

# WANTED: DISCRIMINATING MINDS

In March 2006, an employment tribunal ruled that an atheist teacher working at a Catholic school in Glasgow should not have been (lawfully) discriminated against because of his 'religious' beliefs when he applied for a pastoral management post. This ruling may have far-reaching implications for all schools with a religious character, right across the UK.

For me, the situation which first prompted the tribunal, begs two obvious questions:

- why would an atheist want to work in a Catholic school?
- why would a Catholic school recruit an atheist teacher?

I cannot imagine a life-long vegetarian wanting to take up a management position with the British Meat Federation or a committed vegan wanting to be a spokesperson for the Association of British Abattoir Operators. Nor can I imagine a situation where the British Meat Federation or the Association of British Abattoir Operators would contemplate wanting to recruit non-carnivores in the first place!

Would we seriously expect an evangelical Christian or an orthodox Jew to take on a leadership role with the British Humanist Association or the Secular Society? And why would either of those organisations want to recruit God-fearing souls into their upper echelons anyway?! Similarly, would it be appropriate for a member of the

Labour party to work at Conservative Central Office or for a Tory to work at Millbank?

Surely it must be right for a women's refuge or women's rape crisis centre to have the right to advertise for, short-list, interview and appoint only women. And, wouldn't it make sense for a GLBT counselling service to be staffed by gay/lesbian/bi-sexual/transgender counsellors?

My point is simple: in a functioning plural and liberal democracy organisations should be both entitled and expected to lawfully discriminate in favour of individuals whose beliefs and lifestyle match the aims and values of the organisation. Conversely, organisations must have the legal right not to appoint and/or promote individuals whose value-system is patently at odds with those of the organisation.

Schools with a religious character (eg church/Christian schools) should be free to discriminate in favour of authentic followers of the faith whose thoughts, words and actions are consistent with the long-held teachings of that religion. In other words, church/Christian schools

should have the right to advertise for, short-list, interview and appoint practising Christians and only practising Christians.

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'discrimination' and 'positive discrimination' like this:

#### **discrimination**

- *noun* 1. the action of discriminating against people; 2. recognition of the difference between one thing and another; 3. good judgement or taste.

#### **positive discrimination**

- *noun* the favouring of individuals belonging to groups which suffer discrimination.

As Christians we see discrimination as a positive part of God's plan for humanity. We make choices and we live with the consequences. The Bible tells us that discernment, knowledge and wisdom are spiritual gifts which bring spiritual insights and enable us to 'discriminate' between what is good and what is not; what is likely to succeed and what is likely to fail; what matches God's plan for the world and what goes against it.

■ Rupert Kaye

### The Equality Bill

The Equality Bill sets out to replace three bodies – The Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission – with one: a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

CEHR will also have responsibility for enforcing Human Rights Law and legislation relating to Religious Discrimination and Sexual Orientation Discrimination.

On 20 December 2005 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) wrote to a number of faith-based education stakeholders to advise them of a proposal to extend to all schools regulations to make discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation unlawful.

As part of the consultation process the Association of Christian Teachers (ACT) submitted a formal, written response. This can be found in the *News and Comments* section of the ACT website: [www.christian-teachers.org.uk](http://www.christian-teachers.org.uk)