



# GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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## Why Do Minorities Worship a God That Denigrates Them?

EXCLUSIVE

### Are They Devoid of Human Dignity?

by William Harwood

All of the gods that have ever existed were created by majorities in their own image. In a larger context those majorities were really minorities. Jews, for example, constituted an insignificant percentage of the population of Phoenicia. But the mythologians who created the paramount Jewish god, Yahweh, typified the xenophobic majority of a tiny region of Phoenicia ruled by village chieftains named David and Solomon.

No god was created with the prejudices of a later age. But as new hatreds, xenophobias and self-centered conceits were adopted by a god's adherents, the new prejudices were attributed to the god by its twentieth- and thirtieth-generation scriptwriters. Up until 621 BCE Yahweh viewed the difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals as analogous to the difference between football fans and cricket fans. In that year Yahweh's self-styled spokesman (Hebrew nabiyah; Greek prophetes) Jeremiah wrote in Deuteronomy 13:6 of, "the woman who fulfills your physical needs, or the male lover who means as much to you as your own breath." (1) But between 621 and 612 BCE, the Priestly author of Leviticus learned that Zoroaster had denounced homosexual recreation in the belief that he could thereby force gays to start breeding tithe-paying believers, and incorporated that and other Zoroastrian taboos into Judaism. Then in 434 BCE the Torah's final Redactor took the homosexual taboo to its logical conclusion and added a death penalty.

How that new taboo affected the ten percent of Jews who were gay can only be guessed. Especially after 434 BCE, coming out of the closet was not a viable option. But it is a safe assumption that the Priestly author's attempt to turn gays straight was no more successful than such indoctrination is today.

To gay humanists, the foregoing is simply a footnote to history, since they are aware that

the god who denigrated them is itself a product of the human imagination. But why are there gay Christians, Jews and Muslims? They are not unaware that their respective gods are homophobic. And they are more aware than anybody that their recreational preferences hurt nobody and are therefore not immoral. So why do they grant legitimacy to a god so incapable of telling right from wrong that it labels shared, consensual, non-consequential, victimless recreation a "sin" (defined as disobedience to the god's capricious whims)? Can they not see that a god less morally evolved than its worshippers is an oxymoron? There should be no gay godworshippers.

The Yahwist who composed the oldest parts of the Torah wrote (Gen. 3:16), that women are genetically programmed to need the sexual servicing provided by men but, "he is going to exercise authority over you." Women know firsthand that male authority over women is an aberration that has long been outgrown. A god that endorses such authority is a male chauvinist pig. So why accept such an authority? There should be no female godworshippers.

Women are a minority, or at least are treated as such. Gays are a minority. The educated are a minority. Black Americans are a minority. Black Muslims are a minority. Yet millions of members of those minorities grant blind, unquestioning obedience to religions created and manipulated by white, male, heterosexual, undereducated, chauvinistic, hate-ridden bigots. Why? The only answer that comes to mind is that godworshippers of all stripes are devoid of human dignity.

*Quotation from The Fully Translated Bible, Volume One of Two (Booksurge 2007), edited and translated by William Harwood.*

*An expanded version of this article is included in William Harwood's The God Psychosis: Humankind's Ultimate Black Plague (world audience, 2009).*



## Darwin Day special raises record funds

GALHA celebrated Darwin Day this year, the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of 'On the Origin of Species', with a special evening of entertainment, February 13th 2009. Over 60 people attended, including many new faces. Fire and Brimstone Productions performed two exclusive, specially-written plays, while Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, introduced a short film on the life of young Darwin.

One guest commented, "I enjoyed the enthusiasm in the presentation of the specially written Darwin based plays" while another contributed: "This was a thought-provoking, original and highly entertaining event. There were some really interesting people to chat to afterwards as well".

Read more reviews, provide your own,

and find out first and free about future events at [meetup.com/galhagroup/](http://meetup.com/galhagroup/).

Thanks to Derek Lennard for all his work on the event, to Terry Sanderson (playwright), Jim Herrick, Gillian Spragg, David Stone - and all those that helped to make the event a great success. It was kindly supported by South Place Ethical Society, the Paul Patrick Memorial Awards 2009, LGBT History Month and LGBT Consortium.

Raising nearly £500 for the cause is a record amount in recent times and huge thanks to all that donated. GALHA has hosted regular events throughout its 30 year history; the next is 'Squatting in Brixton', March 13th, 7.30pm at Conway Hall. If you can make it, we look forward to welcoming you there!

