

*The Religiosity of the USA*

**Sofia** is the magazine of the Sea of Faith Network (UK), a network of individuals and local groups that explores religion as a human creation. The magazine comes out in January, March, May, July, September and November.

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Victory wave of George and Laura Bush

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Drawing of Guantánamo by Antonio Pacitti

*sfia* is the magazine of  
**the Sea of Faith Network (UK)**  
which explores religion as a human creation.

*Sofia* does not think wisdom is dispensed supernaturally from on high, but that it can only be sought by humans at home on Earth.

*Sofia* is both anti-fundamentalist and anti-restrictive-rationalist, believing in the value of humanity's poetic genius and imagination, as well as reason and experience, in its search for wisdom.

*Sofia* is for diggers and seekers in its own native radical tradition and everywhere.

# The Religiosity of the USA

The USA is the most religious country in the Western world. Why is this? And what forms does this religiosity take?

For this issue we invited two distinguished US academics to write about religion in the USA. Betty A. DeBerg from the University of Northern Iowa presents some of her research on the current state of religion on US university campuses. Jason C. Bivins from North Carolina State University looks at the rise of the New Christian Right and its support for President Bush. There are also pieces from two writers who are already contributors to the magazine. From the US, David Rush provides some comparative facts and figures, and John MacDonald Smith, who lives in Worcestershire, looks at ongoing attempts to defend 'creationism' in the USA under the name of 'intelligent design'.

Betty DeBerg describes how 'colleges and universities have come under heavy criticism for alleged secularism and anti-religious bias by conservative "insiders," some of whom are on the faculties of rather prestigious universities'. *The Guardian* of 4<sup>th</sup> April 2006 reports the attacks on Paul Gilroy, chair of African American studies at Yale University, because he made some criticism of the Iraq war, together with other 'McCarthyite' attempts to gag US academics. It also reports how a local school board in Pennsylvania has banned the A-Level equivalent International Baccalaureate as 'un-American' and anti-Christian. MacDonald Smith points to the ongoing hoo-ha about 'creationism' in schools. However, David Rush's statistics show the wide variety of religious affiliation in the US. By no means all US Christians (or religious folk in general there) support the New Christian Right agenda.

SoF 'explores religion as a human creation'. If God is a human creation, we can make him up in our own image any way we see fit. And indeed have often done so. In his article in the January magazine (and in the forthcoming book he has edited – *Godless Quakers for God's Sake* – to be reviewed), David Boulton describes some Quakers who regard God as the subjective projection of their highest human ideals of 'mercy, pity, peace and love'. These 'godless' Quakers (who include David Rush in the book) and, of course, many 'godly' ones, espouse a 'sane and kindly humanism', often combined with humanitarian action. And they are not the only US Christians to do so. But as well as good gods, we humans have created mixture-gods – 'all too human' like some of the Greek gods – and horrific, monster gods. As the poet Stevie Smith says, we ourselves 'are so mixed' and capable of high virtue, humdrum ordinariness and deep depravity. So when SoF 'explores religion as a human creation', it must be religion for better or worse. As well as defending the

right to freedom of conscience and religion, we should not flinch from casting a critical eye over the gods and religions we create.

This is particularly important with the US New Christian Right because Bush is the mightiest ruler in the world and this is the ideology that drives him. Bivins describes how Bush's religiosity represents the consolidation of conservative evangelical power in the United States – 'ardently patriotic, staunch supporters of free market capitalism, and committed to America's role as a beacon to nations abroad.' This is not the place to write at length about US government policy. Readers are probably well informed already and there are plenty of readily available sources to educate ourselves about what is happening in the world, but brief notes are in order.

