

Winter 2006/7

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gone into outer-space?



## About the Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association



**GALHA** provides a fellowship and voice for the many non-religious in the lesbian and gay community. It aims to promote an awareness and understanding of the Humanist outlook in that community, as well as bringing gay and lesbian rights to the attention of its kindred Humanist organisations.

**GALHA** plays a part in the campaign to combat prejudice and discrimination against lesbians and gay men and to achieve their complete legal equality with heterosexuals. It also takes up issues of concern to Humanists. It lobbies MPs, the media and others; and makes submissions to government committees and responds to consultative documents concerning lesbian/gay and Humanist rights. It takes part in demonstrations and rallies concerning these rights.

**GALHA** is an integral part of the British Humanist movement and has close links with other organisations in it. These include the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, which have each consistently backed homosexual law reform and supported making the age of sexual consent for gay men equal to that for heterosexuals. **GALHA** is represented on the Humanist Forum (a liaison committee) and it co-sponsors Humanist functions.

**GALHA** membership is open to all lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who broadly subscribe to the Humanist outlook and are concerned about lesbian and gay rights. It is also open to any heterosexual Humanists wishing to offer their moral and financial support.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN! WIN!

Each edition, the best letter will be selected by the editorial committee. The writer will receive a prize - compliments of **GHQ!** So do write in, air your views, vent your spleen, or share something interesting with other readers.



### ONE LUCKY CORRESPONDENT

will receive a free DVD of the movie that premiered in the UK at the recent **GALHA** film festival, kindly donated by the producers. *'Heart of the Beholder'* tells the true story of how a young couple was ruined by a group of religious fundamentalists because they were the only video store owners who dared to carry Martin Scorsese's controversial film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

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# FROM THE EDITOR

Hello all and welcome to the first GHQ of 2007. First off, apologies for the lateness of this issue, but its been a busy year so far for a gay atheist campaigner like yours truly.

2007 got off to a frantic start, with renewed attacks on secularism and gay rights by the *forces of evil* (also known as the religious fundamentalist lobby).

In January, over 1000 Christian and Muslim (but mainly Christian) hardliners congregated outside the House of Lords to demand that gay people not be included in anti-discrimination legislation. Apparently the right to persecute us is a civil liberty. They didn't have much mainstream support, but the calvary cavalry were soon galloping towards the fray: the Catholic church, supported by Archbishop Rowan Williams of the Church of England, the Muslim Council of Britain and the Federation of Synagogues joined in calling for specific exemptions for religious adoption agencies from having to provide services for same-sex couples.

Then, in Nigeria, an odious bill to outlaw gay organisations gathered steam with the support of the Nigerian Church (led by hate-filled cleric, Archbishop Akinola, now practically a rival Archbishop of Canterbury), and by other Christian and Muslim leaders.

The absurdly and obscenely-titled "equalities minister" Ruth Kelly has been at the centre of more storms as the government plows ahead with its plan to increase faith schools – even being prepared to allow further exemptions from equal opportunities for these schools – and as she suffered yet another crisis of conscience when her co-religionists wanted exemptions from complying with the new Sexual Orientations Regulations. A prayerful Tony Blair hummed and hahed not knowing whether to put his foot down or in his mouth.

And then the Muslim Council of Britain released a long diatribe on how to "integrate" Muslim pupils into UK schools – the plan included gender segregation and the inclusion of "Muslim perspectives" in sex education classes – especially those dealing with homosexuality, of course.

But it's not all heavy going this time – we hope you enjoy our cover feature on gay and secular themes in Science Fiction.

"Read all about it" as they say...

**PS:** As GHQ editor, I appeared on a discussion programme – Little Atoms (a show about Science, Rationalism, Humanism and the Left) – hosted by former deputy editor of New Humanist, Pdraig Reidy, and Richard Sanderson. Catch it here: [www.littleatoms.com](http://www.littleatoms.com)

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**SUFFER THE CHILDREN**  
Organisers cynically put their kids at the front of the barricades.

# Festival of Blight

On January 9, fundamentalist Christians and Muslims protested outside the House of Lords in London against the inclusion of gays and lesbians in anti-discrimination legislation for the provision of goods and services. Brett Lock braved the mass hysteria to find out what was getting them so revved up...

The first thing I noticed as I approached the gathering masses that gathered on the laws outside the House of Lords were the children. Of course, I am fully aware how this opening statement would sound to the paranoid bigots who assembled, bathed in the light of Jesus – well, at least in the neon glow of their battery-operated ‘Jesus’ signs (see right). Placards read “don’t corrupt our children” and as if to drive the point home, they paraded the little dears for the media to see, like some sort of emotional cannon fodder. I suspect many of those teens and pre-teens will be profoundly embarrassed in later life when their free-thinking gene kicks in.

I made my way down from the BBC studios across the road, where I’d bumped into Keith Portious Wood, executive director of the National Secular Society, who had also been doing wall-to-wall interviews and debates with the fundies all day. Keith and I compared notes, and what became clear was that - despite clear answers having been given in the Lords, to

the scare-mongering ‘objections’ to the Equality Bill’s inclusion of gays and lesbians – the evangelicals persisted with their outright lies about the effects of including gay people in equality legislation.

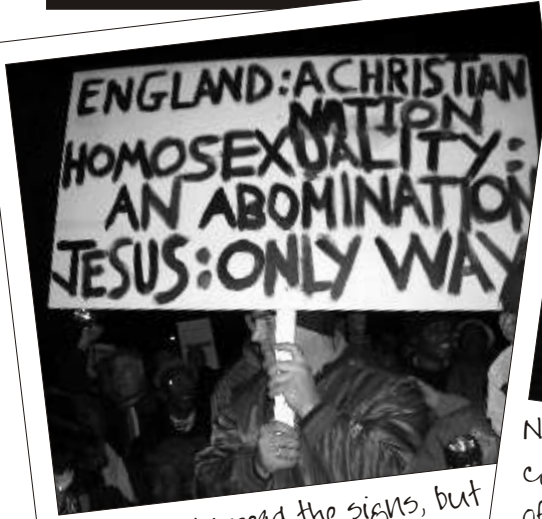
The Welsh vicar I had debated on Radio Wales just minutes before sounded downright confused - a common effect of having to substitute bluster for facts.

Outside, over a 1000 Christians sang hymns and attempted some chants, cheered by the manic Rev George Hargreaves, dressed, inexplicably, in an orange overall and strutting along the front line like Napoleon. I chatted to some of the counter-protestors and took some photos for my photo diary on the next page.



The Power of Jesus – in 4 AAA batteries: Brett Lock snaps one of the more absurd weapons on the evangelical arsenal. Does it give good reception?

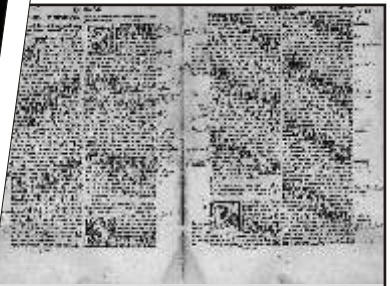




Yeah, we can read the signs, but it's still not making any sense!



No gathering of loonies would be complete without Stephen Green (left) of 'Christian Voice' turning up.



### The book of Levity

Unsurprisingly, the wittiest and most sensible placards were held by the small group of counter-protestors...

### Prawn-eating hypocrites!

Leviticus 11:12

"Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you."

### Cashmere with those trousers?

### I don't think so!

Leviticus 19:19

"Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee."



"Don't Corrupt Us" says the poster with two children's faces — the slur of gays = paedophiles persists, despite priests being the main culprits!



"Are you fighting for Jesus?"  
"Sir! Yes sir!"



Rev George Hargreaves, resplendent in orange takes time out from pursuing the Gay Police Association to fire up his congregation of bigots.



A very agitated Dr Majid Katme of the Islamic Medical Association led the Muslim delegation.





# Terms of engagement

When he heard that a thousand Christian fundamentalists were descending on Westminster, **Robin Sivapalan** of the Alliance of Workers Liberty decided to pop down for a chat. The police thought otherwise...

The mobilisation of bigoted Christians outside Parliament, ostensibly to demand freedom, was a worrying one. I have a general perspective about the need to speak to people while there is still space to open dialogue, though I must say the whole scenario infuriated me, including the lack of queers there to come back at these bigots.

When I arrived there were a handful of counter-demonstration bodies so I don't think I could have cut a very threatening figure. I'd ask the Christians why they'd come, as my opening gambit. Some who were better briefed would say they were here for the freedom to practise their faith. I'd ask what's stopping them.

This little query was enough to elicit hysterical torrents of feeling. Not one spoke about the legislation. They had bigger fish to fry. They were there to stop their children being corrupted in school by people intent on telling them that it was alright for men to have sex with men. Bible this and bible that.

I'm in two minds, as a secularist, about feeling the need to counter bigots with their one book, but I did offer some small Christian tenets forth, like love, casting stones, the fact that Jesus according to the bible never uttered a word himself about gays. To no avail. I'd put to the many black people there the analogy of segregation in the provision of goods and services. They'd reply with some inane comment like, "I believe in Jesus, do you?". I'd ask whether they thought it was in any way Christian to be adding to the climate wherein gay children are the most at risk of any group in society to commit suicide. No answer.

Within seconds, the stonewalling would start, the hard face set in, and a steeliness in their eyes. The children were the only ones who seemed engrossed and interested. Many were probably eager to hear their no doubt oppressive parent figures queried on their stifling doctrine. The organisers went down the front line and would stop conversations and ask them to concentrate on their hymn singing. They'd had enough of me, and started acting provoked. A woman who called herself a nun, with gaudy red beads and picture frame of Jesus hanging from her stubby neck, came over and thanked the children for doing Jesus's work, he'd be very proud of them. I said I think Jesus, if he were alive, would be very angry with their parents. And I told the parents they were not Christians but bigots.

Soon I had police around me, asking me to stop harassing the children. I said that this was a public demonstration, in public, to engage with the public. And I was. And I wasn't calling the children bigots as the 'nun' had reported to a wantonly credulous police. I tried to carry on the conversations, but the police insisted that I represented a threat to public order. I was like, "I'm peaceable, they're apparently Christians, so you don't need to worry mate. They find you offensive. I find them offensive and we have no right to not be offended, policeman." Within minutes I was being physically bundled by about ten officers down the street, to be placed among the couple of dozen gays and Christians milling about with small banners and a single rainbow flag.

Before walking down to Westminster, to prepare myself, I'd sat outside a cafe re-reading a little pamphlet called *Radical Chains* by Janine Boote that I'd stuffed in my bag that morning. The opening paragraphs give the story of the sparking of the Stonewall riots. There are few things that provoke spontaneous tears in me, but when the memory dulls of the story and it's brought to mind again, well told, I can't help but feel a surge of affection and pride and solidarity for those brave queer predecessors of ours. I've never felt, perhaps as a previously very fat Asian boy, very much part of the gay 'culture', one that previously psychologically tyrannised me as much as the homophobes. I often feel an immense contempt for queer brothers, less so for our sisters. Outside this cafe, a young skinny camp gay boy sat down and we talked about a lot of things. He couldn't come, but he later sent me a link to some gay website about the demo, but there's still a gulf between what he represents at the moment and what I do. These are strange days to be gay or indeed alive, where thousands will march come pride season, many with no broader life view as a queer than the freedom to parade. Which is a freedom that needs defending. However, that liberation, in itself, for mainly wealthy and white gay men is a far cry from the events surrounding stonewall that launched our recent history. It's worth looking at, and the class and race lessons learnt. I really think we're about to need every bit of strength and solidarity and ideas for real freedom that might prepare us for the struggles ahead.





# Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights

*Editor, **Brett Lock**, went along to the Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights conference and brushed shoulders with activists from all over Britain. He filed this report.*

Two hundred and fifty people and over fifty organisations turned out to support the Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights conference organised by the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement on February 17. The Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association and the British Humanist Association were among the dozens of secular organisations – including the Gay Police Association, OutRage! and the major trade unions – who turned out to support the conference. The National Secular Society sent a message to delegates (see overleaf).

I was very pleased that several speakers – both from the podium and from the floor – identified themselves as atheists and humanists. One of GALHA's vice presidents, Darren Johnson, participated in the panel discussion after the keynote addresses by Lord (Chris) Smith and others.

Frequent contributor to GHQ, Ali Hilli, the gay Iraqi activist, gave a moving and chilling speech, detailing the rise in religious extremism in Iraq – a story we've been giving ongoing coverage to in this magazine. Ali's speech is included later in this report.

One of the more controversial speakers was Rev Malcolm Duncan from the evangelical think-tank Faithworks. While not exactly a friend to the LGBT community, his organisation has at least criticised those religious organisations who are openly hostile and spiteful – particularly those opposed to the inclusion of gays and lesbians in the Equality Act. Duncan did question whether it was constructive to 'name-and-shame' religious homophobes (as in the conference graphic) and saw this as a barrier to "dialogue".

However, the LGCM's Rev Richard Kirker is unmoved by this objection. He says: "I think it is reasonable, in the majority of cases, to leave it to those who are on the direct receiving end of Church inspired and sanctioned homophobia to determine what images and wording are appropriate to draw attention to its pernicious consequences."

It is this fighting talk and refusal to compromise or be an apologist either for religious homophobia or equivocation on lesbian and gay rights that makes groups like the LGCM such an interesting ally in the fight against religion-inspired antigay bigotry (which, let's face it, is 99% of it).

One group notable for its absence was the gay Muslim group Imaan. A few days before the conference, their chair Farzana gave an interview to Gay.com news explaining that her group would not participate because groups like OutRage!, GALHA and LGCM "insult Islam", and they were involved. Of course, at GALHA, we're quite open about not thinking very much of Islam (or Christianity, for that matter), but LGCM's "insult" was hosting Irshad Manji, who is (gasp!) a gay Muslim. But a little to open and feisty for Imaan.

