



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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GALHA joins protest at 'cure gays' conference

After denouncing in the press an anti-gay conference run by Anglican Mainstream, GALHA members joined 100 protestors outside the Emmanuel Centre in London on 25th April. Entitled "Sex and the City" the aim of the conference was to promote a "cure" for homosexuality, the so-called "reparative therapy" devised by key speaker, American psychologist, Joseph Nicolosi. He is beloved of the Christian Right but held in contempt by the vast majority of his fellow professionals.

The protest brought a variety of groups together – some Christian – in a good-humoured but determined protest. A small body of police looked on, but the protest remained peaceful. The mood was lightened by the welcome presence of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Said GALHA's Derek Lennard: "This was one of the most united and important demos I have attended for a long time. But the fact that it was necessary at all in 2009 highlights the danger of religion dragging back the progress LGBT people have made over the last three decades."

GALHA secretary David Christmas added: "The fact 'reparative therapy' is

riddled with absurdities does not make it any the less dangerous. For 30 years, mainstream medicine and science have accepted that homosexuality is in no sense an illness, and as such, by definition, cannot be cured."

Humanists certainly don't believe that most religious believers are mad, despite their frequently believing in invisible beings, miracles and after-life experiences. And so it seems foolhardy for some Christians to claim that homosexuals are in any sense mentally ill. There is no evidence that subjecting gay people to indoctrination and reprogramming can change their underlying sexuality. It may encourage people to suppress their true feelings, often with disastrous consequences for themselves and for their marriage partners. It is preying upon the most vulnerable members of the gay community – those who are for any reason unhappy – in order to suck them into an intolerant and absolutist morality, without any regard for their needs or nature. The "ex-gay" movement is deeply flawed and intolerant. It is alien to British standards of respect, tolerance and simple common sense. Ed.

LGBT rights in the Press

Since our last issue in February there have been the familiar crop of mainly disturbing reports.

On 13th March we learned that Cardinal Keith O'Brien was urging Catholic families in Scotland to consider fostering children to prevent them from ending up with gay foster parents, claiming that "a mass of evidence attests to the instability of unmarried partnerships and the chronic instability of same-sex partnerships".

Later in the month, from Nigeria, we were treated to Archbishop Akinola's view of same-sex marriage: "Same sex marriage, apart from being ungodly, is unscriptural, unnatural, unprofitable, unhealthy, un-cultural, un-African and un-Nigerian. It is a perversion, a deviation and an aberration that is capable of engendering moral and social holocaust in this country. It is also capable of existinting [sic] mankind and as such should never be allowed to take root in Nigeria. Outlawing it is to ensure the continued existence of this nation. The need for doing this is urgent, compelling, and imperative."

Which makes the use on Northern Ireland radio of "abomination" to describe homosexuality by Mrs Iris Robinson, MP, seem rather mild. She also opined that

counselling could help those struggling with same-sex attraction. The Christian Institute was glad to learn that she was not to be prosecuted for inciting homophobic hatred.

More disturbingly, we learned on 27th March that a survey by University College London of 1400 health professionals working in psychiatry had found that one in six of them admitted to trying to "cure" gay patients.

The Pope has had an appalling press. Caught rehabilitating a holocaust-denying bishop and claiming that condoms would not stop the spread of AIDS in Africa, he has nevertheless been invited to make a state, not a pastoral visit to Britain. Then upon the welcome retirement of Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, we learned that the Pope had ignored pleas from bishops not to appoint the hardline Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Birmingham to replace him.

However, the silver lining to this cloud was that we had a letter in the Guardian. Writing as a committee member Malcolm Trahearn referred to Nichols' aggressive promotion of a homophobic agenda – and succeeded in getting in a plug for GALHA's 30th anniversary.

Finally, John Hunt's publicity for debaptism was a triumph.



