

A RANT TOO FAR?

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Dedicated to my wife, Annie

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On writing this book I really need to thank the many friends who offered me anecdotes and, above all, encouragement to stay the course and complete the job. Help that I asked for was always generously and freely given with offers for more if needed. Above all, the encouragement and support received from my family was supreme.

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About the Author

Fraser Blake was born in Johannesburg, South Africa but left there as a baby and was brought up in Eritrea until the age of 11 when he was sent to boarding school in Scotland. There he attended a couple of minor public schools until he was 18. Neither school was a great success when it came to learning or career advice and he left with no clue as to what he might do for a career. His father suggested he join the B.S.A. Police in Rhodesia. He felt this would help to 'mature' him. So he joined the force in 1962.

In 1965 Ian Smith declared independence and he felt it was time to leave. A state of emergency had been declared so he had to find a roundabout route out of the police as no officers were being released. He did this by joining the immigration service. Inter governmental changes were allowed. It was much easier to resign from this department after the minimum service period of 1 year. So he was an Immigration Officer for a year at the end of which he resigned and returned to Britain. The idea was to further his education. He had left school with only four 'O' levels so he had to attend night school to study for more exams.

In Manchester he was offered a job with the Ministry of Employment. Whilst working there finding work for the unemployed, a job came in from a brand new shop called Mothercare. This was for a storeman/driver and the wage offered was nearly double what he was getting as a lowly civil servant. He applied and got the job. He worked there for the following 9 months when he achieved the necessary exams to gain entry to St. John's College in York, to train as a teacher. After the 3 year course he received a Teacher's Certificate and then went on to complete a B.Ed. (Hons) degree at Leeds University. He taught at Danesmead Secondary Modern School in York for a year when a very attractive job in Saudi Arabia was advertised in a Sunday paper. The attractive

part was that it more than doubled his salary again. In 1974 he took a very rapid commercial TEFL course and applied and was offered the job.

In September 1974 he went to teach English in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for three years. Here, he very quickly learned to speak Arabic whilst his young Arab charges, in common with many children learning a foreign language, paid scant attention to their English lessons. At the end of his third year he was head hunted by a building company because of his ability to speak Arabic. Returning to England in 1978 he bought, along with a partner, a small printing works which he managed for about ten years. At the same time he had a share in a North Yorkshire pub for a couple of years.

In 1990 he decided to change his life again and went to try his luck selling houses in France where he has been ever since. He enjoys reading, writing and wine tasting in small privately owned vineyards.

Definition in Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language

rant 1. *v.i.* to use bombastic language, esp. in public speaking, [of an actor] to be declamatory in a ludicrously exaggerated way, to be noisily angry, *v.t.* to utter with exaggerated emphasis 2. *n.* a piece of ranting [obs. Du. *randten*, to rave]

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>		1
Rant 1	On Religion	3
Rant 2	On Islam	21
Rant 3	On Government, Local and National	37
Rant 4	On Freedom	57
Rant 5	On The Fragility of Personal Rights	59
Rant 6	On Inter Governmental Relations and the 'Special Relationship'	75
Rant 7	On American Nationalism	83
Rant 8	On US Treatment of Native Americans	89
Rant 9	On the Real 'Special Relationship'	91
Rant 10	On the United States and Trading	99
Rant 11	On Education	103
Rant 12	On The European Union and The Commission	111
Rant 13	On Britain and The European Union	115
Rant 14	On Polarity in Politics	119
Rant 15	On the Economy	123
Rant 16	On Global Warming	125

Rant 17	On Slavery	131
Rant 18	On 'Use By' Dates and Food Wastage	133
Rant 19	On the Sanctity of Property	135
Rant 20	On the Difference Between 'Rip-Off' Britain and 'People-Friendly' France	139
	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	149

INTRODUCTION

This book is the end product of years of dinner parties at my French home that involved guests who were well-informed and opinionated, and with whom the exchanges set about sorting out the problems of the world. What I have written is intended both as a summary of what has frustrated me and them and, in response, presents an historical perspective that hopefully provides an insight into many of the complex issues that were raised.

However, please do not view this work as having academic pretension. Rather it is offered as a pocket-sized source of reference material that might inspire argument, and counter argument, at your own *soirees*..... from the welcoming *aperitifs* until well into the night.

My RANT has been carefully researched, but if omissions and errors have been incorporated inadvertently I apologise.

Cheers then, to your next [good-humoured] dinner-table debate!