The wide range of workshops generally got good feedback, and I think overall the conference was a good starting point to build valuable alliances in the fight ahead. For the closing statement and podcasts of the main speeches, see [www.lgcm.org.uk/fhconference](http://www.lgcm.org.uk/fhconference).

## GALHA/BHA Workshop

**Countering the religious lobby in Westminster and Whitehall**

**GALHA committee member and Education Officer for the British Humanist Association Andrew Copson facilitated a workshop for the Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights conference.**

The title of the workshop was "Countering the religious lobby in Westminster and Whitehall" and it proceeded on the basis that: "Religious groups have been stepping up the pressure recently in many areas, lobbying to keep control of faith schools, for exemptions from equality law and for more weight to be given to their views across the board in issues of social and ethical issues. This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that Government itself is seeking to give a greater role to religious groups in policy making and the delivery of public services. Why is the Government so keen to give this role to religious groups? What are they demanding in return, and how can we lobby against them?"

**Andrew explains the key outcomes of the workshop:**

*We need to be able to articulate a positive case for gay and lesbian rights which builds on the fact that human rights gives only a qualified right to manifest religious beliefs - it is qualified because a manifestation cannot be to the detriment of someone else's rights and freedoms.*

*We need to be prepared to do this and recognise that the same debate will play itself out again and again in the coming years. There will be progress made in some area and then there will be a religious reaction. We need to know in advance what our view and response will be. Because the case we articulate for greater equality will never change, it is perfectly possible for us to be prepared in advance.*

*The next big thing for us will be the Government Green Paper on a single law to bring together all equality measures. We need to push for the prohibiting of harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services; we need to push for a positive duty on public authorities to promote equality in the area of sexual orientation; we need to make the case for removing religious exemptions and rolling back the tide of religious claims for exceptionalism and privilege.*

*In this transcript of his speech to the Faith, Homophobia & Human Rights conference which received a standing ovation, Ali Hilli describes how the*

# Iraqi government sanctions anti-gay death squads

“ I speak on behalf of Iraqi LGBT – an underground network of LGBT activists that we have established inside Iraq.

Our members – and all Iraqi LGBTs – are at daily risk of execution by the Shia death squads of the Badr and Sadr militias.

Members of these militias have infiltrated the Iraqi police and are abusing their police authority to pursue a plan to eliminate all homosexuals in Iraq.

This is happening with the collusion of key ministers in the Iraqi government.

The Badr and Sadr militias are the armed wings of the two main Shia parties that control the government of Iraq.

These governing parties – particularly the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq – are complicit in the widespread execution of Iraqi LGBTs.

What is happening today in Iraq is one of the most organized and systematic sexual cleansings in the history of the world.

Attacks have escalated into unprecedented levels of homophobic violence, including targeted assassinations.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) has recently, for the first time, confirmed that there are organised campaigns to kill gays in Iraq. These killings are taking place on the order of Iraq’s Shia leaders.

The UNAMI Human Rights Office recently reported that it was “alerted to the existence of religious courts, supervised by clerics, where alleged homosexuals would be ‘tried’, ‘sentenced’ to death, and then executed.”

One of the self-appointed religious judges in Sadr City believes that homosexuality is on the wane in Iraq. “Most [gays] have been killed and others have fled,” he said, insisting that the religious courts have “a lot to be proud of. We now represent a society that asked us to protect it not only from thieves but also from these [bad] deeds [same-sex relationships].”

Iraq’s government strongly criticized the UNAMI report on human rights abuses; condemning it for discussing issues that are considered taboo in Iraqi society, such as homosexuality, and the systematic murder of LGBTs.

“There was information in the report that we cannot accept here in Iraq. The



report, for example, spoke about the phenomenon of homosexuality and giving them their rights,” said Mr al-Dabbagh, a spokesperson for the Iraqi regime. “Such statements are not suitable to the Iraqi society. This is rejected. They (the UN) should respect the values and traditions here in Iraq.”

I will give you just one example of the homophobic terror Iraqi LGBTs are facing.

Five activists in Baghdad were discovered in a safe house and abducted at gunpoint on 9 November last year. Nothing has been heard of them since then. It is feared that death squads operating within the Iraqi police may have murdered them.

The kidnapped men all were members of our group Iraqi LGBT.

For the previous few months these activists had been documenting the killing of lesbians and gays, and relaying details of homophobic executions to our office in London. I have no doubt that they were targeted – not just because they were gay – but also to stop them exposing to the outside world the anti-gay pogrom that is happening in Iraq today.

The Iranian Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who is the world leader of Shia

Muslims, clearly states that gays and lesbians should be executed.

This gives direct religious sanction to the murder of LGBTs by the Badr and Sadr death squads. Sistani is giving the killers divine authority.

In spite of the world unity against the unlawful war on Iraq, the United States and its allies, including the government of the United Kingdom, chose to go ahead with the invasion of Iraq and cause the deaths of so many innocent lives.

The everyday loss of innocent lives in Iraq does not seem to matter to the western media today, especially when the victims are minorities like LGBTs.

The urgency now is to protect LGBT people in Iraq. We need action by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and by other international aid agencies and human right organisations.

The UNHCR is failing to support Iraqi LGBTs who have fled to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. It should be providing them with shelter and subsistence. It should be giving them travel documents, so they can seek refuge in safe western countries. So far, this is not happening.

The West, which caused much the current chaos in Iraq, should be giving refuge to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Iraqis. Right now, the US and Britain are turning down asylum claims by Iraqi LGBTs.

We need funding to enable our activists inside Iraq to continue to document the killings, acquire more safe houses, and to assist LGBTs to escape to neighbouring countries.

We are working closely with OutRage!. Please send a donation payable to OutRage!, with a cover note stating that it is “For Iraqi LGBT”.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Tatchell and OutRage! for all the help that they have provided Iraqi LGBT so far.

Finally, we Iraqi LGBTs will not allow ourselves to exterminated liked rats. We are determined to fight for our rights in the new Iraq. With your help, we can defy the religious fundamentalists and win our place in a free and democratic nation.



# Secularism holds the key to justice for all

*In this written message to the conference, National Secular Society President Terry Sanderson describes how secularism is to everyone's advantage, whether they have a faith or not.*

Secularism is a much-misunderstood concept. Conservative religious leaders try to characterise it as "anti-religious", and as the enemy of faith. There is nothing people on the right of the religious spectrum like better than to sow the seeds of doubt about secularism - conflating it with atheism and anti-clericalism.

But secularism is not synonymous with atheism. Indeed, there are many people of faith who are secularists, who recognise that keeping organised religion out of the workings of the state is to their advantage as well as to everyone else's.

We need only look at the places where one religion has gained state power, mainly in the Islamic world, to see what happens. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, where a particular strain of Islam has taken over the functions of the state, Christianity is not only banned, but it is actively suppressed. And so is every other faith that does not tally with the Wahhabist view of Islam. In Pakistan, Christians live in fear of their lives as Islamists become more politically influential. Christians, in their turn, have practised similar oppressions against other faiths. The persecution of the Jews has been a sad and recurrent feature of Christian history.

And now, a cruel and revolting sectarian war rages in Iraq, as religious factions fight for supremacy.

A democratic society with a secular constitution would offer safeguards against this (as in France, America, India, Turkey and many other nations). In separating the functions of church and state, there is a wall that prevents any religion, sect or denomination making a bid for power that will disadvantage other religions and those who do not believe.

We recognise that in all the countries mentioned above there are challenges to secularism. In the USA, the evangelical Right has made large inroads into secularism by undermining the constitution that prevents them from legally assuming power as an established religion. They have great influence at the moment, but if the people of America decide that they value their freedom from religion as much as their freedom of religion, the people who support such extreme religious views can be voted out of power.

In India, Hindu nationalists constantly try to take control. In Turkey, Islamists are putting great efforts into overturning Ataturk's secular reforms. But while the constitutions of these nations hold, religious fanatics cannot take the reins of power. And although minority religions in both the last mentioned countries suffer at the hands of rival religious groups, those groups cannot carry out their persecution with legal sanction.

A secular democracy offers protection to all from the prejudices and irrationality of religion. We have seen recently in Britain how religious groups still feel that they have a right to special treatment by the state. The Catholic Church has demanded exemptions too, even threatening to bring out voters against the Government, but carefully not mentioning mass attendance is little over

**Religious groups should become simply interest groups that can lobby and argue for their agenda in the way that every other pressure group can.**

half what it was in 1980. Both Anglicans and Catholics have shamelessly threatened to withdraw from their own charitable work if they do not get their way. So far, they have been refused the special privileges they have demanded. They were refused them because the vast majority of those in our Government recognise that such religious influence in the workings of the legislature is undesirable and eventually leads to injustice. This is a secularist position.

England has an established church, but the debate is now open about whether such an arrangement is any longer sustainable. Less than 3% of the population worship at the Church of England on an average Sunday, and this is now a multi-faith country, with other faiths making bids for a share of the cake.

The National Secular Society campaigns for the disestablishment of the Church of England, not because we feel it is in any way

especially malign or repressive (in its modern form, at least), but because while it enjoys the privilege of establishment, it has special access to our law-making process, partly through the 26 bishops who have the right to sit in the House of Lords. Britain is the only western democracy affording such a privilege. The Church also benefits from being reimbursed for all the running expenses of the quarter of our education system that is under its control. There are significant other financial privileges too. Eventually, other religions that are growing (as the CofE shrinks) will want to enjoy those same privileges, and the stage will be set for religious rivalries to be played out in our public life, while the non-religious look on, increasingly disenfranchised.

The only way to avoid this is to ensure that no religion, sect or denomination can be established by law, that all religions are treated equally, that none of them have special access to the workings of the state, and that those people who do not believe are not disadvantaged relative to those who do.

In this way not only do we protect smaller religious groups from being disadvantaged by their larger and more powerful brethren, we also protect the rights of other minorities from attacks from the more irrational elements of religion.

Religious groups should become simply interest groups that can lobby and argue for their agenda in the way that every other pressure group can. In a democracy, if they make a convincing argument, they will be listened to. If they don't, they will be disregarded. What they will not be able to do is impose their will by the mere fact that they are religious groups. That special status that religion has enjoyed throughout history is rapidly becoming an anachronism. It is time for change.

The desire of some religious groups to retard gay progress and to rob gay people of their human rights and dignity would no longer be possible without democratic approval under a secular democracy.

Secularism is to all our advantage. But gay people - and every other minority group in Britain - would especially gain protection from religious power-seeking and enjoy the security of knowing that their rights cannot be taken from them simply on the grounds of religious prejudice.



## Google blogger says “Kill Battyman”

In February, a lynch mob of over 200 people gathered outside a pharmacy in Kingston, Jamaica. Their target: a group of three apparently gay men inside the shop. They demanded that the men be handed over to them for, at best a severe beating, or - more likely - extra-judicial execution. This is not uncommon on the notoriously homophobic island.

A fourth man, Gareth Williams, a leader of the Jamaican gay rights group JFLAG tried to intervene but became a target himself. It was a brave move on his part since his predecessor, Brian Williamson, was violently murdered, and his colleague, AIDS activist Steve Harvey was abducted and shot just over a year ago.

Besides the well-known glorification of these attacks on lesbian and gay Jamaicans by Buju Banton and other dancehall artists, a blog inciting the murder of gay people – killbattyman – is being hosted by Google's blog service, Blogspot.

The photo above is one in a series of photos of this incident on this blog, posted under the charming heading of “Bring out the Gay!!!”. They also published a video of a Jamaican TV news report about the incident. At one point, a viewer in the background can be heard cackling with laughter as the violence unfolds on screen.

This is not a free speech issue. Incitement to murder shuts down the very exchange of ideas that free speech seeks to promote. It is illegal, and it doesn't come much clearer than the name of the blog: “Kill Batty Man” (gays).

In the light of ongoing violent attacks against Jamaica's gay community, why is Google allowing its services to be used to incite murder by hosting this hate-site?

Please consider writing to the Corporate Communications office in the UK, requesting that they take killbattyman.blogspot.com offline:

**Laura Ainsworth**  
**Corporate Communications**  
**+44 (0) 20 7031 3049**  
**ainsworth@google.com**

As a footnote, the men were beaten by the police during the rescue and Gareth Williams was hospitalised. On the plus side, a police beating was better than a mob lynching. So there's some progress.

**STOP PRESS:** Following calls from a journalist at Pink News, Google have added a “offensive content” warning to the blog. This is not adequate. Those who get off on homophobic violence are not likely to be “offended”. The site must be taken down. Keep up the pressure.

## A Pink Anniversary

In Brighton at 8am on the 21st December 2005, Gino Meriano and his partner Mike Ullet made history as one of the first couple in the England to enter into a Civil Partnership: a great way of expressing his campaign for equal rights and his very own commitment, says Gino.

A year later, the couple chose to celebrate their first anniversary in a dramatic way – by presenting a petition to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street calling for the resignation of Ruth Kelly.

“I want her resignation with immediate effect. There has been a delay in introducing new protections for gay and lesbian couples caused by Ruth Kelly. That is completely unacceptable. The delay is because of her religious beliefs,” he explained, noting that religious groups campaigning “to allow their prejudice against us to be exempted from the law” had the ear of Kelly, a devout Catholic and member of Opus Dei.

Gino, a founder of Pink Weddings, a company providing wedding organising services to same-sex couples, says he has “had enough” of venues and suppliers refusing to work with gay couples.