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 Condoleeza Rice toured Lancashire with a sycophantic Jack Straw. She was greeted by, or rather carefully shielded from, Lancastrians wearing orange jump suits, like the prisoners in Guantánamo Bay. She made a speech saying America treats prisoners properly and does not torture people at home or abroad. And smiled. Jack Straw smiled. She was presented with a football strip... A week before that, Colleen Gaffy, United States' Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for public diplomacy, wrote an article in the *Guardian* denying that there is anything wrong going on now at Guantánamo. When the pictures came out from Abu Ghraib prison, the US authorities suggested that these abuses were just aberrations in the lower ranks. It is not possible to believe these dismissive claims, either about Guantánamo or Abu Ghraib. The CIA has been using similar well-researched techniques for decades, with manuals to train personnel in them.

Bivins describes how the New Christian Right emerged in the USA in the 1970s and how it has grown stronger over the last three decades, so that President Bush today enjoys the tolerance of millions because, whatever his faults, he is seen as A Good Man, a 'person of faith'.

It is hard to credit how 'America' is seen as 'a beacon to nations abroad' during this period. To name just a few events, the period begins with 'the other 9/11', the CIA-backed coup that overthrew the elected government of President Allende of Chile on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973, and brought in the dictatorship of General Pinochet, whose record of torture and other human rights abuse is well documented. The School of



the Americas (SOA) – renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in 2001 – at Fort Benning, Georgia, USA, trains Latin American military personnel in ‘counter-insurgency’ measures, which have been used to prop up repressive, pro-US regimes throughout the continent. Many dictators were graduates of the School of the Americas. Its training manuals teach interrogation techniques, advocate torture and the targeting of civilian populations.

The US government funded the contras in Nicaragua to overthrow the Sandinista government, which they feared as ‘the threat of a good example’. The contras specialised in destroying villages, schools and health centres. As Ernesto Cardenal says in his poem *The US Congress Approves Contra Aid*, after a murderous raid, ‘when the contras left they scattered Christ propaganda’. Among other killers, the School of the Americas trained Robert D’Aubuisson, the leader of the Arena Party in El Salvador and organiser of death squads. D’Aubuisson was responsible for the murder of Archbishop Romero on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1980, at mass in his own cathedral in San Salvador. As well as perpetrating the notorious El Mozote massacre of an estimated 900 villagers in 1981, the Atalacatl Battalion, trained in the School of the Americas, murdered the Jesuits of the Central American University of San Salvador on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1989.. The list goes on...

During Bush’s own presidency, on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2002 Washington was involved in an attempted coup (which failed) to overthrow the democratically elected government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, whom televangelist Pat Robertson has openly incited his viewers to ‘take out’. Beyond ‘America’s backyard’, it is unlikely that the attack on Afghanistan in October 2001 was first planned after the attack on New York on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. If the sole motive for the invasion was to catch Osama Bin Laden, why haven’t they got him yet? We are all familiar with the dubious evidence produced to support the invasion of Iraq in 2003. We saw the contempt shown by the US government for the United Nations and indeed for every single nation, including its allies, when it made clear the US was prepared to ‘go it alone’, whatever anyone thought. Now we are daily reminded of the continuing post-war chaos the invasion created, and haunted by the murky terrors of ‘extraordinary renditions’ for torture.

The US government has consistently failed to support any measures to deal with pollution or climate change, refusing to sign even the minimal Kyoto Protocol. US free market policies have permitted biopiracy, the stealing of traditional healing herbs from poorer countries and the patenting of some of their medicinal properties by large pharmaceutical companies. US Pentecostal sects in Ecuador have even been reported as stealing rare indigenous blood samples and putting them on sale.<sup>1</sup> The New Christian Right are staunch supporters of free market capitalism; the Free Trade Agreements NAFTA and CAFTA benefit large companies in the US far more than the people in the poorer countries south of the border. The free

movement of goods is not complemented by the free movement of people and US borders are vigorously and violently guarded. At home, there was ‘the disastrous mishandling of Hurricane Katrina’. Was that because most of the people affected were poor blacks?

