



# The Power of Critical Thinking

fundamentals in the declaration are part of what the Pride marchers are fighting for. The first fundamental says that we believe in “**the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others**” and that “**humanists have a duty of care to all humanity**”. In other words if we do not actively support the harmless actions of homosexuals the blood from the next gay bashing is on our hands too.

1. The second fundamental says,
2. **“Humanism is rational”**. If we
3. support rationalism then we must
4. be against superstition in all its
5. forms. Homophobia stems purely
6. from religious superstition. Its is as
7. natural as heterosexuality.
8. **“Humanism... supports**
9. **human rights”**. Human rights
10. are being curtailed by homophobic
11. individuals and by a homophobic
12. law. To sit quietly by, therefore is
13. immoral.

4) and 5) I will mention at the end.

1. The sixth says we should support
2. **“creativity and imagination”**.
3. The Pride march is a creative act in
4. itself. It is a transcending the status
5. quo of political descent and turning
6. it into a surrealist ‘situation’. It is
7. (to misquote the bible) strength that
8. comes forth from sweetness, and (to
9. misquote André Breton) a bomb tied
10. in pink ribbon.
11. Humanism should be **“a**
12. **rational means of addressing**
13. **the challenges of our time”**.
14. That is to say that humanism should
15. not be a philosophy of quietism. As
16. it says in the fourth ‘fundamental’,
17. **“liberty must be combined**
18. **with social responsibility”**. I
19. am, and most of the rest of us are,
20. heterosexual, and so we are lucky
21. enough to be provided with the
22. liberties that are denied others. We
23. must use, then, the liberties that we
24. are provided with to get the same for
25. them.

The fifth statement says humanism is responding **“to a demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion”**. The Pride march IS that demand. Let us then respond to it!

## NOTES

[1] “Gay Discrimination ‘Normal’ in Northern Ireland” BBC News ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/3105241.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3105241.stm))

[2] PSNI Hate Crimes Statistics. ([http://www.psnipolice.uk/3\\_hate\\_incidents\\_and\\_crimes-4.pdf](http://www.psnipolice.uk/3_hate_incidents_and_crimes-4.pdf)) □

**I WAS BORN** on the Shankill Road. I went to Mayo Street Primary, the Boys’ Model, and Inst. In those schools I met not a single Catholic, nor did I have a single Catholic friend. I was fed a diet of anti-Catholic propaganda from my father (who was a Paisleyite, although he never entered a church in his life), some of my teachers, some of my BB leaders, and all of my friends. On the other hand, everything that was said about Protestantism was positive. Not a negative word was heard about the Protestant faith.

At about seventeen I decided I wanted to leave the BB because I no longer believed in a god. My parents accepted this decision without demur. I remember three of us at Inst. going to the vice-principal and asking to be excused Assembly on the grounds that we were agnostic. “Oh, in that case, you have an open mind and can go along and listen”, he said. After that, I decided I definitely wanted to call myself an atheist. But I was still very much a Protestant atheist with my anti-catholicism intact.

Then I went to Trinity. At that time there was a ban by the infamous Archbishop McQuaid on Catholics attending the university, but a few defied it, and there were English Catholics of Irish descent. Two local Catholic men, one who had trained for the priesthood but dropped out, one English Catholic woman and a Dublin ex-Jew became among my best friends. Although they were critical of the Catholic faith, the other four were also critical of the Puritanism that dominated up North.

At first, I resisted their arguments, but they hectored and hectored, and eventually I realised that they were right to do so, and I began to see that there were faults in Protestantism too, faults that I hadn’t thought about because I was too busy in my own mind finding fault with Catholicism.

Eventually, I was able to progress beyond both Orange and Green to something better than either. Now that is the

power of being exposed to some negative thinking about your own tradition and upbringing. And that’s why it is important to be negative as well as positive, though I prefer ‘critical’ to ‘negative’.

Humanists stand for reason. But how do you promote reason without attacking the irrationality of so much behaviour? If a government acts irrationally, for example, by declaring war on false premises, then would it not be a humanist imperative to criticise its actions?

Humanists stand for love and compassion – in short, humaneness. But how do you promote these things without criticising man’s inhumanity? If people or animals are cruelly treated or abused, aren’t we right to condemn it?

Humanists stand for justice. But how do you promote justice without pointing out the social and economic injustices: the slavery, the trafficking of women and children, the homophobia, the poverty, the discrimination?

Humanists stand for freedom. But how do you promote freedom without challenging the threats to it – the censorship, the imprisonments without trial, the tortures, the hangings?

Humanists stand also for scepticism. We are natural doubters who are suspicious of beliefs in general. But how do you promote scepticism and doubt without being negative?

You cannot do any of these things without being negative, but the end goals are positive, a better and a happier world free from the barriers that get in the way of our better nature. We teach the young to develop critical thought, so why on earth should we abandon it when we become adults?

So, I say, it is stuff and nonsense to criticise humanists for being too negative. Let us have the courage to stand up and speak on behalf of all the good things and the courage to attack all the bad things. But let us keep our attacks as impersonal as we can. It is ideas, systems and institutions that should be our targets rather than individuals. **BMCC** □