The couple say they'd rather have spent their anniversary doing something more romantic than standing in the rain outside Downing Street, but they have no regrets: “We do not deserve, nor should we accept, this attempt to settle for ‘lazy equality’. We must stand up and speak out,” he says.

See: [www.pinkweddings.biz](http://www.pinkweddings.biz)



## Desmond Tutu speaks out

“I am deeply disturbed that in the face of some of the most horrendous problems facing Africa, we concentrate on ‘what do I do in bed with whom’. For one to penalize someone for their sexual orientation is the same as penalizing someone for something they can do nothing about, like ethnicity or race. I cannot imagine persecuting a minority group which is already being persecuted.”



PHOTO: HAROLD GESS

PHOTO: SCOTT NUNN





Live long and prosper

# Humanists in Space

*Science fiction has traditionally espoused humanist values. But, as **Brett Lock** discovers, religionists are infiltrating the genre and dumbing it down...*

In January 2007, the two academics at the University of British Columbia put out a call for papers for a book they were editing on the new science fiction series *Battlestar Galactica*, a modern remake (or 're-envisioning') of the classic 1970's TV series. One of the themes they invited contributors to explore was the presentation of religion, allusion to the *Book of Mormon* and the *Bible*, syncretism (whatever that means!), scriptural authority, and the role of religion in a secular state. It is sad that there is such scope for academic explorations of theology in the genre.

Science fiction has traditionally espoused humanist values. As Andrew Copson explains in his article over the page, *Star Trek* with its celebration of Vulcan logic matched with Human passion epitomised this. Writers like Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan were open Humanists. The UK's flagship SciFi programme – *Doctor Who* – flew, sometime literally, in the face of religion and had no trouble taking on board issues like the Big Bang and Evolution (which decades later would become an evangelical battleground).

However, another strain of TV programming challenged science fiction and provided a fertile environment for hard-coded religious messages: the 'paranormal'. Where once we had the

*Twilight Zone* and the *X-Files*, soon religion found a foot in the door and we were presented with essentially Judeo-Christian mythology dressed up as entertainment. *Touched By An Angel*, for example, where angels go undercover to help humans through various trials. *Joan of Arcadia* is another example. Joan sees God in various forms and s/he sends her off on various missions which are hard to understand, but ultimately are shown to have 'a purpose'. At least at the end of the first series, viewers were teased with the possibility that Joan was simply suffering from psychotic episodes. Tragically, in the second series, that idea was effectively trampled over as the 'religious' messages became more overt. Mercifully the series soon collapsed under its own spiritual weight.

But that hasn't stopped others having a go. A new show, *Ghost Whisperer*, launched a few weeks ago in which the lead character can communicate with the newly departed who have unresolved issues. Sounds a bit like *Dead Like Me*, another series that tried to be a funky version of *Touched By An Angel*.

As *Star Trek* was pitched as "a wagon train to the stars" (in other words, a Western in space) the original series of *Battlestar Galactica* was pitched as "Adam's Ark" or "bible stories in space",

thinly disguised by series creator Glen A Larson, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The lost – in space – tribes of humanity looking for a mythical Earth mirrors the ten tribes of Israel trying to regain the Holy Land.

Ironically, the new version of *Galactica* is overseen by Ron D Moore, a former executive producer of *Star Trek*. Moore's version has taken religion from being the basic borrowed framework and placed it centrestage. Foremost of the religious nuts is the president. In one episode, she subverts a rational strategic military plan because ancient religious texts tell her to go in search of a golden arrow. Suddenly priests and oracles are invited into her inner circle. Some say that the show is a reflection of post 9/11 America, so perhaps this is apt. Either way, it's infuriating.

Of course, all sorts of religious issues – monotheism v polytheism, destiny, reincarnation and the nature of the soul – are addressed. But to a humanist audience, it can be one big yawn! No sensible person needs to waste time on this gobbledygook when unpacking the philosophical implications of *Star Trek's* "Prime Directive" is more interesting, challenging and, above all, relevant to the modern world. Now if only someone would tell President Bush!



# Sagan betrayed

## Beware of Hollywood Christians bearing gifts

One of the most despicable distortions of an atheist text is the Robert Zemeckis film adaptation of Carl Sagan's novel **Contact**. This is what the reviewer for website 'Film Atheist' has to say...



"Eleanor, a driven scientist and skeptic, because her mommy and daddy are gone, finds a message from extraterrestrials with instructions on how to build a really big ball. She also discovers super-Christian and telescope groupie, Palmer Joss, and since he looks like Matthew McConaughey, she sleeps with him, but then ignores him because, you know...the daddy thing. Lots of people argue endlessly (really, it never stops) about how only God-types should get into the really big ball, but Eleanor is helped by a rich nut who floats around and is only in the movie to further the plot. Oh, there's a terrorist too, but that part is too silly to discuss. So, Eleanor must fight evil religious guys and her own lack of faith until she can reunite with Palmer Joss (I'm not kidding, his name is Palmer Joss) and realize that we're all religious, in our own way, so its OK to sleep with him, even if daddy is gone.

"What makes Contact so excruciating, so painfully unpleasant that it sends any alert film critic into spasms, gnawing at his own leg in hopes of escaping, is the insidiousness of it. Coming as it does from a book by atheist and scientist Carl Sagan, it pretends to be an intelligent look at the implications of extraterrestrial life. It's not. What it is is a love letter to religion. At least The Passion of the Christ makes no bones about what it is. It clearly states Jesus exists and he got the shit kicked out of him for you, so you better be grateful. Contact's message is much more dangerous and tries to hide under a false aura of intellectualism. The message: Science is a religion. Atheism is a religion. And of course, Christianity is a religion. It's all religion, so let's all worship together."

**Read the full *Film Atheist* review, and many other film reviews from an atheist/humanist perspective at: [www.filmatheist.com](http://www.filmatheist.com)**

# Whose Who?

In 1972, two of the most well-known writers of *Doctor Who*, Terrance Dicks and Malcolm Hulke, edited a book *The Making of Doctor Who*. It included an essay by a vicar reassuring readers that the television series was compatible with a religious outlook. That such reassurance was needed speaks volumes because, quite simply, like Jesus never mentioned gays, The Doctor never mentioned Jesus, or God, or gods. For a series about a time traveler who on more than one occasion traveled almost to the beginning of time, this was quite telling.

Throughout the run of the original series an unashamedly Darwinian outlook presented itself. When the fifth Doctor's companion Adric dies, it is while trying to save the Earth from a crashing space ship on a collision course. Little did poor Adric know, but the crashing space ship was the "meteor" destined to wipe out the dinosaurs.

Indeed, the Doctor's deadly enemies, The Daleks, are the result of one of their chief scientists accelerating their projected evolutionarily path, while the universe is known to be populated with races who'd achieved space flight millennia before humans first stood upright.

For the gay viewer, it was just as significant that, unlike Star Trek's Captain Kirk, the writers of Doctor Who never felt it necessary to contrive situations where the Doctor would display his testosterone around the galaxy. The Doctor was not only beyond heterosexuality, he in fact acknowledges that a two-sex species is by no means standard and that our conventional

sexuality and notion of family is just one of many possibilities. The Doctor loved people for their humanity. When the fifth Doctor eventually dies, his last words are the name of his long-deceased (male) companion, Adric. This is not to suggest there was anything untoward between them – The Doctor never thought of his companions in a sexual way, including the buxom ones drafted in by the producers to decorate the Tardis.

In a sense, it is quite appropriate then that the person drafted in to steward the rebirth of the franchise is Russell T Davies, creator of the controversial drama *Queer As Folk* – and a gay atheist.

Davies's version does not have to tiptoe around the sensibilities of clergymen the way the show had to in the 60s and 70s.

In his series, it is suggested (when it is mentioned at all) that religion is a kind of manic delusion at worst, or at best a primitive stage in human development. Subjects like life and death are treated in a matter-of-fact way. From the Doctor, we learn that life is "nature's way of keeping meat fresh" and that after death there is "only blackness". The Doctor is a kind of intergalactic Epicurus, explaining that life and all existence is simply the organization of matter. Though an alien (from the planet Gallifrey), he is the ultimate Humanist. He marvels not only at human beings' curiosity and our joy in existence, but our ability to adapt and to cope.

"The human race just keeps on going, keeps on changing; life will out! HA!" he exclaims!

**The Doctor is a kind of intergalactic Epicurus, explaining that life and all existence is simply the organization of matter**



# I Star Trek

*On the 20th Anniversary of The Next Generation, Andrew Copson discusses why Star Trek is still essential viewing for the humanist futurist.*

Amid our apocalyptic fears of climate change and culture wars, avian flu and nuclear proliferation, what could be more welcome than the hopeful vision of the future imagined by one of the twentieth century's most influential humanists, the American Gene Roddenberry. All humanists should be happy to celebrate this year, therefore, as the twentieth anniversary of Star Trek: The Next Generation (2006 was the fortieth anniversary of Star Trek itself so ardent Trekkers have had quite a time of late). Gene Roddenberry is not the only prominent science fiction or fantasy creator who preferred a humanist view to a religious one – Philip Pullman, Terry Pratchett, Arthur C Clarke are all supporters of humanism in Britain today – but the universe created by Roddenberry has to be that which is most expressive of humanist ideals.

It is not just that the mankind of Star Trek has united around shared values and international cooperation, come together in common endeavour to reach the stars and happily abandoned religion on the way (it's a counsellor, not a chaplain that the Enterprise crew turn to when in need of guidance). Roddenberry's humanity explore a universe that is full of beauty, wonder and awe for them but ultimately is a natural thing which the adventurous can know and understand. And all the phenomena they encounter are investigated rationally and, though they may seem inexplicable, are understood in the end as susceptible to naturalistic explanations.

Any culture's ships have always been a microcosm of the culture itself (think of the democratic Athenian trireme or the rank-obsessed British ship of the line) and the Enterprise is no exception – a Starfleet crew values cooperation and liberality, they hold to the equality of persons and the dignity of life; though rank is respected, the views of all are given fair airing. When the crew encounter new peoples there is an assumption of peace, but they defend themselves robustly when attacked (no pagan bellicosity but not pointless turning of the other cheek here either), and though the men and women of this future cultivate an internal life through meditation or the arts, they accept reason and science as the means by which they can know the universe they explore.

But not too much! The charge (so often made by religious critics) that a humanist universe would be a coldly rational one, with humanity in thrall to unfeeling science receives a blow in Roddenberry's world. What is the story of Spock other than a grand tale of one person's discovery that, though science and logic may uncover truth, it is our relationships with others and the meaning that we make for ourselves that give life its purpose?

If some of the recent series in the Star Trek franchise have lost a little of their humanist spirit, it is the darkness of our times – it is not a progressive future we allow ourselves to envisage today. But if we have lost that humanist, expansive vision which infused Roddenberry's utopia, let's celebrate this year's Star Trek anniversary by watching again his inspiring early works and remember it.

Read David Alexander's 1991 interview with Gene Roddenberry at <http://www.philosophysphere.com/humanist.html>



## Baldly going where no man has gone before

**When basketball star Tim Hardaway made some homophobic statements recently, Star Trek's Sulu, George Takei responded with a tongue-in-cheek public service announcement:**

Hello. I'm George Takei. Recently, I've been troubled to hear comments made by former NBA All-Star Tim Hardaway, who said: "I hate gay people. Let it be known that I don't like gay people. I'm homophobic."

As a gay man and a human being, I was shocked and saddened. But, I want you to know, Tim, on behalf of gay people everywhere, that, despite your ugly words, we don't hate you. As a matter of fact, we like you.

We like you very much.

*Slow, soulful R&B music starts. Takei is superimposed in front of a picture of Hardaway.*

We particularly like your large, powerful calves...

*He strokes Hardaway's leg. His hand drifts up to Hardaway's crotch. Takei bounces his eyebrows lasciviously. He starts to stroke Hardaway's head.*

...your smooth, chocolatey head, glazed in man-sweat.

I'll keep my eyes on you. And let it be known: One day, when you least expect it... I will have sex with you!

*Takei laughs maniacally.*

*Cut away to a logo, which reads: "I love sweaty basketball players."*



# Should Free Speech should be moderated by respect for Religion?

*Emphatically 'no', says Barbara Smoker, nor for any other abstract noun...*

On May 25 last year I took part in the Oxford University Union Debate, for which the motion was that *“Free Speech should be moderated by respect for Religion”*. Needless to say, I spoke for the opposition.

The chief speaker on my side was Flemming Rose, the Danish editor who published the controversial Mohammed cartoons. As there is a seven-figure bounty on his head, the security arrangements for the debate were heavy, everyone being searched on the way in.

In the days when, as president of the National Secular Society, I used to take part in a lot of university debates, in the 1970s to '90s, I was almost invariably on the losing side when it came to the vote, but this time we won by a good margin – 129 to 59.

Had the word “religion” in the motion been replaced by any other abstract noun, we would have won by 188 to nil. Suppose the word was “science”. The motion would then have read “Free Speech should be moderated by respect for Science”, and no reasonable person would vote for that – least of all a genuine scientist.

So why is religion given its unique privileged status? After thousands of years, it has become the norm, so no one ever thinks it needs justifying.

Should we respect religious faith? Certainly not. Well, should we respect religious people? Yes, as long as they are not antisocial and don't aim to impose their religious views on others.

But even if we respect them as good-living people, we cannot respect their beliefs. Faith, which means firm belief in the absence of evidence, betrays human intelligence, undermines science-based knowledge, and compromises ordinary morality. If there were objective evidence for its doctrines, it would no longer be faith: it would be knowledge.



Scepticism is of paramount importance, because it is the gateway to knowledge; but unless the sceptical ideas are freely argued over, they cannot be assessed, nor can the ensuing knowledge spread through society.