- Report by Adam Knowles, chief purple t-shirt wearer.

## GALHA says "Abbas Must Stay!"

GALHA Secretary David Christmas has written to the Home Office urging them to give "fair consideration" to an appeal by Abbas Naji to remain in the UK. Mr Naji is a gay man and as a member of the Council of Ex-Muslims would be regarded as an apostate if he was returned to Iran.

In his letter Mr Christmas draws on the personal experience of Iranian writer, Azam Kamiguiyan who argues "Non-believers and atheists under Islam do not have the right to life. They are to be killed. Mr Kamiguiyan continued "I, along with thousands of non-believers and political prisoners, was tortured by order of the representatives of Allah and Sharia, tortured while the voices of the Koran

about non-believers were played in the torture chambers. The voice reading the Koran was mixed with our cries of pain from lashes and other forms of torture".

Mr Christmas also pointed out that the attitude of the Iranian Government was clear and had been verified by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The law provides for a choice of the means of execution-hanging, stoning, being halved by a sword or dropped from a high place-but a judge may also decide which form of execution is employed.

Mr Christmas concludes that "Mr Naji has a well founded fear of persecution if he returns to Iran".

## GALHARAMA

See [www.galha.org](http://www.galha.org) for more details

**Prime Mover:** GALHA Chair, Andrew Copson is meeting the Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street on 24th February. All part of LGBT History Month. Too late for a report in this edition of GALHA News, but we'll give you the lowdown in our next edition. Not content with sending buses around the world proclaiming the virtues of secularism, and giving advice to the PM, Andrew has also written to President Obama on behalf of the GALHA Committee. In the letter Andrew expresses "our appreciation for your recent openness towards humanists and your support for gay rights as civil rights, and our best wishes for a successful presidency". Andrew adds that "we were heartened in particular by the inclusion of non-believers in your inaugural address and of humanists in your remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast on February 5". Commenting that it is difficult to be non-religious and/or LGBT Rights in some parts of the US, Andrew concludes "We wish you luck in your aspirations to change this and so much else in the years ahead".

**GALHA Gets Grant:** Malcolm Trahearn attended the AGM of the

consortium of LGBT Voluntary and Community Organisations in Birmingham on January 31st. The meeting discussed issues such as funding, health and bi-inclusion within the LGBT Community. However, Malcolm reports that the highlight of the day was a speech by GALHA Vice President, Michael Cashman, which pointed out the threat religion poses to the LGBT Community in particular and to human rights in general. The Consortium also administered grants on behalf of the Paul Patrick Memorial Awards and the GALHA committee was delighted to learn shortly after the conference that GALHA had been awarded a £250 grant towards the cost of its Darwin Day event.

**Pressing Issues:** Derek Lennard attended the Press Launch of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS) ON 19TH February at Conway Hall. The speakers were Norman Ralph (President of the AHS), A.C.Grayling, Richard Dawkins and Polly Toynbee. The event was upbeat and celebratory and valuable contacts were made for GALHA.

## SUPPORT OUR IDAHO E.D.M.

### EDM 360 - International Day against Homophobia.

Please contact your Member of Parliament and ask him or her to add their signature to EDM 360. This Early Day Motion has been tabled by Evan Harris, who is a Vice President of GALHA. Thanks are also due to Naomi Phillips of the British Humanist Association. The aim of the EDM is to increase awareness amongst MPs of the important worldwide campaign to decriminalise homosexuality. If you follow the link below you can see the wording of the EDM, and there is a very simple online form which when completed will automatically go to your MP and ask them to sign.

(This applies even if you don't know who your MP is!). See: <http://tinyurl.com/p6plv>

#### Text of EDM 360 - International Day against Homophobia. (Harris, Evan.)

"That this House notes the historical declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, presented to the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 2008; further notes that this declaration was submitted by the French government in consultation with the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO); and urges the British Government to continue to work with other governments and non-governmental organisations to ensure that there is enough support in the UN for a resolution to be passed to decriminalise homosexuality and to end gender identity discrimination around the world."