‘Bush,’ says Bivins, ‘has often professed that he is doing God’s will, that he has “prayed on” policy matters, that he believes the United States is divinely favoured.’ Some of the US government policies approved by the New Christian Right have involved human sacrifice on a greater scale than that of a former American superpower, the Aztecs, and Bush’s god can be compared to the gruesome Aztec war god Huitzilopochtli. (The Toltec god-king Quetzalcóatl had been driven out of the city for refusing to allow human sacrifice but promised to return to install a reign of justice and peace.)

Christianity has another tradition, looked to by many Christians in the USA as well in other parts of the world. This is of a gospel that is ‘good news for the poor’ (Lk 4:18) and ‘puts down the mighty from their seats’ (Lk 1:52). *The Sermon on the Mount* tells us to ‘Seek first God’s reign [kingdom] and his [its] justice’ (Mt 6:33). ‘God’s reign’ or ‘heaven’s reign’ on Earth is preached as the goal of Christianity: it is a reign of justice and peace. The *Beatitudes* say: ‘Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the reign of God (Lk 6:20). Blessed are the dispossessed for they shall have land (RSV: Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the Earth (Mt 5:5). Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called God’s children.’

In the March issue of *Sofia* Don Cupitt writes about a spirituality of ‘ardent world love’ that generously pours itself out and values every aspect of the body. We can look at this spirituality from a private, subjective, individual point of view: how should I be? What should my attitude be to life? That is what Cupitt focuses on in his article, which has received a very positive response from readers. But precisely because we are bodies, should we not look at it from a public, objective and social point of view, as well? We are material beings belonging to one life system, the Earth. How do we look after it, so that it thrives? We are material beings, biologically related to each other as members of a species. How do we take care of our species as a whole? How do we ensure that everyone has the chance of a decent life? Spiritual generosity has to be more than just a nice warm feeling, a private attitude. Otherwise what will become of humanity and the Earth our home?

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1 See *We Will Not Dance on our Grandparents’ Tombs: Indigenous Uprisings in Ecuador* by Kintto Lucas, translated by Dinah Livingstone (CIIR, London 2000).

# Religion in Bush's America

Jason C. Bivins from North Carolina State University looks at the rise of the New Christian Right in the USA and its support for President Bush.

In a rare interview on the American news program *Meet the Press* in 2004, President George W. Bush was asked, 'Why is it that you – a man who campaigned for the Presidency as 'a uniter, not a divider' – are perceived by so many people as such a contentious figure?' Bush responded, 'Gosh, I don't know. Maybe it's because I'm working so hard to unite the country.' This improbable, almost surreal statement exemplifies this administration's public discourse, subsisting on evasion and abstraction.

While evidence of the administration's ineptitude, cronyism, and bull-headedness mounts – following the disastrous mishandling of Hurricane Katrina, criminal charges accumulating around Bush insiders, the ever-unfolding calamity that is the U.S. involvement in Iraq – the American public is either insufficiently outraged or seemingly placated by the most transparent nostrums from the Bush camp. How can this be? This President enjoys the tolerance of millions because, whatever his faults, he is seen as A Good Man; many believe that because Bush is a 'person of faith,' no permanent harm will come from his policies, no matter how ill-conceived.

Since the 2004 election, there has been considerable discussion of the role of 'moral values' in Bush's victory. Exit polling and surveys suggested initially that Bush supporters voted overwhelmingly on the basis of 'values' rather than policy. The immediate reaction was concern about the role of religion in the Bush administration. In particular, there followed rage and disbelief among liberals\* and leftists, many of whom called petulantly for secession from 'Jesusland.' This reaction, however, reveals a flawed understanding of American public life. In fact, for the last three decades conservative evangelicals have constructed one of the most successful of their recurring entrances into politics. Such mobilisations have occurred regularly in American history – usually stirring up tensions among evangelicals themselves, who are often nervous about the perceived corruptions and compromises political

**This President enjoys the tolerance of millions because, whatever his faults, he is seen as A Good Man, a 'person of faith'.**

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\* The term 'liberal/liberalism' here refers to generally 'progressive' policies and is the opposite of 'conservative'. It is not to be confused with 'liberal' or, more often, 'neo-liberal' referring strictly to an economic free market policy. (Such a policy, vigorously pursued in the Free Trade Agreements NAFTA and CAFTA, is now also described as 'neo-con'.)

action necessitates – but the emergence of the New Christian Right (NCR) in the 1970s, and its subcultures and organisations arising since then, is among the more significant evangelical political engagements in American history.