And free speech must include the right to laugh at absurd ideas. Indeed, ridicule – including satirical cartoons, which have recently provoked terrorism – has always been an important element of the free exchange of ideas on everything, not least religion. Without that free exchange there can be no advance in knowledge and no social progress.

Muslims, we are told, are sensitive, and are really hurt when their religion is joked about. Don't they credit their supposed creator god with any sense of humour? Didn't he actually invent laughter? And is he too weak to withstand a joke without some humourless cleric rushing to his defence? Or is their own faith so weak that they fear its contamination? Let them heed the old playground retort: “Sticks and

stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

Claiming to be ultra-sensitive and really hurt by mere words or pictures is, of course, a way of gaining privilege. Everyone else has to speak softly so as not to hurt you.

Incidentally, the violence provoked by the Danish cartoons was deliberately stirred up by Islamic extremists publishing exaggerated versions of them in Muslim countries up to four months after the originals were published.

I have discussed it with several moderate Muslims, and while they roundly condemned the violent reprisals, they generally added “But people ought not to insult religion”. Why not?

No-one would denounce the ridiculing of political views, which are open to free debate. In fact, true respect for religion would allow it to be opened up in the same way, relying on the truth emerging. But at present it is shielded from honest scrutiny. This suggests that the faithful realise it could not stand up to it.

Though we must take care to avoid a native backlash against the mostly peaceable British Muslim community, succeeding governments have carried the exonerating of Muslim villains too far in the past. For instance, as long ago as 1989, when, even on BBC television, imams were offering bribes for the murder of Salman Rushdie, they were never charged with incitement to murder.

The word “appeasement” is rarely used except in the context of Neville Chamberlain's deal with Hitler in 1938, but what about the present appeasement of Muslims in Britain?

Of course the law must protect people – in fact, that is basically what the law is all about – and we have plenty of general laws for the protection of people, without special



laws for the protection of ideas of a particular kind.

It is obviously impossible to genuinely respect an ideology that our reason rejects as superstition – let alone dangerous superstition; so what the precept to respect religion actually means is that we should pretend to respect it, for the sake of political correctness. At the very least, then, as I pointed out in the debate, the motion called for hypocrisy. So the final majority vote was for honesty, not hypocrisy.

But hypocrisy is not the worst of it.

When the ideologies we pretend to respect indoctrinate children, some of whom may even grow up to be suicide bombers because of it, hypocrisy becomes complicity in the mental abuse of children, in the oppression of women, in the obstruction of social reforms, and even in incitement to terrorism.

We are told that Islam itself cannot be blamed for the terrorist attacks on New York, Madrid, and London, followed by widespread carnage in retaliation for the publication of a few innocuous drawings. That is like saying that the horrors of the Inquisition had nothing to do with Christianity.

In the gospels, Jesus consistently identifies righteousness with believing in him; and in the ages of faith the statement by Thomas Aquinas that “Unbelief is the greatest of sins” was incontrovertible. Hence the Inquisition, the Crusades, and the Christian burning of witches, heretics, and Jews – the flames being fanned by Christian faith.

This use of torture was not a case of bad

people perverting a good religion; the persecution of sceptics follows logically from the Christian correlation of faith with salvation, not to mention the scary notion that God could punish the whole of society for the disbelief of a few.

Mohammed followed on from Jesus, and the Koran contains even more manic denunciations of disbelief than the New Testament. Moreover, Islam has failed to

moderate its cruel practices to the extent that mainstream Christianity has done in the past couple of centuries.

The Taliban, Al-Qa’eda, and the Badr Corps, are certainly extremist, but they are orthodox deriving logically from the

Koran, which denigrates women and tells believers to wage jihad against heretics and infidels. Moderate Muslims often try to explain away this tyranny and violence as misinterpretation of the Koran. If that is so, why did Allah, or his Prophet, lapse into such ambiguity?

Religion cannot, in all conscience, be intellectually respected if honesty is to prevail over hypocrisy – and giving it false respect would not just be obsequious and dishonest: it could actually allow superstitions of the Dark Ages to triumph, destroying the whole range of social and individual freedoms courageously won over the past few centuries.

So, for the sake of liberty and equality as well as truth, we must resist the indefensible furtherance of hypocritical respect. Far from our agreeing to moderate free speech in favour of respect for religion, we should moderate respect for religion in favour of free speech.

**Religion cannot, in all conscience, be intellectually respected if honesty is to prevail over hypocrisy**

## Muslim Council seeks to introduce ‘Islamic’ view on homosexuality into school curriculum

The Muslim Council of Britain released a 72 page document of what they dubbed “best practice” with “suggestions” on how Muslim pupils could better be integrated into British Schools.

The advice, if accepted by the government, which thankfully it was not, would have meant Muslim pupils would attend gender-segregated classrooms for certain subjects, be excused from showering after sports and games, and from taking some classes, like dancing (which they said encouraged ‘sexual’ thoughts) and art (if it required making three-dimensional sculptures, which is blasphemous idolatry).

The MCB text also noted that: “In public boys should always be covered between the navel and knee and girls should be covered except for their hands and faces.”

But most troubling, was the demand that sex education classes should include the Muslim perspective on homosexuality.

The guidance stated: “*In addressing issues such as sexual conduct and behaviour, abortion, contraception, sexual orientation, hygiene, forced marriages, drugs, child abuse and relationships between males and females, Islamic moral perspectives should be included and explored when teaching Muslim pupils. Such inclusion would make the subject more meaningful and relevant to preparing Muslim pupils for the responsibilities, moral challenges and risks that they may face in relationships during their life.*”

It also requested that outside agencies invited to the school to talk about sexual health matters should change their presentations to give “*appropriate consideration and reflection of Islamic perspectives, moral values and conduct with regard to Muslim pupils.*”

The government dismissed the MCB’s document, but we can expect the calls to increase in volume over time. If schools are not secularised, religious groups will demand more and more input into the curriculum. Out will go science and research-based information and in will come religious moralising masquerading as education. Introducing religious perspectives on gender and sexual orientation into the classroom would be as catastrophic for gay teens as giving consideration to Hendrik Verwoerd’s screeds on race relations would be for black kids.

sexuality, politics, humanism, atheism, liberalism, free thought

## Missed an issue?

If you’ve missed an issue of GHQ, don’t worry. Back issues can be ordered (while stocks last) from the GHQ website, or by post or email.

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### ADRIC

Played by gay actor, Matthew Waterhouse, Adric was many emerging young gay man's schoolboy crush.



### OUT IN ORBIT

Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry said that sexual orientation wouldn't matter in the future and promised to introduce a gay character on the show. Alas, he died before he could, but Russell T Davies has now given us the first gay alien in the BBC's Torchwood. "Captain Jack Harkness" is played by openly gay actor, John Barrowman.



### SCIENCE FICTION FAN

John Travolta took sci-fi so seriously he made it his religion. But a new photo in a US paparazzi mag has rekindled speculation about his sexuality.



### VEGAS IN SPACE

Possibly the worst sci-fi movie ever-made. Actually, possibly the worst movie ever made - full stop! The "plot"? three male space travelers who must become women in order to complete a secret mission on the all-female planet Clitoris. Some say it's a drag classic.



A pub landlord in the West Midlands thinks it's hilarious to name the faggot pie on his menu a "Barrymore" in reference to the gay TV personality. The 'joke' is extended when the 'faggots' are described on the menu as "swimming in gravy" – an obvious reference to the tragic drowning of a guest in Barrymore's pool. Not amusing!

Indian-born US Conservative pundit, Dinesh D'Souza, a former Reagan advisor (and fiancé to right-wing broadcaster Laura Ingraham - who refers to gays as 'sodomites') has a plan to end the animosity between the West and the Middle East. Apparently if Americans were more vocally opposed to gays, they'd earn the respect of the Muslim world!

The *Nacht der langen Messer* award for rank stupidity goes to a new forum for "Gay and Bisexual White Nationalists who vote for the British National Party" which has stared up on Yahoo! Groups. But their info page says that their enterprise "has no approval by the British National Party". Gee, do ya think!? Maybe the BNP will provide the pink triangles.





### SLASH FICTION

Slash fiction, a bizarre genre that really took off with the early 90s Internet boom, refers to a sexual or romantic relationship between two same-sex (originally only male) characters in fan fiction. Spock & Captain Kirk are firm favourites.

### GOD (aka YAWEH/ALLAH)

Sillier than Vegas in Space and even less available from quality retailers.



### GAY ROBOTS

In the past, only robots could be gay in sci-fi – on-screen anyway – and even they had to be in the closet

The Orkeny Islands blocked a civil partnership ceremony citing fears that it might feature “unsuitable music”. A dodgy claim, considering one half of the couple was Sir Peter Maxwell Davies - the master of the Queen’s Music. And yes, That’s Liz, not Freddie! Sir Peter blamed “religious fundamentalists”.

An Australia company is marketing a garment that looks like a cross between baggy pyjamas and an XXL superhero costume. Dubbed “the burqini” ( a bikini and a burqa – geddit?), the UV protected, chlorine resistant, quick drying wearable beach tent allows women to swim without making Allah angry.

A Tyneside church is to screen Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, with sing-along sheets and organ accompaniment. In 1979, Christians sought to have it banned. The Rev Adams told the BBC that the film pokes fun at “some of the stupidity and hypocrisies of people who profess religious faith”. Amen, vicar.



Most well-known science fiction writers were atheists or humanists. In our tribute to scifi edition, we remember their wisdom...



*“It was communion time, where you eat this wafer and are supposed to be eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood. My first impression was, ‘This is a bunch of cannibals...’ I guess from that time it was clear to me that religion was largely nonsense.”*

**Star Trek creator, Gene Roddenberry**



*“If they want to teach religion, they can teach it outside of science, and they can say that all of science is wicked and atheistic. But to force their way into science and to dictate what scientists must declare science to be destroys the meaning of all of science.”*

**Writer, Isaac Asimov**



*“Skeptical scrutiny is the means, in both science and religion, by which deep thoughts can be winnowed from deep nonsense.”*

**Writer, Carl Sagan**



*“It is not an exaggeration to say that religion is the most inflammatory enemy-labelling device in history. Who killed your father? Not the individuals you are about to kill in ‘revenge’. The culprits themselves have vanished over the border... You aim your vendetta at those who belong to the same religion as the original perpetrators.”*

**Novelist, Douglas Adams**



*“Reason shapes the future, but superstition infects the present.”*

**Novelist, Iain M Banks**

# Jewish opposition to gay equality “disgraceful”

*In my capacity as editor of Gay Humanist Quarterly, I was invited to write a comment piece for Totally Jewish on the issue of exemptions for religious groups from having to provide services to gay adoptive parents*

The Dutch Reformed Church in Apartheid South Africa spent a great deal of energy constructing theological arguments to justify racial segregation. For those who want to dust off their “No Black, No Jews, No Irish” signs and claim that putting them back in the window is a matter of religious conviction, not prejudice, the theological groundwork has already been done.

But UK law takes a different view. The Race Relations Act makes it illegal to discriminate against a person because they’re Jewish. The new Equality Act does the same. Few would argue this legislation isn’t needed. The Community Security Trust has released statistics on antisemitic incidents for 2006. The 594 incidents are a third more than the previous year. Anti-Jewish feeling is alive and well.

Given this, would Jewish people concede exemptions, based on “conscience”, from legislation that bans antisemitic discrimination? It’s hard to accept, but antisemites also have consciences. Should anti-Jewish discrimination be overlooked if the perpetrators claim it is a conscientious objection to Jews, not blind prejudice? If so,

all manner of far-right bigots would suddenly become very pious indeed.

Jewish people who support calls for exemptions to laws banning discrimination against gays and lesbians on grounds of “conscience” are disingenuous. They are the recipients of very legal protections they now seek to deny others.

A Libertarian argument would, at least, be consistent: Yes, let individuals decide whether or not they want to offer services to gay people. But the same opt out would have to apply to Jewish and black people. One hotelier might not like gays, another might not like Jews. Should they both be allowed to discriminate on grounds of “conscience”?

But, would those Jews calling for the right to discriminate against gays be willing to drop all equality legislation, including that which protects them? That would be the only logically and morally consistent position.

Certain Jewish leaders have swallowed the alarmist lies spread by evangelical Christians. They have expressed concern that synagogues will be forced to hold ‘gay marriages’. This is nonsense. Legislation expressly forbids places of worship being

used for same-sex civil partnership ceremonies. Significantly, Jewish adoption agencies do not wish to discriminate, even though the current law does not compel them to accept gay adoptive parents. As Norma Brier, of the Jewish agency Norwood, said to *Totally Jewish*, “[W]e do not discriminate against any group or part of the community. In adoption, as with all matters, we put the child at the forefront of our concern.” In other words, she is making it clear that the interests of the child is the only priority.

Have groups like The Federation of Synagogues campaigned against this existing practice? No. It seems that this is simply bandwagon jumping. Since the government is not requiring Jewish adoption agencies to change policy (if anything, it’s affirming their existing policy), the chief motivation of The Federation appears to be seizing an opportunity to have a pop at gay people. As Jews, who are on the receiving end of malicious prejudice and who are beneficiaries of anti-discrimination protection, this is a particularly disgraceful stance. They should be ashamed.



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**Jennifer Hudson**, winner on January 15th of the *Golden Globes* award for best supporting actress in a motion picture, undeniably sings up a storm. But her theistic beliefs led to stormy headlines in a Texas gay paper, *Dallas Voice*: “Dreamgirl Says, Gay Is a Sin.” Whether Hudson follows *Leviticus* and also objects to eating shellfish or wearing clothes made from blended fabrics is unclear – those are not problems, however, for her sister Dinah, who is gay.

