and defensive this may be, but it is seldom overtly hostile.

Brett also claims I asserted that gays trump Christians in the pecking order of social power. Again, what I actually said was that gays trump Christians in the pecking order of *political correctness* (and that gays, in turn, are trumped by Muslims). Political correctness deliberately inverts social power relations and is just one device used by left-wingers to try and foist their unpopular agendas on an unwilling electorate.

Of course, Brett is absolutely right to say that Christians have the numbers, the institutional power, the money and the organisation to do the most damage, but the point is, relatively few Christians *want* to do gays any damage. For most Christians, there is a space between scripture and everyday life that allows for pluralism and even contradiction; for most practising Muslims, that space is much tighter and sometimes non-existent. However, in the left-wing la-la land inhabited by Brett Lock and his co-travellers, if you criticise Muslims (only radical Muslims in my case) you're a "bigot".

Condemn Christians without qualification, as GALHA often does, and you're a "rationalist". Yet unlike their Muslim counterparts, none of the bothersome anti-gay Christian organisations Brett lists have actually advocated or condoned physical violence towards homosexuals, imprisonment, or even the denial of basic human rights. In any case, they represent a rapidly diminishing constituency. There are far more Christians prepared to accept and even campaign for gay equality than GALHA is prepared to admit.

Muslim radicals are smaller in number, less well resourced and are currently under-represented politically, but they represent an aggressive and fast-growing constituency. Unlike their Christian counterparts, their beliefs and traditions are alien to our civilization and their pronouncements on gays range from the censorious to the blood-curdling. By 2040, it is claimed, more people in Britain will worship in mosques than in churches and it is probable that *sharia* law will have been formally introduced into "Muslim areas" of the UK – where it is already said to be operating informally. Peter Tatchell (not exactly an anti-Muslim bigot) has identified a number of councils and parliamentary constituencies which are already susceptible to electoral takeover by Muslims, in which case, Brett might be kissing some of his gay rights goodbye sooner than he thinks.

The trouble with British humanists is that we are too often complacent and lack strategic initiative. We are living through a unique historical moment when secular humanism should be capitalising on the widespread fear and anxiety over religious fanaticism generally, and Islamic militancy in particular. Yet

while we allow far-left infiltrators to occupy key positions within our movement, "managing" the debate and promoting self-serving notions that being anti-Islam is somehow unacceptable, secular humanism will continue along its path of declining influence. These days, GALHA might be happy for Lock to act as its mouthpiece, but the challenge for more measured and mainstream humanists, gay and straight, is to engage with ordinary people beyond the ranks of the NSS and the far-left fringe.

DIESEL BALAAAM  
London

**Celebrity crazies**

MEL Gibson's beliefs, set out in the October issue of the *Freethinker*, remind me of that song from "Barry MacKenzie Holds His Own".

*He's a ratbag, a raving ratbag  
He's a screwball, he's a nutcase,  
there's no doubt*

**Jesus and Mo**



The creator of Jesus and Mo has introduced a new Mo – Moses

*And if you think you're ratbag-free  
Go and shake your family tree  
See the great big raving ratbags falling out!*  
I charitably hope that his father is just senile.

As for Pat Boone – I've no doubt he knows Gibson, but I doubt his second claim about knowing Jesus! Also, the clean-cut Christian Mr Boone seems to have a less attractive side. It is claimed that he was a child-beater, in the habit of hitting his daughters on the bare flesh with an implement.

Incidentally, has anyone ever thought of writing a book about celebrities falling for weird cults? The list seems extensive – Gibson, Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Lisa Marie Presley, Muhammad Ali, Bobby Fischer ... of course, the Osmonds and Jacksons started off in them!

MARK TAHA  
London

### Archbishop of Birmingham

YOUR article "Catholics attack BBC" in the November issue quotes the Archbishop of Birmingham referring to a BBC programme about the Church's record on child abuse saying: "They (the viewers) will know that aspects of the programme amount to a deeply prejudiced attack on a revered world religious leader."

