



Free service at the Medicines Information Centre

To the Editor: It is with great pleasure that we announce the re-introduction of the free service of the Medicines Information Centre at the University of Cape Town Medical School to all health professionals throughout South Africa, effective immediately.

To those very kind supporters who helped us through a tough period with subscription fees, we say a sincere thank you.

The Centre is open for all drug-related queries, Mondays to Fridays, from 08h30 to 17h00. Our direct lines are 086 110 0531, 021 406 6829, 021 406 6780, and 021 406 6783. You're also most welcome to pay us a visit to see how we operate.

With our good wishes for a happy and healthy 2005.

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What Islam does not need is a pope!

To the Editor: Having read your editorial in the June 2004 *SAMJ*,¹ we were astounded by the unwarranted and unfounded statements that were made by yourself. It appears that you too have climbed onto the Islamophobia bandwagon that is currently in vogue in the Western countries, notably the USA.

It is a well-known fact that the vast majority of Muslims throughout the world have been and are being immunised against polio as well as other infectious diseases. To say that immunisation activities in Nigeria were brought to a halt because of 'exhortation against immunisation by Islamic clerics' on the basis of flimsy evidence is therefore unbecoming of somebody with a scientific background. In fact, according to a recent report, it is people with a political agenda who appear to be responsible for such a state of affairs. More often than not lack of education among the people themselves rather than the words of clerics is the root cause of the failure to institute a mass immunisation programme in such countries.

You then go on to lambast Islam by quoting Christina Lamb, a Western writer, whose book is undoubtedly biased and based on prejudice. It would have been far better had you also read the book by Yvonne Ridley, a Scottish woman who was detained during the Taliban reign, to get a balanced overview. She highlighted the tremendous respect afforded to

her as a woman by the very same Taliban people who you have demonised on the basis of writings of some Western journalists who have a vendetta against the Muslims. Granted there could have been some excesses, which would be likely to occur in any society undergoing a transition, but on the whole women could walk the length and breadth of Afghanistan with impunity without being molested. Moreover, during the Taliban era the abolition of the opium trade as well as sanctity of family life and absence of crime were the order of the day, in contrast to the post-Taliban era, where the opium trade is once more flourishing and anarchy is the rule. Of interest is that the present US-appointed president, Hamid Kharzai, controls just a small area around his headquarters in Khabul.

You then discuss terrorism, implying that it is an exclusive domain of Islam while ignoring the even greater acts of terrorism of the US government and its lackey, the British government, in its unwarranted invasion of Iraq with a total disregard of international law; not to mention the atrocities, only some of which have been exposed, in the infamous Abu Ghraib Prison and the Guantanamo Bay torture camp. The massacre in Rwanda and Burundi and in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila should be seen in a similar light. The perpetrators were Christians. Christianity has a Pope, but he remains silent or powerless in stopping such atrocities being committed by Christians. Nor has he been of any help in resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland that has been going on for over three centuries. In spite of the presence of the Pope the Nazis managed to kill millions of Jews, Gypsies and Russians during World War II. Moreover, the massacre of worshippers in the Hebron mosque by one Goldstein in the name of his religion has elevated him to the status of a hero in the eyes of the Jewish settlers in the region, culminating in a monument in his name.

You appear to be applying different standards by invoking only one religious grouping. It would have been far better had you directed your venom at the likes of Bush, who launched his 'Crusade' in Afghanistan and is still hell bent on pursuing his missions elsewhere, and Blair, who is blindly following Bush — reminiscent of our own notorious apartheid era where might was right and no attention whatsoever was paid to any moral or ethical principles. Moreover, it would have been appropriate to highlight the wanton loss of life and destruction of property perpetrated by the Americans in Iraq with the use of warheads with depleted uranium and the horrific daisy bombs instead of launching your own personal crusade against Islam.

Such an unwarranted attack on a religion as has been displayed in your editorial appears to be without precedent in the history of any scientific journal.

In closing, Sir, Islam does not need a pope because Muslims have their divinely revealed book, viz. The Quran. For your information the caliphs of the past were certainly not popes,



but responsible for the everyday running of both the temporal and religious affairs of the community based on the teachings of the Quran, which is still available today in its original form. It provides guidance for all Muslims.

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1. Ncayiyana DJ. What Islam does not need is a pope! (Editorial). *S Afr Med J* 2004; 94: 385.

Cancer and the prediction of death by oncologists

To the Editor: The diagnosis that one has cancer comes as a great shock. Many people immediately accept it as a death sentence, while a few resolve to fight the disease. On top of this

traumatic situation, oncologists predict the death of the patient when their treatment fails.

When my late wife was diagnosed with cancer of the ovaries, both she and I went into shock. I urged her not to take the diagnosis as a death sentence. The first thing the oncologist asked us to do was to have an interview with the counsellor at the oncology department. One visit was all we could take. She started off by saying that people with cancer are lucky because cancer is a slow-developing disease and that it gives one time to prepare for death. That is not what we wanted to hear. We wanted to be given hope for life, not a lecture on how to prepare for death! The treatment my wife received was not successful. Instead of keeping the hope of life alive in her, the oncologist asked her to prepare for death within a month or two. My wife was devastated by the news. Once again we went to the counsellor who immediately started to prepare for the funeral. She contacted the hospice, and advised us on funeral undertakers. The very people to whom we turned to keep our hope alive wanted my wife dead. That is what their advice amounted to.

She gave up on life and almost fulfilled the oncologist's prediction. Fortunately we changed doctors. Our new doctor encouraged her to live and did everything possible to