Gay priests have been whispering about Monsignor **Georg Gänswein**, who has a doctorate of canon law from Munich University. Since 2003, he has been **Pope Benedict’s** private secretary, the person who decides who gets to see the boss and who does not. **Ingrid Stampa** does the domestic duties (aided by her girls, **Carmela, Loredana, Emanuela, and Christina**), but Gänswein is the Pope’s gatekeeper.

Italy’s TV host **Fabio Canino** is one who absolutely won’t get past. On the day the pope was voted in, Canino opened his show with a shot of pink smoke wafting from a chimney at the Vatican. On *Out.com*, Canino has said, “Everybody know he is gay, and his boyfriend is his private secretary.”

The popular TV host tells of having been invited by a cardinal for a recent lunch at the Vatican: “I walked in and I thought the person in front of me was a drag queen, not a cardinal.” “Hel-lo, sweetie!” Canino lisped, and he said that the prelate dished Vatican colleagues, referring to one black cardinal as “Naomi”, after **Naomi Campbell**. Well, that ends the old punch line, “Is the Pope Catholic?”

**Algernon Swinburne** abandoned Christianity before his 21st birthday. He had been brought up piously, but in Atalanta in Calydon (1865) he denounced “the supreme evil, God”, a phrase that disturbed Victorians in England as well as in the United States. A rebel and an atheist like **Percy Byshe Shelley**, Swinburne in his poetry glorified freethought and republicanism in *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871).

Search *philosopedia.org* and you’ll see what a handsome hunk he was before poor health became a problem.

For the last thirty years of his life, he was looked after by another gay poet, critic **Theodore Watts-Dunton**, a Rationalist who offended many by giving Swinburne the atheist a Christian burial despite Algernon’s will that directed there should be no religious ceremony.



# LETTER FROM AMERICA

Warren Allen Smith



Poet, Algernon Swinburne (1837–1909)

Biographers often overlook not only people’s religion or lack of religion but also omit their sexual history, annoyingly implying they were asexual. Not so, *The Alyson Almanac* (1989). In addition to lamenting that critics have largely neglected Swinburne, the book describes an occasion when Algernon was living alone with a monkey on the Isle of Wight. He met a young man, invited him home, and once there began making advances on the chap.

This isn’t unusual, of course, even on the Isle of Wight. But the monkey, overcome with jealousy, attacked the guest, who understandably ran for his life. Biography is intriguing, but this leaves one wondering not only whatever happened to the monkey but also what hanky-panky went on for three entire decades between Algernon and Theodore, his benefactor.

**Rupert Everett** told the press that he is sperm-free because he is taking pills for his alopecia (baldness), explaining that if he stops the pills he’ll lose his hair. In short, he prefers having hair to sperm. His, that is. In his just published autobiography, *Red Carpets and Other Banana Skins*, the person who in the mid-1970s was a male prostitute comes off as such a great writer that Manhattan gossip columnist **Michael Musto** complained in *The Village Voice*, “I realized the British actor doubles as a sparkling social arbiter and ultra-literate gossip reporter, and as such he’s clearly more astute an observer than even yours fucking truly! I absolute hate him!” Musto then raves lovingly about Everett’s spot-on portraits of **Madonna, Sharon Stone, Faye Dunaway** (a.k.a. Done Fadeaway), **Julia Roberts, Cameron Diaz**, and sexpot **Béatrice Dalle**, described by Everett, “Her kind of beauty was definitely pre-Botox, much deeper than the cash-and-carry bargains of today. Its origins were the gaslit barmaids of Manet and the Parisian demimonde between the wars. She was *jolie laide* pretty and ugly. If you pulled back her hair, her head was the shape of a woodland elf.” Now, that’s dog!

**Borat Sagdiyev**, the fictional Kazakh journalist, is so famous in New York City that only a numbnut would expect to get his autograph by waiting for him to exit the United Nations building. **Sacha Baron Cohen’s** financially successful movie, *Borat*, not only includes raw tea-bagging, sixty-nine, rimming, voyeurism, and bondage but also has him saying, “In my country, only time two men ride together in car is when they journey to the edge of town to make bang-bang in anoos.” Sacha and his girlfriend took a stretch limo when he won the 2007 *Golden Globe* award for being best actor in a motion picture.

How many uptight officials does it take to stop a sex act that’s not in the *Bible*? It recently took representatives of the health, police, and fire departments as well as the New York City Task Force and various lawyers to descend upon El Mirage, resulting in the East CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

An intense debate is raging with regard to the Republican Party's nominee to seek the presidency in 2008. It has an amusing twist in who is participating, and the positions of one of the candidates are downright un-conservative. I will provide some of the lines in this prodigious debate, and see if you can guess who the candidates are.

**Candidate A:** I feel that as a society and for me as an individual, it's incumbent on all of us to respect one another, regardless of our differences and beliefs, our differences in sexual orientation, in race and that America has always been a place, and should be a place, to welcome and tolerate people's differences.

**Candidate B:** [By legalizing gay marriage] here in Massachusetts, activist judges struck a blow to the foundation of civilization: the family. Every child deserves a mother and a father.

**Candidate A:** I think Bill Weld's fiscal conservatism, his focus on creating jobs and employment and his efforts to fight discrimination and assure civil rights for all is a model that I identify with and aspire to.

**Candidate B:** Our state is in danger of becoming the Las Vegas of gay marriage!

**Candidate A:** There's something to be said for having a Republican who supports civil rights in this broader context, including sexual orientation. When Ted Kennedy speaks on gay rights, he's seen as an extremist. When [I] speak on gay rights, [I am] seen as a centrist and a moderate.

**Candidate B:** If the citizens decide it in the privacy of a voting booth, they'll protect traditional marriage from homosexuals.

**Candidate A:** I believe that there will be change over time as the military establishment and the rank-and-file become more comfortable with the realities of sexual orientation in the military. I will support progress being made in that area as time progresses and the military and society becomes more accepting.

**Candidate B:** It's time to say no more to this activist agenda, this agenda that says anything goes, if it feels good do it!

**Candidate A:** If elected Governor of Massachusetts, I will not tolerate discrimination of any form in Massachusetts.

Well, Candidate B, if you cannot tell, is Massachusetts's Republican conservative former governor Mitt Romney. The only problem is... so is Candidate A.

Mitt Romney is an unlikely governor. The practicing Mormon son of former Michigan governor George Romney, Mitt has been highly successful financially – a former top honcho at Boston-based Bain Capital and, more recently, the saviour of the failing Olympic Games in Salt Lake City.



# STRONG STUFF

## Brian Miller

### If the mitt fits, wear it! The inscrutable Mitt Romney

He also had a failed Senatorial run against Ted Kennedy, liberal Democrat of Massachusetts, from which most of the quotations of "Candidate A" come from. Mitt has decided that, if he wants to be president (or at least the Republican candidate for President), he needs to embrace the GOP grass roots and that grass roots remains religious, right wing, and unapologetically homophobic.

Romney has mastered the Janus act better than any politician since Bill Clinton. In Massachusetts, just last year, he proudly proclaimed "gay pride day" with an official declaration on the governor's letterhead. However, at right-wing fund raising events in South Carolina, he seems almost apologetic of his status as the Massachusetts governor and a bit pointed about his state's perceived position as "the gays' place". He so regularly slammed his

own state, while traveling throughout the south, that many members of his own state party delegation publicly took him to task.

As he exited office late last year, Romney has hoped that the anti-gay stridency will overcome the fact that, as a Mormon, the evangelical Protestant constituencies of the Grand Old Party will be unlikely to endorse his "unsaved" candidacy. Initial reaction from the right wing of the party was promising but then some old enemies came home to roost.

Specifically, Brian Camenker, conservative crank from Massachusetts, had his revenge on the governor. Camenker gained nationwide recognition as a kook after being interviewed about gays by hit comedic "newscast" *The Daily Show*, in which a sputtering Camenker simultaneously claimed and denied that his interest in his wife was diminished by gay marriage. (A *YouTube* search for "Camenker Daily Show" provides this amusing clip for your consumption).

However, to local gay and lesbian people, his antics are well-known – from secretly wiretapping gay student association meetings (and illegally distributing the recordings) to claiming that pollution and criminal activity increase when gays get hitched – Camenker and his "Article 8 Alliance" are always good for a laugh or two.

It seems that Mr Camenker remembered the "old" Mitt Romney's stance on gays – and of course, since Mr Romney was unwilling to describe homosexual Americans as the scourge of humanity in 1994, that resentment festered for a while. Romney's failure to overturn Massachusetts's gay marriage laws further enraged Camenker, who did a little digging and slammed Romney's governorship in an article in a right-wing local paper.

The local gay press and other journalists did some digging of their own, creating the "Mitt Romney Files" as posted on Bay Windows's web site (the largest gay newspaper in New England).

As a result, the conservatives across the United States have learned that not only is Mr Romney different from them on religious grounds, but he also is surprisingly "flexible" when it comes to his stances on political issues of import to them and probably will say almost anything to get elected.

Mr Romney, of course, is outraged at these attacks on his integrity. How can a gay-bashing social conservative issue gay pride proclamations and claim to be "better" on gay issues than notoriously socially liberal Ted Kennedy? How can he



**STRONG STUFF continued...**

weather attacks from liberals for his anti-gay, control freak legislation and attacks from the right for his libertine 1990s positions? Attacks from every party – and every candidate within his own party – are possible, since he's taken every position on gay issues that can be taken in the past 12 years. Despite strong support from corporate scions including eBay CEO Meg

Whitman, Romney's campaign appears to be as hard-hitting as whipped cream.

Republicans referred to the grey John Kerry as a "flip flopper" for stating that he voted for a bill before he then voted against it. It would appear that the Mitt fits Mr Romney as well, and like it or not, he's going to have to wear it.

**Letter from America** [Continued from page 19]

Houston Street gay sex club's being shuttered... But when the 6th annual No Pants! Subway Ride on the #6 subway line occurred January 13th, fellow subway riders were amused because there's no law against wearing underwear.

In Toronto, the completely out and about filmmaker, **John Waters**, has been filming the TV show *Love You To Death*, in which he plays a **Vincent Price**-like "Groom Reaper", in which wedded bliss turns to one partner's killing the other. Changing the subject, he with the razor-thin moustache wondered where else but a funeral parlor could a necrophiliac find Paradise.

Pending the Stonewall Inn's favorably

getting a liquor license, the place made famous when a group of us rioted in June 1969 is scheduled to re-open in February.

The hot new play on Broadway is *Spring Awakening*, which is something like *Hair* or *Rent*. It features in an unembarrassed way the dark side of teenagers growing up, illustrating stories of abusive, uncomprehending parents, unimaginative teachers, and stupid clergy who don't communicate with kids in a meaningful way.

Based on a banned 1891 play, it depicts masturbation, rape, abortion, and suicide. One critic, John Heilpern, calls it "the best new musical I've seen in a generation". What a memorable portrayal of adolescent sexuality and yearning, so look for it to receive some major awards soon.

**ISLAMOPHOBIA-WATCH-WATCH**



**The story so far:** Professional offence-taker Bob Pitt set up Islamophobia-Watch in the wake of criticism of mad cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Only racists would object to the beheading of gays, you see. Secularists oppose Islam, Islam is a race, therefore secularists are racists... You're catching on, right? Even Muslims who criticise Islam or other Muslims are Islamophobic, and thus racists. Just ask Irshad Manji. So who has been 'listed' recently?

**February 21:** Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society. *Crime:* Pointing out that the Muslim Council of Britain "shouldn't try to force its religious agenda on children who may not want it."

**February 20:** Oh dear, Terry again. *Crime:* agreeing with Robert Kilroy Silk's comments on sexism in mosques. Also, Muslim Peer Lord Ahmed. *Crime:* saying he thinks the hijab is a mark of separation and segregation.

**February 14:** Um, Terry again. *Crime:* Noting that "satirising religion – even if that religion is Islam – is not racism. Religion and race have very different characteristics."

**February 12:** (Muslim) Independent Columnist, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. *Crime:* saying "Religion and race were used – if you voice any disagreements with the 'official' line, or point out oppression within, you are charged with betraying the faith and faithful, bringing on the BNP and encouraging Islamophobia."

**February 10:** Muslim MP Shahid Malik is listed. *Crime:* Saying the MCB should "stop whingeing and show leadership".

**February 9:** Pitt mauls a Muslim woman Gina Khan. *Crime:* Ms Khan spoke out against those who sought to radicalise her community.

**February 4:** Independent Columnist and Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, Joan Smith. *Crime:* Noting that Political Islam is "an authoritarian political ideology based on a literal reading of the Koran". Isn't it?

**Lesson:** Don't criticise Islam – even if you're Muslim. Uncle Bob is watching.



**Beyond Belief**

**New column focuses on religious homophobia**

GALHA committee member Terry Sanderson has brought to an end his long-running Mediawatch column in Gay Times. The column has been running for over 23 years and will be replaced with Terry's new column "Beyond Belief" looking at the developing struggle for gay rights in the face of religious hostility. Gay Times relaunched on 17 February as "GT" under its new editor Joe Galliano.

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## Anti-discrimination law at risk as religious pressure builds

Religious groups have launched an “onslaught of dishonesty” against new laws aimed at protecting gay people from discrimination. George Broadhead, secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) said: “These evangelical groups are becoming hysterical and desperate as they pile on the pressure to destroy the new sexual orientation regulations.”

George Broadhead added: “The religious lobby is now resorting to the use of dishonest and misleading tactics to try to panic politicians into scrapping the regulations. Following their full-page advertisement in *The Times* – which made claims about the effects of the regulations that were simply a pack of lies (and this has been confirmed by recent parliamentary

questions tabled by humanist peer Lord Lester of Herne Hill) – they are now petitioning the Queen asking her to put pressure on Tony Blair to withdraw the regulations, which have been introduced in Northern Ireland but have been postponed in Britain until April by minister Ruth Kelly.”