# Pearls of Wisdom

by DEREK LENNARD

## GALHA ANNOUNCES PROGRAMME OF PUBLIC MEETINGS TO MARK 30TH /PEARL ANNIVERSARY IN 2009.

*"The pearl is the queen of gems and the gem of queens".*

*Meetings at Conway Hall Library starting at 7.30pm unless otherwise stated.*

**MARCH 13th - "Squatting In Brixton"** - The Brixton Gay Community of the 1970's. A talk based on new research by Dr Matt Cook, Senior Lecturer in History, Birkbeck, University of London. Dr Cook reveals his new research on the Brixton Gay Squatters, who together with the South London GLF, the journal "Gay Left", and the Brixton Faeries contributed to the early years of the Gay Rights movement in the UK.

**APRIL 17th - "Islam, Human Rights and Homophobia"** - A talk by Maryam Namazie, "Ex-Muslim Human Rights Campaigner."

**MAY 15th - "EUROPEAN ELECTIONS QUESTION TIME"** - A special event to mark the International Day Against Homophobia. European Question Time focussing on human rights and LGBT Rights in Europe. We are delighted to confirm that the following will be members of the panel: **From Labour**, Mary Honeyball MEP. Mary has been a staunch supporter of human rights - particularly women's rights - in Europe. She's quoted as saying that Catholicism exercises a 'vice-like grip' over large parts of continental Europe, and she campaigns for a separation of religion and politics. She's also a VP of the BHA. **From the Lib Dems**, Jonathan Fryer. Jonathan is number two on the Lib Dem Euro candidate list for London. An academic at SOAS and an expert on international affairs, he writes for the Guardian and appears on the BBC including broadcasts such as From Our Own Correspondent. He is also an out gay man. **From the Green party**, Jean Lambert MEP. Jean has worked on a number of campaigns, not least in relation to human rights and LGBT rights, where she has a strong record. She's a member of the European Lesbian & Gay Intergroup. We welcome her back after being one of the key speakers at our 2006 IDAHO event. Speaker to be confirmed **from Conservative Party**.

**JUNE 12th - "THOMAS HARDY - PART OF OUR HUMANIST TRADITION?"** - Was Thomas Hardy a secularist or humanist? Derek Lennard considers the evidence.

**JULY 10th - "GALHA 30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS"** at the BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE, London EC2M 4QH. 6.30-8.30pm - A very special event. The following have confirmed their attendance and involvement: Peter Tatchell, and GALHA VP's: Michael Cashman, Professor Rob Tielman, Barbara Smoker, George Broadhead, Jim Herrick. (More information to follow: see [www.galha.org](http://www.galha.org)).

**SEPTEMBER - GALHA WEEKEND.**

**OCTOBER 9th - "Edward Carpenter - a Life of Liberty and Love"** - Edward Carpenter's biographer Sheila Rowbotham talks about his life and times.

**DECEMBER 11th - "CONWAY HALL - A CELEBRATION"** - Another 30th Anniversary event - this time - to celebrate the public meetings which have been held at Conway Hall. Readings from some of the speakers who have kindly given us talks during the years and surprise guests. Plus of course mulled wine and mince pies. (More details to be announced).

## NEW TO THE COMMITTEE



### Malcolm Trahearn

Born: 1939. Retired teacher of English living in Lichfield with his partner, Ifor Griffith, also a GALHA member.

His membership of GALHA dates from about 1980, when he and Ifor were attracted by the fact that the association had been "born of Mary". In the 70's they had been active in CHE and marched on the Gay News protest. Over the years he has served on the committee and nearly always attended the residential weekend, organising two of them. He is also a keen member of the National Secular Society and has recently retired after five-year stint on its council of management.

His interests are classical music, reading, photography and all things French.

### Mike Rickwood

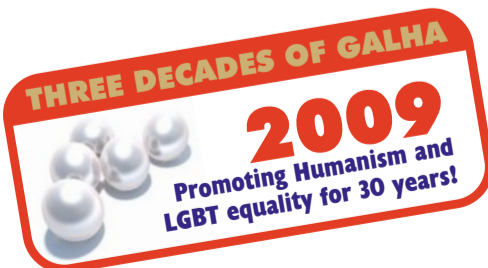
Mike Rickwood lives with his partner, Roy Heaps, in Isleworth, West London, where he was born in 1943.

In a career spanning over 40 years in Government service, more than half was devoted to negotiating international trade and transport agreements in the European Union and at the UN. He also spent time in project management and was subsequently Head of Change Management and then HR Director for a large Government Department, retiring in 2003.

In his younger days he was heavily involved with the Labour Party. He was a councillor in the London Borough of Hounslow from 1964-8 and chaired his constituency Labour Party in the 1970s and early 80s.