Bush's presidency is one sign among many of this coalescence of conservative evangelical powers. American religions have persistently been involved in political matters, yet Americans nonetheless continue to wring their hands over the 'proper role' of religion in public life. Bush, however, is not the first President to have courted 'the evangelical vote': Jimmy Carter's 1976 election drew political attention to evangelicalism, while Ronald Reagan's victories revealed the growing power of conservative evangelicals in particular. Evangelicalism is an old tradition in the United States, yet since the 1960s it has become dramatically more public than in previous historical eras and its conservative constituencies have become politically quite powerful. And these conservatives have invested considerable hope in Bush's Presidency. Bob Jones III, president of South Carolina's much maligned Bob Jones University, wrote effusively to Bush in 2004 that 'In your re-election, God has graciously granted America – though she doesn't deserve it – a reprieve from the agenda of paganism.'<sup>1</sup> Conservative figures including Charles Colson, James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson have expressed a like confidence not only in Bush's own religious character but in the promise they believe he symbolises: a restoration of America's mission as a beacon to the nations and as a polity of Christ-like citizens.

Bush converted in the 1980s, when – as a newlywed, recovering substance abuser and political newcomer – he claims Christ 'changed' his heart. During his political career, Bush has often professed that he is doing God's will, that he has 'prayed on' policy matters, that he believes the United States is divinely favoured, and that Jesus is the thinker who has most influenced him (these convictions are garlanded by Bush's proud assertion that he neither deliberates excessively about policy decisions nor feels any doubts about them). Bush's aggressive courtship of evangelicals led him, in 1993, to assert that those who did not believe in Jesus (the unspoken subtext is that one must also believe in Jesus in the right way) could not enter heaven.<sup>2</sup>

None of these themes is particularly new in American political discourse. The notion that the United States enjoys God's unique blessing traces its legacy back to the Puritan commonwealths. The rhetoric of moral revival, too, has long proven fertile in public affairs. What is significant, then, is not simply the



success of an evangelical President or the effect of certain beliefs on his governance (after all, Ronald Reagan's piety arguably played a larger role in U.S. policy, particularly his apocalyptic outlook on international affairs). What is most noteworthy about Bush's evangelicalism is the way it represents a consolidation of conservative evangelical power in the United States. This is the culture that spawned Bush, to which he speaks, and which legitimises his presidency. It also raises profound questions about the nature and the future of American democracy.

It is in some sense ironic that the United States – whose independence was inspired by the ideal of a secular state – should remain so vigorously religious. Perhaps this is because, as some polemicists have suggested, the American historical memory is shaky. Yet this devotional zeal is perhaps one of American history's few constants. Where historic American attitudes may vary considerably on matters like patriotism (the 'my country right or wrong' position currently taken for granted is actually of somewhat recent vintage), state power (Americans both befoul the state's existence and, when it conveniences them, beg for its succour), or public education (once seen as the linchpin of civic allegiances, but more recently denounced as an incubator of immorality), Americans have always been pious. They may have been too restless to settle in an institutional housing, but they remained reverent; they may have differed greatly on how best to understand 'God,' but have insisted on a deity's existence nonetheless.