John with GALHA VP Darren Johnson holding his NSS debaptism certificate

GALHA member John Hunt debaptises – and causes a stir

GALHA member John Hunt felt so strongly about being signed up for religion at a tender age that he decided to take on the church to "debaptise". Here is his account of what happened.

"After reading in October 2007 that a gay man in Spain, Mañuel Blat González, had won a court ruling under Spanish data protection legislation that he could have the record of his baptism stricken from the baptismal register, I emailed the Church of England, hoping to do the same.

"Six months later, after resorting to recorded delivery as emails remained unacknowledged, I was advised by the diocese where the ritual child abuse was performed that they had taken legal advice. They claimed that the entry could not be deleted, as it recorded a historic event - little suspecting quite how historic it might prove to be. They recommended instead that I should agree wording with the National Secular Society and then place an announcement in the London Gazette: an obscure official journal dating from the time of the Great Plague in 1665. The church could then keep a copy of the announcement with the baptismal register, and add a cross-reference to the entry.

"I consulted the NSS, agreed wording, and paid £81 for a standard announcement, (the first of its kind), which was published on 23rd May, 2008. However, as a letter sent by recorded delivery to the parish priest was returned three weeks later, marked "not called for", this instilled no faith that he would archive a copy in perpetuity.

"In March 2009 the BBC arranged to report the story. The Bishop of Croydon agreed to be filmed, but refused to meet me to accept a copy of the London Gazette. He claims not to understand why a baptised nonbeliever should wish to revoke the ritual, claiming that it is like airbrushing people out of photographs.

"After the BBC coverage on breakfast news and World Service, the story was picked up by local, national, and international press.

Ruth Gledhill, Religion Correspondent at The Times, explained that "The case is significant because it could ultimately cost the Church of England and the other Anglican churches in the UK nearly all of their 25,336,000 official members", adding that, although the CoE "claims it does not use baptismal figures in counting its membership", it does supply them to other bodies. These figures are then used, for example, to calculate how many antediluvian bishops should sit in the House of Lords, where they oppose abortion, euthanasia, and LGBTIQ equality.

"Fortunately there is a much cheaper way than paying for an announcement in the London Gazette, as the NSS will supply a Debaptism Certificate for just £3: and monthly sales will provide statistics. The Church of England Newspaper reported at the end of March, as its lead story, that 1500 people paid to be debaptised in just one week."

Helped by the publicity John has generated and fuelled by the words and deeds of a reactionary Vatican, debaptism has taken off internationally and probably provided powerful encouragement to the ex-muslim movement and discouragement to politicians eager to privilege religion. "Is the House of God finally being exposed as a house of cards?" writes John. "We must abandon stoning sinners and intoning to the heavens, and concentrate upon saving our ecosystem in this world."

John Hunt has been a member of OutRage! since 1995, and is a Green Party candidate on the London list for the European elections on 4th June. He gains no financial benefit from sales of NSS Debaptism Certificates: but encourages all baptised nonbelievers to purchase one – or more, to give as Winter Solstice presents. He is also encouraging people to sign the "Number 10" petition to secularise the monarchy, (with wording that should be acceptable both to monarchists and to republicans), at: <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/SecularMonarchy/>

Talking Point - "Tweeters"

The GALHA Newsletter really doesn't have the space for readers' letters. So I am inviting very brief observations, no more than 200 characters (a few more than on Twitter!) on an issue which I shall set out as briefly as possible.

GALHA AGMs should be in London. Distant weekend venues difficult and expensive to get to. Therefore not democratic. Could be popular if associated with social events. (138 characters)

Contributions ("Tweeters"?) by letter to: Galha Newsletter Editor, 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD; by email newsletter@galha.org.uk; or text message 07971579544. Ed.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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

