

### 'Spirituality' is escapist, shallow and self-indulgent

'The great religions are more than spirituality. They pose the question: how do we translate our private experiences into the public world we share and make? How do we turn our intimations of eternity into a more gracious order of acts, relationships and institutions? How do we escape not from but into reality? How do we move from soul to society? That is why, while spirituality changes our mood, religion changes our life. Yes, there is much positive about our search for spirituality, but there is also something escapist, shallow and self-indulgent. Just as street protest is the attempt to achieve the results of politics without the hard work of politics, so the current cult of spirituality is the attempt to achieve the results of religion without the disciplines, codes and commitments of religion. That is not good news.' (Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks [*Times* 2005; 24 August] cited in *SMJ* 2005;45(1):3-4 [www.smj.org.uk/0205/spirit.htm](http://www.smj.org.uk/0205/spirit.htm))

### 2,000-year-old seed germinates

A date palm grown from a 2,000-year-old seed found during excavations at Masada, Israel is now 12 inches tall. It is believed to be the oldest seed ever germinated. The Judean date palm died out in the Middle Ages but had been valued for its medicinal properties. Researchers at the Louis Borick Natural Medicine Research Centre in Jerusalem hope the plant may help in the development of new medicines. If the sapling survives it will not bear fruit for about 30 years, and only if it is female. (*Independent* 2005; 14 June)

### Relief of poverty comes before population control

The president of the Indian Medical Association has called for India to adopt a one-child policy similar to China's. A number of states already use coercive methods to prevent large families, such as the withholding of government jobs, benefits and subsidies if couples have more than three children. Ashish Bose, a demographer, who disagrees with coercive population control said, 'In a democracy when people want employment, drinking water and literacy, one cannot distribute contraceptives and ask them to solve the population first.' (*BioEdge* 2005; 10 May)

### Fake acupuncture as good as the real thing

In a study of more than 300 patients, both genuine and sham acupuncture reduced the intensity of headache compared to no treatment at all. But real acupuncture was no better than needles placed at non-acupuncture points on the body. (*JAMA* 2005;293:2118-2125)

### Religious hate law revolt fails

The government has survived a backbench revolt over its plans for a new law to ban incitement to religious hatred. Critics, including comic actor Rowan Atkinson, The National Secular Society and the Evangelical Alliance say the measure will limit freedom of expression. But Home Secretary Charles Clarke says the bill protects 'people not faiths'. Clarke, apparently motivated by a desire to win back Muslim votes lost over the Iraq war, had previously written a letter of apology to the mosques of Britain for failing to get the incitement of religious hatred proposals through Parliament before the election. (*IRIB News* 2005; 12 April, [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/4114582.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4114582.stm))

### As easy as ABC?

Uganda's ABC programme (abstinence, being faithful, condoms) has led to dramatic decreases in HIV infection rates for over a decade. No country in the world has seen its HIV incidence fall through condom promotion alone. Changes in primary sexual behaviour are always present when HIV rates decline. There are valid criticisms of the ABC approach but its critics and proponents alike should work together if the Ugandan success is to be maintained and replicated in other countries. (*PMJ* 2005;81:273-275)

### New website tells stories of women's abortion regrets

[www.tellmyabortionstory.com](http://www.tellmyabortionstory.com) is a web site that provides a confidential place for those who have experienced abortion to share their stories. The site allows visitors to read stories by women who have experienced abortion, written in their own words, and to share their stories with others.

### Bedside Bibles to stay

In response to a wave of protests Leicester hospital bosses decided to reverse a decision to remove Bibles from the bedsides of patients amid concerns over offending non-Christians and spreading MRSA. Leicester-based Gideons International, which distributes the Bibles, had described the proposal as 'outrageous' and Muslim and Hindu leaders had also condemned it as medically non-sensical and motivated by political correctness. ([news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/4077988.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/leicestershire/4077988.stm))

### Did Jesus die from a blood clot?

Jesus may have died from a blood clot in his lungs according to Israeli doctors. Dr Benjamin Brenner from Rambam Medical Centre bases his theory on New Testament and contemporary religious sources about the crucifixion. He believes Jesus developed a deep vein thrombosis in his legs while nailed to the cross, which then travelled from his legs to his lungs and killed him. Other scientists have dismissed the theory and Bible scholars have said the spirituality behind Jesus' death is more important than his mode of death. ([news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4075936.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4075936.stm))

### Lottery money funds abortion

Scotland's Cardinal Keith O'Brien has called for a boycott of the National Lottery over what he described as 'blatant misuse of funds'. The lottery has granted some £3.3 million to pro-abortion organisations such as Brook Advisory Centres and the FPA. Cardinal O'Brien said, 'I am quite staggered at the volume of funds provided to these agencies, which is in stark contrast to the lack of support for organisations offering alternative approaches.' (*The Scotsman* 2005; 14 March)

### Cannabis link to road accidents proven

Heavy cannabis users are 10 times more likely to be injured, or to injure others, in car accidents, researchers have found. The scientists from the University of Auckland, New Zealand, say their study is the first proof that there is a link between using cannabis and accidents. Previously, there was only laboratory research and post mortem evidence. (*Addiction* 2005;100(5):605)