## Big autumn boost for the *Freethinker* fund

BETWEEN October 21 and November 21 this year the *Freethinker* Fund received a welcome boost of £673.10 as a result of generous donations from subscribers. We would like to thank the following donors for their help in keeping the *Freethinker* going:

I M Anderson, J Beech, J Berryman, D Birrell, G Bogie, K Bolton, R Bowell, K Budden, B Burfoot, J Camden, B Childs, D Clamp, B Dawson, F R Evans, G Francis, C Greedus, D Harrop, M Howells, D T McIntyre, V M Martin, I Mathieson, J Metcalf, K Moore, G O'Shaughnessy, R S Parfitt, P Proctor, R Rowlatt, B Ross, M Short, C A Shrives, A Sneddon, A Taylor, C R Thomas, T D Tyson, S Valdar, S G Williams, and J G Wilson.

During 2007, we will be making a determined effort to significantly increase the circulation of the magazine, and will be investigating ways of doing this. One possibility is to place ads in local newspapers. Last year a dedicated supporter, Mr J R Craddock of Lincoln paid for a series of ads in his local paper which attracted a number of new subscribers. If any supporter wishes to follow Mr Craddock's example, we will be pleased to provide the wording for such an ad.

We would also like to remind existing subscribers that they can send a gift of a trial issue to family and friends for just £5.00.

If they "will know" this, then why is the Archbishop complaining?

FABIAN ACKER  
London

### The 'religion' of atheism

MY old friend, Ted Goodman (*Points of View*, November), is quite right to insist that atheism is a religion – in its most militant forms (eg Stalinism) perhaps the most dangerous of all. Even forms with less political clout can be pretty damaging. The story of Madalyn Murray O'Hair, a hater of her parents, an abuser of her children, a greedy, self-serving harridan, and arch-homophobe to boot, should provide a salutary reminder of atheism's potential for creating dystopia.

If, as the editor says in his footnote to Ted Goodman's letter, atheism is disqualified from being considered a religion because it is non-theistic, then what about Buddhism, which in its principal form is non-theistic, though absolutely no-one doubts it is a religion?

If he wants atheism excluded from the category of "religion" simply to exempt it from the criticism which he considers all religions merit (but he will not countenance being levelled at atheism), is that not the grossest form of special pleading?

Furthermore, his comment that atheism is "without dogma of any sort" is a breathtaking falsehood.

Here are a few of the commoner dogmas of atheism: 1 There is no God (the dogma of atheism); 2 Life has no purpose (the dogma of meaninglessness); 3 Death is final – there is no heaven, hell, judgement or afterlife of any description (the dogma of nescience); 4 Morality is a human invention (the dogma of relativism); 5 Science is the only route to truth (the dogma of scientism); 6 Religion is a "virus of the mind" (the Dawkins dogma).

I could go on, but that should suffice to demonstrate the utter – and contemptible – falsehood of the editor's claim.

As for "American Atheists Inc", founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, she is rightly described by Alister McGrath as "one of the greatest charlatans of the 20th century". And her own son, William, who knew her better than anyone still living, wrote:

"My mother was an evil person ... Not for removing prayer from America's schools ... No ... She was just evil. She stole huge amounts of money. She misused the trust of people. She cheated children out of their parents' inheritance. She cheated on her taxes and even stole from her own organisations. She once printed up phoney stock certificates on her own printing press to try to take over another atheist publishing company."

Very strange, isn't it, that the American Atheists website still has no postings about her disappearance and murder after the identification of her murderer and her remains (and those of her son Jon and granddaughter Robin) in 2001. And their murderer was not a

Christian, an alien or a CIA agent, but a disgruntled former employee (with his criminal associates) whom she took on knowing he had serious previous convictions.

The *Wikipedia* entry on her is the most unbiased on the net. I suggest the editor reads it carefully before he – or any of his more rabid contributors – leaps to her defence! There is no doubt that for Madalyn Murray O'Hair atheism was a religion – and a very lucrative one at that – and she was its High Priestess, who had no compunction in treating her detractors with a contempt that makes even Saddam seem almost civilised.

Does the *Freethinker* and the NSS really wish to emulate this woman and the organisation she founded?

It is a sobering prospect!