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

MAY 15TH EUROPEAN ELECTIONS QUESTION TIME - A special meeting to mark the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO). A panel of prominent politicians and campaigners will answer questions on the threat to LGBT rights in Europe and issues relating to the European Elections, to be held on June 4th. The panellists are: **Jonathan Fryer** (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 is a broadcaster on "From our own Correspondent". He is also an out gay man, and a biographer of Oscar Wilde.); **Mary Honeyball** (Labour member of the European Parliament for London since 2000. She is a staunch supporter of human rights, particularly women's rights in Europe. She campaigns for a separation of religion and politics and is a prominent supporter of the British Humanist Association.); **Jean Lambert** (This Green party MEP has worked on many campaigns and has a strong record in relation to LGBT Rights and Human Rights. She is also a prominent member of the Lesbian and Gay Intergroup. A key speaker at the 2006 IDAHO event.); **Warwick Lightfoot** (One of the prospective European parliamentary candidates for London, he has been Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea, Special Advisor to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer and has had 20 years experience as a councillor.)

JUNE 12th THOMAS HARDY - PART OF OUR HUMANIST TRADITION?

GALHA Programme Coordinator, Derek Lennard, considers the philosophy of this great author and poet with particular reference to his novels. Was Hardy fundamentally a pessimist, a nihilist or a humanist?

JULY 10TH GALHA SPECIAL 30TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT AT THE BISHOPSGATE INSTITUTE.

Please note the full address of the Bishopsgate Institute is 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2M 4QH, and this meeting starts at 6.30PM and ends at 8.30PM. A truly unique and special event to celebrate GALHA's 30th Anniversary, which includes an exhibition about GALHA's work, reflections and recollections of GALHA founding members about the organisation's early years, and talks exploring the historical context of LGBT campaigning. Speakers will include veteran human rights campaigner **Peter Tatchell**, and GALHA Vice President, **Michael Cashman**. Other luminaries of the humanist/secularist and LGBT worlds will also be contributing to this event*. In addition to all this, the CHE/Derek Oyston Award in conjunction with GALHA will be given to the winning campaigner who has made a particularly outstanding contribution to the LGBT community. GALHA is pleased to welcome the Campaign for Homosexual Equality to this event who will be celebrating their 40th Anniversary. Catering will be provided. Free admission: places can be reserved in advance or will be available on the door. (Phone 020 7392 9200). www.bishopsgate.org.uk. *GALHA Guests include GALHA VPs George Broadhead, Jim Herrick, Maryam Namazie and Dutch veteran activist, Rob Tielman.

SEPTEMBER 4TH TO 7TH: GALHA WEEKEND AND CONFERENCE AT THE VERMONT HOTEL, NEWCASTLE.

See accompanying details.

OCTOBER 9TH. THE GAY DIVORCEE-A TALK BY PAUL BURSTON.

Award winning author and journalist, **Paul Burston** will talk about his new book "The Gay Divorcee", ("Some partnerships aren't that civil"). He will be talking partly based on his own experience about the reality of gay civil partnership and divorce. You can read more about Paul on www.paulburston.com/biog.html

NOVEMBER 13TH. EDWARD CARPENTER-A LIFE OF LIBERTY AND LOVE.

Sheila Rowbotham, drawing on her well received biography of Carpenter considers the lives and loves of this gay socialist pioneer.

SATURDAY 14TH NOVEMBER: GALHA LUNCH. CAFÉ DES AMIS, SOHO, LONDON. 12.30PM FOR 1.00PM.

Food, wine and a very special guest of honour.

DECEMBER 11TH. CONWAY HALL - A CELEBRATION.

Our final celebratory 30th Anniversary Event will celebrate the public meetings which have been held at Conway Hall. There will be readings from some of the guests who have kindly given us talks during the year and surprise guests. Plus of course, mulled wine and mince pies.

ANNIVERSARIES

THREE DECADES OF GALHA

2009
Promoting Humanism and
LGBT equality for 30 years!

This is a year of notable anniversaries. Events worldwide have marked the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth. No doubt plans are in hand to celebrate the 150th anniversary in November of his *On the Origins of Species*. Between the Darwin dates the 200th anniversary of Tom Paine's death will be commemorated on the 8th of June. Born in Thetford, Norfolk, of humble stock, he influenced events in this country, America and France. A radical, republican and deist, his writings were of immense value to generations of secularists and freethinkers.