Mr Broadhead said that the Government must stand firm against this onslaught of dishonesty. “These regulations have already been seriously compromised by the granting of extensive religious exemptions. The religious groups will not be satisfied until they have destroyed them altogether. The gay community really must get its act together or these important new measures will be steamrollered by religious bigotry.”



## Battle for sexual orientation regulations far from over

The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) has welcomed the House of Lords decision to approve the Northern Ireland sexual orientation regulations, but warns that the battle is far from over.

GALHA’s secretary, George Broadhead, said: “While we are very pleased that the Lords sent the Christian agitators packing on this occasion, they haven’t gone away. The regulations are still subject to a judicial review, which will take place in March, and the judge might decide that the regulations are incompatible with the Human Rights Act. And we are still awaiting the regulations that will apply to Great Britain, which have been delayed until April.

“The religious pressure on the Communities Secretary, Ruth Kelly, will be relentless to provide more and more opt-outs for religion. We certainly hope that this result in the House of Lords will stiffen the Government’s resolve not to weaken the regulations even further with concessions to religion that will render them meaningless.”

Mr Broadhead said that although the extremists on the religious right had shot themselves in the foot with their campaign of distortion and exaggeration, the mainstream churches were much more powerful and influential with the Government behind the scenes.

“We should not forget that the Church of England and the Catholics have both opposed these regulations and continue to do so. The Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham, Vincent Nichols, has even tried to blackmail the Government into

dropping the regulations by threatening to withdraw welfare services operated by the Church. The Church of England has made similar threats. It is these powerful institutions that will be exerting pressure on Ruth Kelly – but in the light of the big majority in the Lords, we hope that she will resist any further exemptions.”

### UPDATE:

The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association has welcomed the Government’s reported promise not to grant religious exemptions to the sexual orientation regulations, but warns that this is the first shot in a long battle.

Secretary, George Broadhead, said: “The new Commission for Equality & Human Rights will soon begin operating. It is an umbrella organisation trying to protect the rights of all minorities. It has religion and belief as well as sexual orientation within its remit, and this latest battle over adoption agencies shows just how difficult it is going to be to reconcile the two.”

He added. “This problem of religious homophobia is not going to go away. As individual discrimination cases arise, Trevor Phillips, the head of the new commission, will have to try to decide whose rights are paramount. In the area of equality, there can be no compromise – gay people must be given complete protection from aggressive religious homophobia. There must be no conscience clauses, exemptions or special arrangements anywhere in law that allow religious groups to discriminate where no-one else can.”

## ‘OPELESS DAZE: GALHA calls for minister Ruth Kelly’s resignation – once again!

Reacting to reports that Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly is trying to water down the sexual orientation regulations in order to please the Vatican and Opus Dei, of which she is a member, George Broadhead, secretary of the UK Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA), said: “Ms Kelly is clearly the wrong person for this job. We warned at the time of her appointment that there would eventually be a conflict of interest between the rights of those she is supposed to be defending and the demands of her religion.”

Mr Broadhead said that the only honourable course for Ms Kelly was to resign. “She has to choose. It is obvious that she cannot adequately represent the interests of the LGBT community while she is also trying to serve an organisation that is telling her to discriminate against us. The Catholic Church has shown itself to be increasingly hostile to the progress of LGBT rights and she is clearly struggling between her loyalty to the job and her loyalty to the Church. She has now made it abundantly clear where her prime interest lies. There should be no more excuses – she must go.”





## NIGERIA: Humanist Jeered for Supporting Gay Rights

A Nigerian humanist was repeatedly jeered during his statement opposing the proposed new anti-gay legislation in Nigeria.

Leo Igwe, the executive secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement, made his statement at a public hearing to gather views from the public before a committee examines it and sends a final version to Parliament for voting.

Mr Igwe said that law should not be made to oppress people. It should be made to serve the interests of all the people.

Reacting to the outrageous statement made by an Islamic law professor who said that sometimes the minority should be destroyed in order to protect the majority, he said that that was exactly what the bill was meant to achieve and that it was unhealthy for the country and its democracy. "One of the hallmarks of a true democracy is not only upholding the will of the majority but recognising and respecting the rights of minorities."

In response to the contention that same-sex marriage should be banned because it was alien to Nigeria, Mr Igwe replied by saying that Christianity and Islam, the Bible and Qur'an, were all alien to Nigeria and if they wanted to ban same-sex marriage they should also ban Christianity

and Islam and their holy books.

When the religious groups also said that banning same-sex marriage was to protect public interest, good and morality, he said the term "public" was all-inclusive and included gay and lesbian people and therefore their interest and good should not be excluded or undermined.

However, the vast majority of those who spoke agreed with Jonathan Adamu of the Christian Lawyers' Fellowship of Nigeria who said: "Western society is decaying, we cannot use Western society as a model for moral values. If we let a man go with a man or a woman go with a woman, the next thing will be a man with an animal."

The secretary of the UK Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association, George Broadhead, said: "We naturally warmly welcome our fellow humanist's courageous intervention, but it is hardly surprising that he was shouted down. Nigeria is split about evenly between Christians and Muslims and the one thing they can agree on is that gay relationships are abhorrent and gay rights have no place in human rights."

"This being the case, it seems highly likely that this pernicious legislation will be enacted and there can be no doubt that it has been driven and fortified by religious hatred."



## President Terry

The Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association has warmly welcomed the election of its longstanding committee member, Terry Sanderson, as the new president of the UK National Secular Society (NSS).

Mr Sanderson, who has served for some time on the NSS Council of Management, was elected at the society's Annual General Meeting on 25 November 2006 at London's Conway Hall. He is a former counsellor and the author of a number of seminal books on gay issues, including *Assertively Gay*, and has been a regular columnist for *Gay Times*, the UK's premier gay magazine, for many years.

The NSS is one of the oldest societies in the country. It was co-founded in 1866 by Charles Bradlaugh, a convinced freethinker and MP for Northampton, who became its first president. He was a strong advocate of birth control, trade unionism, republicanism and women's suffrage and was ejected from the House of Commons for claiming the right to affirm instead of taking the religious oath of allegiance.

The NSS is a vigorous campaigner for liberal causes including freedom of expression and LGBT rights. It campaigns for the separation of church and state and challenges religious privilege like the current rapid increase of faith schools funded at taxpayers' expense and mandatory morning worship in state schools. It is affiliated to Amnesty International and Liberty.

GALHA secretary George Broadhead said: "We warmly welcome Terry Sanderson's election as NSS president. He has long been a great asset to GALHA and a staunch critic of media and religious homophobia. Since its founding 27 years ago, GALHA has had close, friendly relations with the NSS and I am sure that under Mr Sanderson's presidency it will go from strength to strength."

## Gay-bashing bishops in self-serving call

News that the Church of England has joined the Catholic Church in calling for exemptions from the sexual orientation regulations were labelled "predictable, self-serving prejudice" by the UK Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA).

GALHA's secretary, George Broadhead, said: "It is no surprise that the Anglicans have joined in the call for religious exemptions from the equality legislation – they did exactly the same thing with the employment equality regulations – and the Government gave in on that occasion. They are driving a coach and horses through the very concept of equality. This is not just about adoption, it is about a whole raft of other petty discriminations that the

churches want to practise against gay people.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury argues that the opt-outs are necessary to protect the religious from acting against their 'conscience'. What kind of conscience is it that feels it is necessary, in effect, to put up a sign outside its premises saying 'No Gays'?"

"The bishops may be presenting themselves as some sort of victims, but the truth is that they are hiding their crude loathing of gay people under a cloak of 'conscience'. This is nothing less than ecclesiastical gay-bashing."

GALHA calls on the Prime Minister to stand firm against this religious bullying and leave the regulations intact.

# My experience of losing faith... or never really having any.

*Charles Coventry describes growing up gay, disabled and non-religious in 1950s Scotland.*

An interesting point in the interview with George Broadhead (GHQ Autumn 2006) was the point about religion, that right from childhood he just had no belief at all. I had a similar experience, although as far as I know, I was never baptised. If this is the case, it is the influence of left wing politics and a higher level of education than most people would have had in the west of Scotland. Even today, parents who say they aren't having a child "done" will get terrible warnings about not giving them protection against abduction by the Catholics (two or three hundred years ago the fairies). There was still a vestigial sabbatarianism, not being allowed outside in case the neighbours objected and having to stay in bed starving till 11 a.m. (time of morning service in the Church of Scotland).

I wasn't aware of religion till I went to school. The only effect "Bible" had, because in the 1950s the text used was the Authorised Version, was that its sound made an impression on me, and this led to an interest in the development of the English language which culminated in studying English at university. One story had an effect, not religious. After reading the story of trial before Pontius Pilate, the teacher said that the Romans had been in Britain. This started me off on an interest in Roman Britain and led to Classics at secondary school and university. A "modern" version would probably not have made any impression at all.

My home reading about the age of eight included books about prehistoric animals and early man, so when presented with the creation story which made no reference to these subjects, I just couldn't see any sense in it, it was as far from reality as a fairy tale, but you didn't dare say so. Even though I

was born with a disability, healing stories, whether from the New Testament, or about "cures" at Lourdes meant nothing to me. I have never had any interest in being "cured." Physiotherapy and one operation in my teens improved my walking, and technological advances have meant that my partial vision, which makes lighting things and focusing on flames very difficult, is no longer a barrier to independent living, and with push-button crossings and free bus travel, not being able to drive is no longer a problem. In earlier days, also, the difficulty with lighting things and focusing on flames had one major advantage, no matter how often older people tried what I call "the smoking temptation ritual," it always failed. I was terrified, and because the pressure was from the older generation, quite often religious believers or at least carrying religious labels, there was no incentive to try to overcome the fear, so that active smoking never became an option. There is a religious reason for this ritual. Religionists who have periods of fasting, like Roman Catholics with Lent, must have one or more "vices" to give up during the fasting period, and in Scottish Presbyterianism at least, among Protestant denominations, the man (head of the household) must have at least one "worldly pleasure" (usually dram or pipe) to hang on to in old age, and it never occurred to the older generation that most "vices" or "worldly pleasures" were things I simply couldn't manage because of aspects of my disability.

Although there had hitherto been no religion at home, when we moved to a new house, we were near a church, and what better than to send the children to the Sunday School, get them out of the way while Father read the Sunday papers. At my new school I first became aware of sectarianism. Somebody with an Irish surname was a Catholic, and somebody with a non-Irish surname was Protestant. Protestants weren't, just like "natives" in the colonies. I suspect that my parents, despite their politics, had never really dropped their "Protestant" or "Presbyterian" labels. The Sunday School is only notable for my experience of the religionist's (at least Christian) idea of the disabled person

(especially the child) as an object of pity, because I was presented with a prize book inscribed "for Christian courage" or some such expression.

The next move of house was from city to country, and my parents rejoined the Church of Scotland. Being an elder of the local church would boost my father's career and acceptability in the village. I was sent to the Sunday School again, but because I was now in mainstream education, about to enter secondary school, I soon left because I needed time for homework. Unlike those of an older generation, I have no memory of nightmares about hellfire and damnation or eating a human body and drinking human blood, maybe a sign that even in the 1950s the church was beginning to go into decline. All I remember is the sheer boredom of Church of Scotland services, and having had an early appreciation of classical music, the musical side was just as boring as the rest.

In secondary school there was Religious Instruction (RI) once a week, but in the "A" stream (Latin) this stopped after two years, but then the real trouble came in Class IV in the second year of subject specialisation, mine being in languages, the new one being Ancient Greek (not including the New Testament). My parents, I have always assumed, because of this one new language, started talking about the ministry.

I was going to take over from the local minister who was near retirement. The ministry still had prestige, and I suppose my parents thought that although I wasn't a "son of the manse," it would be something to boast about that they had a son "in the manse." I knew enough about what young ministers were doing in deprived inner city areas to see that with nothing else but a flair for languages and certain aspects of history, the ministry definitely wasn't my line, but the defence was that it was easy to get ministers for these areas, but not for country parishes. There was something else which I realise now would have been a barrier. Ministers (still all men) were expected to marry and have families. My disability prevented marriage and of course, many years later I realise I was gay. Even being single was suspicious, and the news that the Kirk has refused to sanction gay marriage shows that attitudes are little changed. A year later there came a defence

Do you have a personal story about losing your faith – or never actually having any? Why not share your story with GHQ and its readers? Email [editor@gayhumanist.com](mailto:editor@gayhumanist.com) for details.



against this talk from an unexpected source, the school Debating Society. I went there under parental orders, but most of the time had nothing to contribute since political indoctrination at home had no more effect on me than religious indoctrination at school. But one night the subject was "This House proposes that the existence of God is a myth." This clicked and I had my defence. There was trouble at home, the Careers Officer's son an atheist! There was a warning that most "atheists" became Roman Catholics, the old prejudices had never been dropped, and "you had to have a religion in the army." This was irrelevant for two reasons, August 31st 1945 was my second birthday, so I didn't remember WWII, and, being born with a physical disability, at 18 I was automatically exempt from National Service.

In classics I found the Greek version of the flood story, and this started an interest in comparative mythology. There was panic, I was starting to question the truth of the Bible. In another new subject, biology, although I probably knew something about it already, I found the full details of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, and using this prompted a parental statement that scientists were coming to the conclusion that there was a creator of the universe. Teenagers were too young to make decisions on subjects like the existence of gods.