What has contributed to this diffuse but continuous religiosity? Several factors are relevant here: long-standing pluralism, the ubiquity of immigration and mobility, and the historic importance of church-state separation. Each element helps account for the persistence of religiosity: the presence of multiple traditions forces all faiths to maintain their vitality in the face of 'competitors'; the continued introduction of new religions, and the circulation of extant ones, contributes similarly to the vigour of American religions; and the protection of religious liberty, rather than privatising or diminishing religion's role in public life, ensures that religions are allowed free spaces in which to develop.

While each factor is debated both as historical condition and contemporary phenomenon, such deliberation keeps religion at the centre of political conversations about the way Americans understand themselves. Erstwhile proclamations about the inevitable increase of secularism have proven empty; Americans are as religious as ever, and their religiosity

provides not only ontological benefits but social capital as well. Sociologist Alan Wolfe has observed that American religions have become focused less on rigid behavioural regimens than on individualism or self-actualisation. This is only partially characteristic of American religion.<sup>3</sup> For the religious cultures to which Bush speaks (and which legitimise him) have both appropriated long-standing American Christian tropes of messianism and exceptionalism, fashioning from them responses to their political circumstances.

These responses reveal much about the cultural and political conflicts that characterise Bush's presidency. Evangelicals have long been ardently patriotic, staunch supporters of free market capitalism, and committed to America's role as a beacon to nations abroad. Yet the NCR emerged not during American culture's purported Golden Age (the mid-1940s to the early 1960s) but in the 1970s, a hot point of a protracted legitimisation crisis facing American democracy's legitimisation crisis. Following WWII, Americans experienced hitherto unknown levels of both economic affluence and political stability but had questions about the moral costs of this flourishing: there were questions about the bureaucratic (and perhaps undemocratic) quality of American politics; about the persistence of racial and gender inequality in a society that trumpeted its freedoms; and about American dependency upon militarism (with specific focus on the ethics of nuclear weapons and of American intervention in Vietnam).<sup>4</sup>

## Bush has often professed that he is doing God's will.

It was ironically during this period of an apparently triumphant liberalism that conservatism began to regain power. The critical voice which emerged here – first articulated in the quasi-populist discontent of Barry Goldwater's and George Wallace's Presidential campaigns, and later successfully pursued by the Nixon administration's 'southern strategy' – suggested that the rise of protest, the weakening of America's image in the eyes of other nations, and the rapid restructuring of social life could all be adduced to the machinations of liberal elites.<sup>5</sup>

Anxieties about feminism and gender roles, about multiculturalism, about religious pluralism and 'cults,' and about America's national autonomy were all at stake in this discourse. With the affluence and political stability of previous decades eroding steadily by the early 1970s, the conservative critique helped split old Democratic constituencies and re-orient political discourse in ways that facilitated the emergence of the NCR. As conservative evangelicals became ever more active in the public sphere – initially in response to the legalisation of abortion, and to the proposal of an Equal Rights Amendment – most became convinced that the disruptions of the 1960s required a reversal, the restoration of a purported Golden Age. Toward the pursuit of these ends, they established their own national political organisations.

Groups like the Moral Majority and Religious Roundtable proved initially successful in contesting specific policies and in influencing national politics, but they vanished by the late 1980s. However, the NCR quickly shifted its focus from national organising to



grassroots mobilisation, a strategy pursued effectively by the Christian Coalition in the mid-1990s.<sup>6</sup> To conservatives, the Clinton administration provided powerful rallying points in the President's peccadilloes, facilitated the creation of new 'wedge' issues like gay marriage, and allowed for the reassertion (initially by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich) of a declension narrative blaming social woes on the 'permissive liberalism' ushered in during the 1960s. And it was during this period specifically that George W. Bush began his political ascendancy.

Bush's politics to some extent embody this declension narrative, which – despite his campaign promises of 'compassionate conservatism' – exemplifies what George Lakoff calls a 'strict father morality,' a form of disciplinarian correction of perceived socio-political deficiencies.<sup>7</sup> The impulse to restore lost order both contextualises the sense of marginalisation frequently expressed by evangelicals and re-inscribes evangelical identity through its vigorous anti-liberalism.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely this discourse which has so emboldened the Bush Presidency, and which has proven appealing not only to conservative evangelicals but to a broader public. It is through the forcefulness of his policy positions, the clarity (if not always the consistency) of his moral discourse, and the familiarity of his emotional tropes that Bush has won support.