DAN O'HARA  
Saltburn-by-the-Sea

## The *Freethinker*

Founded in 1881 by G W Foote  
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

**Birmingham Humanists:** Friends Meeting House, George Road, Edgbaston. Wednesday, December 13, 7.45pm. *Celebrations: a Topical Look at How We Celebrate.*

**Blackpool & Fylde Humanist Group:** Information: John and Kath Wayland, 13 Elms Avenue, Lytham FY8 5PW. Tel: 01253 736397

**Brighton & Hove Humanist Society:** Information on 01273 227549/461404. Website: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/robert.stovold/humanist.html>. The Farm Tavern, Farm Road, Hove. Tuesday, January 9, 7.30pm David Cook: *Cultural Diplomacy – Whose Values?*

**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 and programme: 01494 771851. Friends Meeting House, 289 High St, Berkhamsted. Tues, Dec 12, 2pm. Denis Cobell: *The Origins of Christmas.* Sat, Jan 6, Annual Dinner. Tel for details (see above).

**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.

**Derbyshire Secularists:** Meet at 7.00pm, the third Wednesday of every month at the Multifaith Centre, University of Derby. Full details on website [www.secularderby.org](http://www.secularderby.org)

**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.

**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. Website: <http://hampstead.humanists.net>

**Harrow Humanist Society:** Harrow Humanist Society. Meetings second Wednesday of the month (except January and August) 8pm at the HAVS Centre, 64 Pinner Road, Harrow. Further information from the Secretary on 0208 863 2977. Next meeting: Grand Yuletide Party on Dec 13. Members of other BHA groups especially welcome. Please phone in advance if you are coming.

**Havering & District Humanist Society:** Information: Jean Condon 01708 473597. Friends Meeting House, 7 Balgores Crescent, Gidea Park. Thurs, Dec 7, 8pm. Norman Dannatt: *My Life as a Humanist Church Organist.* Thurs, Jan 4, 8pm. David O'Brian: *Cosmology – Is There Anyone There?*

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

**Humanist Society of Scotland:** 272 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4JR, 0870 874 9002. Secretary: [secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:secretary@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Information and events: [info@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:info@humanism-scotland.org.uk) or visit [www.humanism-scotland.org.uk](http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk). Media: [media@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:media@humanism-scotland.org.uk). Education: [education@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:education@humanism-scotland.org.uk). **Local Scottish Groups:**

**Aberdeen Group:** 07010 704778, [aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:aberdeen@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Dundee Group:** 07017 404778, [dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:dundee@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Edinburgh Group:** 07010 704775, [edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:edinburgh@humanism-scotland.org.uk)

**Glasgow Group:** 07010 704776, [glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:glasgow@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Highland Group:** 07017 404779, [highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk](mailto:highland@humanism-scotland.org.uk).

**Perth Group:** 07017 404776, [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, Jan 9, 7.30pm. Jeff Tee: *Humanist Ethics, a Critique.*

**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. Full programme of events on website: [www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk](http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk)

**Lewisham Humanist Group:** Information: Denis Cobell: 020 8690 4645. Website: [www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com](http://www.slhg.adm.freeuk.com). The Goose, Rushey Green, Catford. Thursday, Dec 21, 8pm. Saturnalia Party

**Lynn Humanists, W Norfolk & Fens.** Tel: 01553 771917.

**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 second 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. Three Cranes Hotel, Queen Street, Sheffield. Wednesday, Jan 3, 8pm. Public Meeting.

**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.

**Suffolk Humanists:** 5 Hadleigh Road, Elmsett, Suffolk IP7 6ND. Tel: 01473 658828. [mail@suffolkhumanists.org.uk](mailto:mail@suffolkhumanists.org.uk). [www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk](http://www.suffolkhumanists.org.uk).

**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.

**Humani – the Humanist Association of Northern Ireland.** Information: Brian McClinton, 25 Riverside Drive, Lisburn BT27 4HE. Tel: 028 9267 7264. E-mail: [brianmccolinton@btinternet.com](mailto:brianmccolinton@btinternet.com)

website: [www.nirelandhumanists.net](http://www.nirelandhumanists.net)

Please send your listings and events notices to:

Listings, the *Freethinker*, PO BOX 234, Brighton, BN1 4XD

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