At university I no longer needed to worry about the ministry although it was dredged up occasionally on the basis of a new language, Gaelic. The conviction that religion or "spirituality" has nothing to offer came with employment. Although after training for librarianship I started off well at home as a trainee in backroom work on Local Studies and Special Collections, permanent employment was not allowed because of an excuse that a higher salary grade would have to be paid for a graduate. A promised university job failed to materialise, and next thing I knew was that I was in a rough industrial new town where a great show was made of employing disabled people, but never mind how they were treated. Staff relations were bad and I got constant harassment for being a graduate and being disabled, and probably also for being single and by implication gay. There was no reason to do anything to get me out because I was now on the right salary grade. Without spatial difficulties (like dyslexia but with numbers) I could have entered something like accountancy or lecturing in the "right" subjects of economics or psychology, and the other subjects could have been a hobby. In this way I would have

been accepted, a good "nominal Presbyterian," but I had no alternative abilities and now I wasn't using my brain at all, so was actually regressing mentally, becoming just like a child, actually terrified of one of the staff in the way a child might be terrified of a certain teacher. There was no home support, and my bad experiences at interviews got me the reputation "aggressive, chip on the shoulder." I failed to appreciate a pay rise and this caused comments that I was "unworldly," but it was my father, elder of the Kirk, who was "unworldly" with no attempt to try to imagine what it must be like not to be able to do certain things that needed a lot of money, for his age group smoking and drinking expensive malt whisky, and more permanently not being able to drive or get married and have children. The "merciful"

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**"Being gay is like being a murderer: it is a choice. Cerebral palsy is God's punishment on me for choosing to be gay."**

---

god or goddess did nothing to get me what I needed, either my old job back again or something else of the right kind, and never mind the salary grade excuse.

After five years I was lucky enough to be accepted by my old university for another degree, lucky because, even although the job had improved I still ended up with a violent attack on a child and was sacked for child assault. At least "reason for leaving" was "further study," although I still never got suitable permanent employment. By this time there was nothing suitable. About this time, a member of Harold Wilson's Cabinet said that "graduates should lower their sights." However bad this must be for an able-bodied graduate, as my experience shows, it can be even worse with a disability. Whatever political or economic "-ism" this idea comes from, there is surely another origin - in religion. My father was firmly settled as an Elder of the Kirk, and probably remembered Victorian hymns which talked about the poor (or disabled) person being destined for a bad time on earth because they were to have eternal bliss in heaven, so, even when my job ended up with being sacked for child assault there was no need to

do anything. However, from the USA comes an even worse case. Whereas I never believed in anything religionists said, on Disgaytalk, a chatline for gay disabled men, a new member with cerebral palsy said that being gay was like being a murderer, it was a choice, and he was asking for other men to pray for him to be able to come out of his gay lifestyle and be cured of his CP which was God's punishment for him choosing to be gay. We must keep a watch to see that this idea doesn't come back here.

I was always persecuted for my bad subjects, numeracy, philosophy, politics and economics, because it was taken that I was just not working. The Scottish Presbyterian education is based on the maximum of pain. The mathematician who specialised in the field for a higher salary or the M.A. who followed family tradition is fine, but if the specialisation, as in my case was due to a difference in ability, even years after school the experience of belting never wears off. Not being allowed to keep to your best subject alone is "good for the character." All I got was a sense of shame and even being mentally backward till I finally got away from home to study in the Department of Celtic Studies in Edinburgh University. Until the age of sixty I was still officially "seeking gainful employment," but nothing happened. Although I did officially join the Church, the real interest was really for the Gaelic language service which, musically and linguistically, was relevant to my studies. After the Church, including the local Metropolitan Community Church, failed me with employment, I just dropped out and now only attend the Gaelic service. I am now building up freelance proofreading, mainly in Gaelic. I was introduced to this by one of my supervisors who is, incidentally, a Baptist, but there was no religionist "look how good I am" thinking behind this. He just saw that here was somebody with a flair for Gaelic, an adult learner working on a new topic, and thought that as well as getting me through my thesis, this freelance employment opportunity would help the department to build up postgraduate research among scholars with original backgrounds in other Arts fields.

Although I am now settled and no longer need to try to get full-time work, I still emphasise the bad effect religion had on me in earlier years. Christians always ask me if I have forgiven my father for what he did. The past cannot be undone now, but by exposing my experience, I hope it will warn parents of disabled children with academic potential to make sure that they and employers get their priorities right.

# GALHA Film Festival 2007

## THE SCHEDULE

To book by phone and pay by cheque, please call Keith Angus on 020 7833 5870  
Book online now at <http://www.gayhumanist.com/filmfestival>

### SHOW 1

Saturday 10th March  
3:00pm to 5:00pm

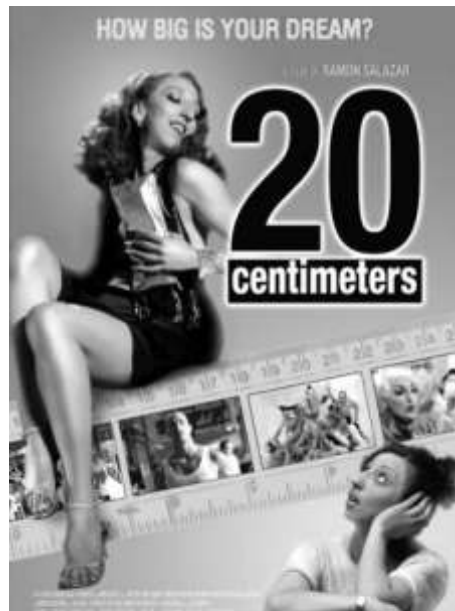


### The Magdalene Sisters

Set in Ireland in the sixties, the Magdalene Sisters is a true story of the renowned Magdalene laundries, run by the Catholic Church for supposedly 'fallen' women. The story centres around four young women: two unmarried mothers; a girl who was accused of flirting with boys; and a girl who was raped by her cousin at a family wedding. They are kept in appalling conditions by the nuns who run the institution, and endure humiliation and abuse on a regular basis. With fantastic performances by stars including Geraldine McEwan (*Love's Labour's Lost*) and Anne-Marie Duff (*Shameless*, *The Virgin Queen*), it's an awful yet compelling depiction of the abuse of power in the name of religion.  
*Best picture, Venice Film Festival*

### SHOW 2

Saturday 10th March  
6:00pm to 8:00pm

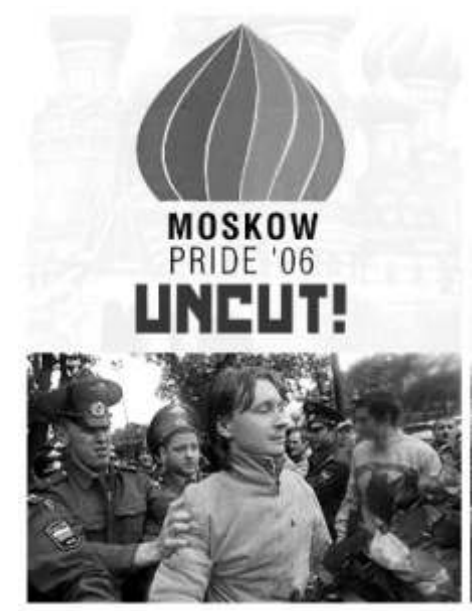


### 20 Centimetres

Fresh from storming the 2006 New York LGBT film festival, fantasy-musical-comedy *20 Centimetres* combines Amoldovarean camp with neo-realism to introduce us to Marieta, a pre-op male-to-female transsexual.  
Marieta works the streets and yearns for the day that she can be a 'proper' woman by getting rid of the appendage to which the film's title refers. She can't hold down a job because she suffers from narcoleptic episodes, during which she enters a fantasy dream world where she's the star of musicals, surrounded by hordes of men.  
But when Raul falls in love with her – 20 centimetres and all – she's left wondering what to do.  
*In Spanish with English subtitles.*

### SHOW 3 DOUBLE FEATURE!

Saturday 17th March  
2:00pm to 4:30pm



### Moscow Pride 2006 Uncut! &

On 27th May 2006 Moscow held its first ever Gay Pride event. It was banned by city officials but that didn't dampen the steely resolve of the Pride organisers – notably Nikolai Alexeyev – of making sure that it happened all the same.  
You may recall that Nikolai was guest of honour at GALHA's November 2006 lunch event, and received a bravery award for his courage in combatting homophobia in Russia and beyond. GALHA is delighted to showcase this film as a UK exclusive – never seen in Britain before now. The film depicts (in English) events before, during and after Moscow Pride, and offers a unique and fascinating insight into what happened, including Nikolai's arrest by the city police.  
The Moscow Pride film lasts just over an



GALHA's second film festival takes place from 10th to 18th March, and a great line-up of features will ensure that every seat in the exclusive private screening room at the five star 'One Aldwych' hotel in Covent Garden, London, will be full.

One Aldwych is one of the finest contemporary boutique hotels in the world and its delightful Lobby Bar is the perfect location for meeting fellow GALHA

members before the shows and dissecting the cinematography afterwards. The screening room itself is a world away from your usual cinema: every comfortable blue leather Italian seat has its own small table for that dry martini.

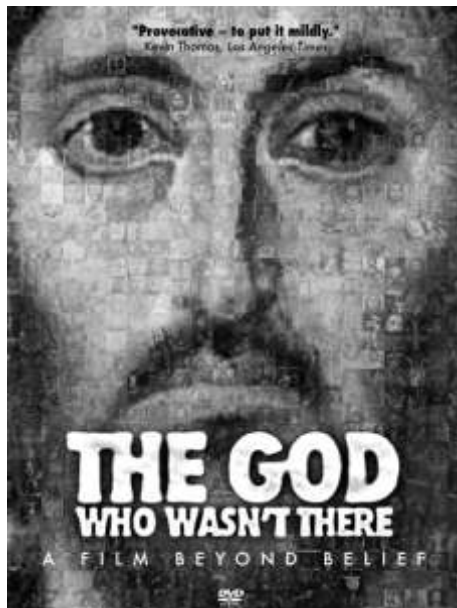
The carefully selected programme of films has been chosen to appeal to a gay and humanist audience, with a mix of the intriguing, fantastic, disturbing, thought-

provoking, and comforting. The festival takes place just before the famous London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival kicks off, so is GALHA's very own fringe event.

Online booking is now open. The screening room only seats 30 people so book early. Tickets are £8 per show, which not only gives you a reserved seat in the private screening room, but also includes free popcorn!

## SHOW 4 DOUBLE FEATURE!

Sunday 18th March  
4:30pm to 6:30pm



### The God Who Wasn't There

hour, after which follows a screening of The God Who Wasn't There follows.

The God Who Wasn't There does to religion what Super Size Me did for fast food and Bowling for Columbine did for the U.S. gun culture. It holds modern Christianity up to a bright spotlight through an eye-opening documentary fronted by former Christian fundamentalist Brian Flemming. This provocative film includes input from luminaries such as Richard Dawkins and really takes the gloves off in affronting religion for all its inconsistencies, un-truths and lies. Hailed as "a stimulant for free thought" it's a must-see for the humanist in us all.

*Voted best documentary film, Grassroots Cinema Film Festival.*

### Boys Beware! & Brief Encounter

Boys Beware! is a collection of short public information films from the 1950s. They are the ones that warn about the evils of homosexuality and sex, and in retrospect are almost comical, but of course contributed to the demonisation of gay people. These thought-provoking vignettes are great at making you realise just how far attitudes have evolved in recent history, and conversely, how they really haven't in certain quarters.

They have only just been released into the public domain so we're lucky to have secured their showing.

These films are followed by a real Sunday matinee treat: Brief Encounter is a timeless classic and what better way to enjoy the film but with friends in a luxurious

private screening room, with a drink in hand and your complimentary popcorn?

Originally a one-act stage play by Noel Coward, Brief Encounter is a film masterpiece and depicts the ultimate *affaire de coeur* between a respectable housewife (Celia Johnson) and a handsome married doctor (Trevor Howard) who meet by chance in a railway station café. Brilliant performances – particularly by Johnson – depict how ordinary life can be turned upside down by unexpected passion. Rachmaninov's second piano concerto makes it simply sublime. Often described as one of the ultimate gay films, it speaks directly to a gay audience, for whom the subject – forbidden love in ordinary lives – has special resonance.

# An Inconvenient Truth

*Ian Stewart says former US Presidential candidate, Al Gore's film is a must-see...*



I've been telling all my friends to go and see this important film. And they've all been thanking me afterwards! Global warming is the "Inconvenient Truth" to which the title refers.

Our planet's atmosphere is irrefutably thickening with carbon, which holds in an increasing amount of warming sunshine. This has been raising global temperatures. The effects are augmenting dramatically.

This film frankly explains what's happening. Simple observations show how the results are swiftly compounding. For example, the vast ice surfaces of the Earth's polar regions normally reflect much of the sun's heat harmlessly away into outer space. Satellite photos show the icecaps are rapidly melting. The water left behind absorbs yet more solar heat.

The former vice-president of the United States, Al Gore, makes this

straightforward presentation about global climate change. It's a comprehensive A to Z guide on the subject, which can be easily followed by absolute beginners with no background. Those who are well informed on the matter will be heartened at such a thorough survey, and will find the timely update to be of interest.

Freed from the constraints of high public office, and sharing some relevant aspects of his family background, Gore's restrained commentary directly indicates that vested interests have been deliberately muddling the science, to keep us all ignorant and buying.

Word of mouth is keeping this 'must see' documentary running in multiplexes everywhere. I understand it's also come out on DVD. After seeing the film, you'll be well informed on the issues, and telling all your friends.