A soiree in Northern France

RANT 1: ON RELIGION

The most important thing about religion and a point most people like to forget, or even deny, is that it is man-made. In general the gods of old were seen or could be seen, they were either statues or stones or obelisks, or objects like the sun or the moon or even a mountain. The Jews were probably the first nation to come up with a totally unseen god. This was a very good idea for the rulers and priests as it relied on faith and could not be disproved, nor proved for that matter. Christianity and then Islam followed the same route and the same god although this would be difficult to recognise from the interaction between the three religions ever since. All the creators of the main religions have been men, as in Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, and most of the prophets of the Old Testament were also men although there were one or two women. They all claimed direct lines to God but at the end of the day they were men and during their lives were just seen as such. Like all men, they were born of a mother and a father in the normal way, lived a life and died as do all humans. During their lives they may have become great leaders or sometimes were shunned as were many of the prophets of old but they all backed their leadership with 'words from god'. However, not until after their deaths did any of their followers ever succeed in getting the same line. God only speaks to those who want to hear and if you want to hear that badly then no doubt you will. None were deified during their lifetime, rather this was an honour accorded them long after their deaths. There has never ever been a single provable instance throughout history of God - any god - revealing itself to man - any man or woman, or even talking to anyone. It is always a person on his or her own who hears the voice or sees the vision and never a group of people. Also, apart from Adam who never actually existed, it is never god but one of his closest helpers, as in an angel. Many men

and fewer women claim that they are in direct communication or that they speak to God but this is easily said and no doubt some of them genuinely believe it. What we [that is mankind in general] have not come anywhere near understanding yet is the power and intricacies of the human mind. You can think yourself into anything so why not a message from heaven or god? There are those who use the word of god to their own disreputable ends and often seem to get a following. The general public can be a very gullible lot and many of these preachers, holy men, gurus, call them what you like, became very rich off the pickings of their followers. For example, Joseph Smith of the Mormons, L. Ron Hubbard and his Scientology, and Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church, to name but a few. These three alone can count their followers in millions and there is always a monetary element to their following. The faithful have to give a certain percentage or all of their money to the movement. The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is another example. He was leader of the Spiritual Regeneration Movement and managed to attract many celebrities among his followers and actually had a fleet of Rolls Royces at his disposal. Then there are the real baddies such as Jim Jones, sometimes called 'the Reverend'. He was another leader who managed to con people into following him. Although his followers numbered fewer than a thousand it is very difficult to understand how such a man, who was obviously mentally unstable, could attract even that many believers. When he fell foul of the authorities in San Francisco he decided to set up home in Guyana, on the north east coast of South America, and was followed by his faithful. When on the point of being exposed as a charlatan by a US senator, he killed him and also some journalists, and then managed to persuade most of his followers to commit suicide. Those that were not so keen were shot. How do these people manage to con so many?

Priests, mullahs, monks and holy men and women in general are good at convincing people that they speak with the authority of god. But, in actual fact, it is the authority of learning. That is why they have to go to university and pass exams so that when questioned they can answer sensibly and with some authority. Or they see images or have visions to back up what they want to get across. It does seem odd that many intelligent people who in normal everyday life can be relatively sceptical about so many things can be taken in so easily by religion. Tradition and, of course, education play a big part. However, it is certain that the human ego has a lot to answer for here. So great is the ego that mankind cannot possibly believe that there is nothing after death. The eternal questions keep rearing their ugly heads - why do we exist, how did we come to exist and if this life is all, is it worth it? Religion is based on the fact that above all else we hope that there is something after death and because life is such a struggle that it will be a lot easier. In fact this is what all religions offer, a life after death that will be a lot easier and happier as long as you behave yourself on earth.

If logic is applied to religion it just does not work. Religion requires bountiful amounts of blind faith. Believe because that is what I say, so argue the religious, and if you don't believe me then it has been written down. The holy books tell it all. Because it is in a book it is right. But all the holy books ever written have nothing to do with the hand of god and everything to do with the hand of man. The prophets who wrote the holy books all maintained that theirs were the 'words of God'; - well they would, wouldn't they? Looked at logically how is this possible? In fact the notion is ludicrous, yet they are all taken seriously and believed by a lot of people. However, if one of them was fibbing why not all, which is equally feasible? It is argued, for example, that the words of Christ and Mohammed came from god and, as it happens, the same god. They can't both be right, can they? But millions of people believe they are. But they could