The 30th anniversary of GALHA's foundation may be regarded as being of lesser note. It is significant nonetheless. Campaigning groups appear frequently, only to fade away when the initial excitement has subsided. But GALHA has stayed the course, an active part of the broad Secularist-Humanist movement.

In my roles as Secretary of the National Secular Society and Editor of *The Freethinker*, I have been closely associated with GALHA from the start. For some reason I was asked to speak at its first public meeting, held in Brighton to coincide with a CHE conference. On that occasion, I warned that reforms already achieved were not invulnerable. Political and religious reactionaries were influential in Parliament, newspaper offices and broadcasting studios. They still are.

Over the last three decades religious pressure groups have campaigned incessantly against reforms relating to abortion, divorce, sex-education, Sunday trading and the theatre. Vitriolic anti-gay propaganda from the same source has been assiduously promoted by the gutter press, resulting in countless attacks upon gay men.

The sour-faced Stephen Green and his Christian Voice crusaders have never accepted that in 1967 Parliament decriminalised homosexual acts by consenting adults. They show a suspiciously obsessive interest in events like Gay Pride. During one of his protests in Brighton, Stephen Green had an unexpected visitation from on high when a seagull crapped on him. Even wimpish gay Christians "could scarce forbear to cheer". (GALHA may consider adopting the seagull as its symbol. Just a thought.)

Today Britain is in the grip of a religious pincer movement from West and East. The union of George W Bush and Tony Blair has facilitated the spreads of American-style Christian fundamentalism. Now our education system is polluted by creationism



by Bill McIlroy

and other unscientific fallacies. Faith-based social services are becoming the norm in some areas and medical research is being hindered by the pro-life lobby.

From the East, adherents to Islam, particularly young men, are increasing in numbers and influence. The wake-up call was largely ignored when mobs were burning books and rampaging through city streets demanding the death of the writer Salman Rushdie. A dozen years on, gender segregation in education and sport, prayer rooms in municipal buildings, compensation for "injury to feelings" and privileged conditions of employment are in constant demand and usually conceded.

Despite set-backs and increasing threats to personal freedom, there is cause for satisfaction. Reforms achieved in the Sixties have been defended. After a campaign dating back to the early 19th century, the infamous blasphemy law has been abolished. Hundreds of churches have closed or been forced to merge with others in an alliance of the doomed. Christian social teachings are widely publicised but generally ignored.

All things considered, we are fortunate to be living in the land of Darwin and Paine.

Long associated with GALHA and quite recently becoming a member, Bill is a veteran and distinguished campaigner known also for his mischievous sense of humour. Now in his eighties he is the very active meetings secretary of Brighton and Hove Humanists, one of the most successful local humanist groups in the country. Ed.



GALHA at Gay Pride

GALHA members Ifor Griffith and Paul Allen sporting cheeky T-shirt slogans. One from the past – "Lead me into Temptation, PLEASE" and the atheist bus advice "There is probably no God, so stop worrying and enjoy your life". Paul is GALHA's Gay Pride organiser.

Paul fronted the GALHA stall at no fewer than six events in 2008. He writes: "The stalls were very successful last year and raised the GALHA profile, building on the year before and we hope to continue this year. We had a peak of interest and membership applications after the summer season of stalls. We gave out BHA materials too and were raising the awareness of humanism generally. The interest in the Greater Manchester Local group was so great as a result of our joint stall, they are looking to setup a special interest group for LGBT people. We will again attempt to run the stalls jointly with local Humanist groups."

Any members who can volunteer to help will be very welcome. We do need to have a female and a male face on a stall as GALHA is struggling to increase female participation in the organisation.

The Gay Pride events kick off in Birmingham on 23rd-24th May, with Ifor helping.