## What YOU Can Do to Reduce Greenhouse Gases

**Drive Less** - 15 miles less driving per week (bike, carpool, walk) eliminates over 400kg of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) per year. **Tune Up** - clean oil and properly inflated tires eliminate 450kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. **Drive Smart** - a hybrid or electric vehicle eliminates up to 2,600kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. **Light Up** - replace three incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs in your home and eliminate almost 140kg of CO<sub>2</sub> (last longer, burns less). **Recycle** - recycling half of the aluminium, glass, plastic and paper that you use reduces over 1,000kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. **Install Solar Power** - and take advantage of soon-to-be-introduced

tax benefits and lower energy bills. Doing so will prevent another 1,000kg of CO<sub>2</sub> or more from entering the atmosphere. **Turn It Down, Turn It Up** - turn your heater down (in the winter) and your air conditioner up (in the summer) by three degrees and save almost 480kg of CO<sub>2</sub>. **Wash Cool** - do two loads of your laundry per week in cold or warm water instead of hot water (and hang your clothes out to air dry when you can), save 225kg of CO<sub>2</sub> a year. **Store Smartly, Save Money** - buy 'energy star' refrigerators and other appliances (like computer monitors) and save money as well as over 450kg of CO<sub>2</sub> a year.

## Become a reviewer

Have you read a book or seen a film or play that you think will be of interest to a gay or humanist audience? Why not share your views by submitting your review of it to GHQ?



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**The Same Language**  
**Ben Duncan**  
 Edited and with an  
 Afterword by  
**John Howard**

U of Alabama Press, 2006  
 ISBN: 0-8173-1479-2

The creation of a gay identity is a complex process. The process is displayed in Ben Duncan's fascinating and delightful memoir. What gives such reality to the book is its unusual structure: the memoir was first published in 1962, but now in a new edition – there is substantial italicised addition to the original. The early narrative is self-censored because of the difficulty of writing about his homosexuality, but the 2005 edition contains full details of his gay experiences and feelings.

Duncan recounts his childhood in the American South – the feckless parents, the orphanages, the foster homes, the army, American college life and how he felt different. But the italicised prose tells of boyhood affections, boyhood sex games, and falling for others of the same sex. He managed to gain a scholarship to Oxford, where he spent two years gaining a degree in English Literature, his impecunious life led him to work in an ice cream factory. The later text adds how he found temporary love on a skiing trip and permanent love with his partner, Dick Chapman. (It is one of the very few gaps which I would have liked filled that you learn so very little about Dick not even how it was that his family accepted them so readily as a couple.) It has to be said that the extra text adds enormously to the account, bringing a richness and honesty which are heartening to read.

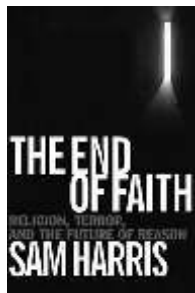
Two key aspects of his early life are his tussle with the Asylum authorities for the right to stay in the UK and his two year stint in an eye hospital as one of the very few work situations he was permitted. The battle with the immigration authorities is Kafkaesque, but Duncan describes it with humour rather than darkness. A Civil Union today would make it much easier, but it is well known that immigration authorities are as inhumane as ever. The editor of this volume, John Howard, tells in his afterword what difficulties he had gaining citizenship for his Iranian lover. Two years as an orderly in the eye hospital were exhausting and at times both amusing and exasperating.

The memoir had its origin in a number of BBC talks and the limpid prose has the feel of the spoken word. The BBC is – to its

discredit – much less inclined to accept unsolicited talks than it was then. They were published in *The Listener*, a journal of broadcast talks and articles which alas is no more.

Perhaps as a result of a childhood in which he had to constantly adapt to new circumstances, Duncan seems able to slip gently into an enormous variety of situations, learning the appropriate language. But it was hard for gay men to live in the homophobic witch hunt of the 1950s. Queer men noticed the case of Montague and Wildeblood, but saw journalists and politicians castigating homosexuals, while themselves indulging.

It is not surprising that Duncan self-censored his writing. Nor surprising that today he should wish to fill in the picture, so that his rich identity is clear. He writes in the prologue "I can only say what an unburdening and a joy it was to feel free, at last, to tell the truth." It is a joy for the reader to see this liberation. – **Jim Herrick**



**The End of Faith**  
**Sam Harris**  
 W.W. Norton, 2004  
 ISBN: 0393035158

Sam Harris's book has been widely acclaimed by secular humanists. But I was surprised to

read in his chapter on "The problem with Islam": "What will we do if an Islamist regime, which grows dewy-eyed at the mere mention of paradise, ever acquires long range nuclear weaponry? If history is any guide, we will not be sure where the offending warheads are or what their state of readiness is, and so we will be unable to rely on targeted conventional weapons to destroy them. In such a situation, the only thing likely to ensure our survival may be a nuclear first strike of our own."

"Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime – as it would kill tens of millions of innocent civilians in a single day – but it may be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe."

Phew! I have quoted this at length to keep the context. Has Harris's fellow US citizen – Bush the 'crusader' - said anything as strong?

Excellent in much of his analysis of dangers from the religiously faithful, Harris is intolerant of tolerance towards Jews, Christians and Muslims. This will upset some humanists. Though I was pleased to

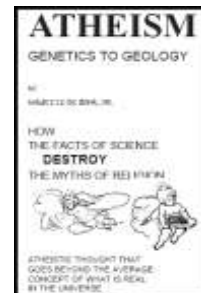
see his quote from Christopher Hitchens: "what can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence".

Harris opposes the US religious organisations who are granted federal funds while upholding anti-gay laws. In 13 US States oral or anal sex is a criminal act. He condemns the absurdities perpetuated through the 'books of faith', on which Jews, Christians and Muslims rely for the stand they take.

The final chapter is disappointing. Harris seems keen on Buddhism, as he interprets it. While recognising that many Buddhists are more akin to those of 'faith', of which he is highly critical, surely he must know spiritual meditation and Eastern mysticism come from the same stable?

He takes many pages of notes to give a philosophical explanation for what many readers will regard as superstitious twaddle. This is pursued on blogs where Harris discusses his stance with critics.

– **Denis Cobell**



**Atheism:**  
**Genetics to Geology**  
**Maurice De Bona Jr**  
 Dessserco, 2006  
 ISBN: Unknown

"Neurologists used to talk only of neurons (neuron brain cells) because they were the ones that generated electrical action potentials. Modern man has about 100 billion of these brain cells. Also, it has been shown that some African natives and some Hindus may have as few as 5 billion neurons."

I must confess that after reading that, I had to stop for a long intake of breath, after which I was disinclined to read any further. Racist drive! Horrible, horrible stuff, and ludicrously pretentious throughout.

I was not surprised to discover subsequent to receiving this book for review that it is the product of vanity publishing and is being given away for free on the internet. I doubt any reputable publisher would touch it.

Apart from racism so blatant that a Klansman would blush, we learn a thing or two. DNA "unzips" to copy itself. Much like this Mr De Bona's writing, I'm guessing.

The 138 page book features 135 pages of incoherent rambling dressed up as 'science' and 3 blank pages for 'notes'. Were it only the other way round, the book might have been useful. – **Brett Lock**

# Letters & Correspondence

Dear Editor,

The religious lobby is well served by dozens of publications ranging from the Catholic Herald to the Salvation Army's War Cry, with the Methodist Recorder, Baptist Times, Muslim News and Jewish Chronicle adding to the outpouring of irrationalism. The Humanist movement only has a few monthlies and, with the exception of the National Secular Society's excellent News Line, not a single weekly.

So it seems odd that GHQ should devote two pages of text and photographs to Roger Burg's self-indulgent alternative civil partnership charade. He and his partner, "a couple of faithless poufs" (his inelegantly homophobic term, not mine) were inspired by ladies clamouring for ordination as clergy in the Roman Catholic Church which for centuries kept women in the second class place.

Roger Burg and partner Ross went to work making props and sewing charity shop curtains for their show. Amateur dramatics are fun, and there is a similarity between what happens on the stage and in the pulpit. But I suggest there are better ways to defend reforms (including civil partnerships) that were achieved in the teeth of religious opposition.

Civil partnerships mean much more to those who enter into them. It is regrettable when the ceremony is turned into a display of silliness. While any attempt at censorship should be resisted, there are times when a degree of editorial judgement would not come amiss.

Yours sincerely,  
Bill McIlroy

## The Author replies:

I'm sorry that Bill McIlroy thinks that my article "One Campaign for Civil Partnerships" was unsuitable for GHQ, but I'm afraid he seems to have missed the point. None of the religious newspapers he mentioned was in favour of the proposed Civil Partnerships in fact their opposition was a real problem.

At the time when we performed the re-enactments of the Church's same-sex union blessing ceremony (described in more detail at [www.samesexunions.org.uk](http://www.samesexunions.org.uk)) there was no question of "defending reforms (including civil partnerships) that were achieved in the teeth of religious opposition" as the Civil Partnership Bill was not going to be debated in Parliament for several months. Indeed our primary aim was to assist in getting the Act onto the statute book. Remember that the Bill was pretty well assured of being passed in the Commons: the challenge was to avoid it being thrown out by the Lords, where the church has strong influence. We were trying to defuse some of the likely opposition from church quarters, by demonstrating that traditional Christianity was not always opposed to same-sex partnerships; on the contrary, some branches of the Christian church have actually celebrated such partnerships at certain times and places, and some continue to do so today. This reduces the opposition to a debate within the Churches, not something to determine national legislation.

The tone of the article was light-hearted, and this may have been misleading, but our re-enactments were certainly not "a display of silliness". Several other groups performed slapstick 'gay marriages' for publicity, and this was likely to raise the hackles of the opposition. The congregations, speakers and all those who took part in our re-enactments (an interesting mix, by the way, of believers and non-believers) took them very seriously, and this tone was important in the literature that reached the Lords.

It was certainly very illuminating to explore one aspect of official views of same-sex relationships from a period which is sometimes considered to have been irremediably homophobic. The ability to enter a civil partnership has indeed meant a great deal to Ross and me, all the more so because we feel we may in some very small way have helped to make it possible.

Roger Burg

**Over to you, dear reader. Ed.**

## CALENDAR

GALHA has a full year of events and activities planned. Here are some of the up-coming highlights. Of course, these are subject to change. The next edition will carry updates and confirmed dates and more information.

### Coming up in 2007

In May we will have an event to mark the International Day Against Homophobia and in July GALHA will again participate in London Pride.

### Saturday, 10 March

GALHA Film Festival - see inside the magazine for the programme and booking details.

### Friday 18 May

GALHA will host a public meeting on a topic to be announced to mark the International Day Against Homophobia.

### September Gathering and AGM

GALHA's annual weekend gathering and AGM will be held from Friday 7th to Monday 10th September in the beautiful city of Edinburgh. The Best Western Bruntsfield is our host for the weekend; a well appointed three star hotel about 15 minutes walk from the city centre, which includes an AA rosetted restaurant and free car parking (amongst other things). What's more, our very special guest speaker after dinner on the Saturday evening is Patrick Harvie, a member of Scottish parliament and also a GALHA vice president.

The cost is £56 per night which includes dinner, bed and full Scottish breakfast when sharing a twin/double room, or £15 more for sole occupancy of a double room.

More information will be sent to all members a little closer to the time, but to book now please send a deposit of £40 per person to Jim Herrick, 17 Christmas Pie Avenue, Normandy, Guildford, Surrey, GU3 2EQ. Cheques should be made payable to GALHA.

This is GALHA's first weekend foray to Scotland, and it promises to be a great weekend so book soon!

**Does your LGBT, atheist or Humanist group have an event you'd like us to list here? It's free, so why not send us the details by email: [Editor@gayhumanist.com](mailto:Editor@gayhumanist.com)**

**NOTE:** It has been drawn to our attention that the GALHA archive photo used on the front cover of the previous edition of GHQ, which was not credited at the time, was taken by Diesel Balaam. We apologise to Mr Balaam for this oversight.





GALHA vice president, Darren Johnson gives a short talk during the panel discussion at the Faith + Homophobia conference.



Former GALHA chair Derek Lennard and GALHA committee member Andrew Copson catch up during lunch at the Faith + Homophobia conference.



Former GALHA chair Derek Lennard, GHQ assistant editor, Chris Houston, and GHQ columnist, Peter Tatchell chat at the reception after the F+H conference



Academic Peter Hearty was the guest speaker at the GALHA/SPES Darwin Day event at Conway Hall. Peter (with Terry Sanderson's help) gave one of the best!



Ensemble bleu: George Broadhead meets and greets the punters at GALHA's Marlene Dietrich event in December



GHQ editors, Brett Lock and Chris Houston meet veteran US journalist, Rex Wockner for dinner. Rex's camera set to timer caught the moment.



GALHA SCENE



## IMAGINE NO RELIGION

Aren't you sick and tired of the homophobia spouted by religious leaders? It is true to say that almost all antigay groups today are religion-based. When they're not issuing proclamations, fatwas and edicts, they're campaigning against our human rights, peddling their bigotry, telling us we're sick, diseased, perverted and destined for hellfire, or promoting quack therapies to "cure" us. Join GALHA in its fight to curb the influence of religious homophobia!

**Stand up to the homophobes who preach hatred, intolerance and discrimination in the name of faith and ancient texts. Join The Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association today!**

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The Gay & Lesbian  
Humanist Association

## in the name of the father

In the last 12 months, the Gay Police Association has recorded a 75% increase in homophobic incidents, where the sole or primary motivating factor was the religious belief of the perpetrator.

Verbal abuse and physical assault against gay men and women is a criminal offence and should always be reported to the police.

Discrimination against gay people in the workplace is also unlawful and should be reported to employers, who have a duty of care to prevent it.

Homophobia can never be justified and must never be tolerated.

[www.report-it.org.uk](http://www.report-it.org.uk)



gay police association

gay police association  
in scotland

gay police association  
in northern ireland