Mike's interests include music (he briefly played cello in the Middlesex Youth Orchestra), politics, walking and cycling (in the 1990s he and Roy climbed all the major passes in the French Alps).

Mike joined GALHA in 2006.



## FILM REVIEWS



### Crying Over Shot Milk

Henry Lawson

Every two years or so, we are presented with a "Hollywood Goes Gay" blockbuster, usually announced with a suitable fanfare. This year's offering dramatizes the life of Harvey Milk.

Whilst I often feel that the British in general, and gay people in particular often tend to hang too much on every development in the USA, (ignoring the fact that it often lags well behind Europe in areas such as gay marriage), there is no denying the importance of Milk. His influence, as the first openly gay elected official anywhere in the world (at least to my knowledge), belies the apparently lowly office that he briefly occupied, and in the month where we salute the world's first open gay head of a democratic Government, one feels that the new Icelandic premier could almost be called Johanna Harveysdottir.

But how does the film work as a drama? Certainly, from Gus Van Sant (responsible for the powerful, if disturbing My Own Private Idaho one would expect something intriguing. The tension builds up even though most of us are well aware of the inevitable denouement.

Despite his fame, I had few expectations of Sean Penn, but his Milk is plausible sympathetic and rounded, with his difficult but passionate relationship with his long-term boyfriend (played by a rather winsome James Franco) providing the underlying romantic interest that in Hollywood is almost de rigueur. The eventual failure of that relationship, and the suicide of Milk's subsequent boyfriend, suggest that being a "political husband" to a controversial politician was ever a veil of tears.

It has been claimed that the film sanitises Milk by glossing over his eager engagement in the promiscuity that seems to have been a feature of the 1970s San Francisco "scene", but surely that would have been a distraction

from the main point. After all, whilst a portrayal of, say a priapic President Kennedy would hardly be seen as "representative" straight man, a cruising Milk would certainly have been seized on to reinforce a gay stereotype. As long as there are so few major gay characters in mainstream films, each one has to carry more baggage than they can reasonably bear, whereas no one man or woman can reflect the extraordinary variety of gay life and experience.

There is also an interesting dramatic tension between Milk and his fellow board member and eventual nemesis. A further sign of the film's success is that it manages to make local government ward boundary changes seem dramatic and compelling. (No, honestly. Don't let that put you off...)

The link between the infamous Anti Gay Proposition 6 in California that Milk fought to defeat and the current fury over the passing of Prop 8, banning gay marriage in the same state 30 years on also makes it timely.

While the film does not touch on Milk's religion (he was of Jewish origin), it does highlight the infamous role played by Anita Bryant the one-time beauty queen and vociferous Southern Baptist who led the assault on gay rights in a swathe of US states, and who played a crucial role in galvanizing Milk. (She could, in essence be seen as a physically prettier but more sinister and effective American version of Mary Whitehouse).

Contemporaries claim that the film captures 70s San Francisco well, and I can believe this. Milk would have celebrated his 80th birthday next year. One likes to think that, had he lived, he would have been delighted at the progress made, but still eagerly manning the barricades to help fight the battles that we face today.

## Phelps Yelps Whelps

**TALKING POINT:** The notorious American Pastor Fred Phelps of the Westbro Baptist Church in Kansas - with his 'God Hates Fags' slogan has been banned from Britain. But what does that mean our Government is taking a harder stance on religious inciters of homophobia?

The answer is probably not. Phelps has cried wolf before. He's announced he's coming to the UK and hasn't even booked a ticket. He's then sat back and basked in the publicity. He is a caricature of a religious homophobe. He's banned, but other religious preachers of hate who couch their words in more civil tones attract no governmental rebukes. One might argue that Phelps's crime - if truth be told - is that he is brash and uncouth, not that he incites hatred of LGBT people. So does the Vatican! So do various Muslim leaders.

Will they be banned because of the substance of what they say or will they be excused because they say it politely or in riddles, while meaning the same thing as the

plain-speaking yahoo from Kansas?

Is it not the case that having banned Geert Wilders, the government needed to appear even-handed, so grasped the opportunity to preemptively ban Phelps - even though there was no evidence he was even on his way? Why did the government not respond to urgent requests from LGBT activists to stop people like Dr Qaradawi or Buju Banton from entering the country? Phelps has no constituency here to incite. Many other religious leaders do, but they come and go without interference.

Is it easier to ban cartoonish homophobes that to stand up to the real thing?

What's your view? Let us know!