Faced with concerns about the growth and moral valence of a bureaucratic state, conservative evangelicals espouse an ethos of personal responsibility; considering disparities of wealth, these practitioners advocate minimally regulated free market capitalism; angered by what they see as a secular, 'activist judiciary,' evangelical culture critics seek 'the reconstruction of U.S. culture so that it is in tune with . . . the Ten Commandments and Judeo-Christian values.'<sup>9</sup> There is the further suggestion that the 1960s paved the way for an unwarranted assault on heterosexual privilege, on 'traditional' gender roles, and on the status of the 'conventional' family as the crucible of morality. America's divinely appointed status as beacon to the nations, critics continue, was compromised by introducing pluralism and ambiguity into the national narrative. These ideas are circulated not only by NCR political organisations, but also to some extent by the 200 Christian television channels, 1500 Christian radio stations, and vast print culture that conservative evangelicals support. Even if these media are not explicitly political in their purposes, their output frequently harmonises with the political worldview of conservatives.<sup>10</sup>

What defines this moment in American culture, then, is not simply the prominence of religious rhetoric but the role of religious convictions in shaping public policy. Conservative evangelicalism has once again become a fighting faith, gaining energy from the way its politics dovetail with the current direction of the federal government, all three of whose branches are currently steered by conservatism.

This situation is gravely serious. While I do find that there are serious questions about religious interventions into government, and that the American separation of church and state requires vigilant defence, what is most troubling about the Bush evangelical gestalt is not its religiosity as such but the way it represents in some sense a rejection of the political in favour of the narrowly communitarian. The Bush ascendancy is not the product

of a contest of ideas, of reasoned dialogue, of the messy halting steps of democratic procedure; instead, it turns its back on the politics of common purpose, of concern for one's fellow citizens, and of the institutionalisation of fairness, even as it cynically appropriates this rhetoric.



Televangelist Pat Robertson

American religions have always participated in the political process, often in ways entirely consistent with a democratic ethos. While there is an important good to be achieved in keeping religious influences from government, something integral to the political process is lost when Americans continue debating endlessly about *whether* religions should participate in politics rather than focusing more productively on *how* they should do so.

Conservative evangelicals have seized power by skilfully manipulating the terms of debate; the choice, they insist, is between 'values' or amoral technocracy. It is profoundly right to be outraged by this false choice and concerned by this coalescence of religio-political power. These developments should be challenged, not in the name of supplanting it with some alternative but equally narrow conception of public life (however understandable this impulse may be); rather, it should be contested in the names of politics itself, of a reaffirmation of a democratic process that allows for the pursuit of reasonable compromises to principled differences. Americans have largely failed to see that these are the real issues in our 'culture wars.' While much of the rest of the world is understandably perplexed and disturbed by the blunt, lumbering course of this administration, it is troubling news that we Americans are so confused about ourselves as well.

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- 1 Quoted in *The Christian Century*, December 14, 2004.
  - 2 See Sylvia Topp, 'Searching for Bush's Jesus.' *The Village Voice*, 12/23/2005.
  - 3 See Wolfe's *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: Free Press, 2003).
  - 4 The story of 1960s political discontent is far more complex than this suggests, of course. See John Patrick Diggins, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* (New York: Norton Books, 1992); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993); Mark Kurlansky, 1968: *The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005); Meta Mendel-Reyes, *Reclaiming Democracy: The Sixties in Politics and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996); James Miller, 'Democracy is in the Streets': *From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
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Jason C. Bivins is Associate Professor and Associate Head of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA. His book *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press) was published in 2003. He is currently completing his manuscript *The Religion of Fear: Horror, Identity, and Politics in Conservative Evangelical Pop Culture*.

# Religion in the USA and Britain: Some Facts and Figures

David Rush provides some tables and brief comment showing how much more religious the US is than Britain.

'In the United States the sovereign authority is religious, and consequently hypocrisy must be common; but there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America; and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth.' Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1838.

I found exploring libraries, journals and the web to dig out these data was fascinating. They solidify impressions that have been gathered over the years: the US is a very religious country, although it is becoming more secular. Britain is very secular, in spite of all the religious ceremony associated with both church and state. This secularity suggests that all the hubbub about homosexuality in the Anglican church is almost a private concern, and not much related to the lives of most British people. The tables show that the US and Great Britain (GB) are indeed very different in terms of religion. Public discourse is very much influenced by these differences.

## Comparison of religious belief and participation in the US and GB

The data in **Table 1** shows trends in US religious identity between 1972 and 2004. The country is overwhelmingly religious, but the dominance of Protestantism is falling, from 64% of the population in 1972 to just over half in 2004.

What is generally not appreciated is that the proportion of Americans stating no religious identity has risen by almost threefold over the same period, from 5.2% to 14.3%.

There is enormous religious diversity in the US (**Table 2**). Much is made of the high proportion of Evangelicals among American Protestants. In fact, there is considerable diversity among Evangelicals, as well as among mainline Protestants. This is clearly illustrated by the great differences among the political orientations of modernist vs. traditional groups within the mainline protestant and Evangelical groupings, as well as the frequency of church going and ideas about God (**Table 3**).

Church attendance in Great Britain is much, much less frequent than in the US (**Table 4**). About 40% the US population is in church every week, compared to 14% in GB. Indeed, half the British population *never* go to church. Religious belief parallels the other measures of religiosity in the two countries (**Table 5**). Almost two thirds of Americans believe in a personal God, vs. half as many in GB.

David Rush is an American retired professor of Paediatrics and Epidemiology. He is an active participant in the SoF email group and has given workshops on non-theism among Quakers in the US and UK.

Table 1: Religious Preference, Selected years 1972-2004, US General Social Survey (%)

	1972	1976	1980	1985	1990	1994	1996	1998	2000	2004
PROTESTANT	64.1	63.5	63.9	62.5	63.1	59.5	57.4	54.5	54.1	50.6
CATHOLIC	25.7	26.1	24.7	26.7	23.9	25.5	23.6	25.2	24.1	25.2
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN								.4	.8	.7
CHRISTIAN <sup>1</sup>								1.2	1.4	2.6
JEWISH	3.4	1.8	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.3	1.8	2.2	2.2
OTHER	1.7	1.0	2.0	1.6	3.1	3.9	4.9	1.0	1.5	1.2
MISC <sup>2</sup>								1.9	2.0	3.2
NONE	5.2	7.6	7.2	7.1	8.0	9.2	11.7	14.2	14.1	14.3
COL TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	1,608	1,497	1,465	1,529	1,367	2,981	2,899	2,797	2,813	2,800

<sup>1</sup> not otherwise specified

<sup>2</sup> Buddhism + Hinduism+ other eastern+ Moslem/ Islam+ Native American+ inter-nondenominational



Table 2: Religious and Party Preference, US, 2004

		Party Affiliation		
		Republican	Independent	Democrat
<b>ALL</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Evangelical Protestant</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27</b>
Traditionalist Evangelical	12.6	70%	10	20
Centrist Evangelical	10.8	47%	22	31
Modernist Evangelical	2.9	30%	26	44
<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>38</b>
Traditionalist Mainline	4.3	59%	10	31
Centrist Mainline	7.0	46%	21	33
Modernist Mainline	4.7	26%	20	54
<b>Latino Protestants</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Black Protestants</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Catholic</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>44</b>
Traditionalist Catholic	4.4	57%	13	30
Centrist Catholic	8.1	34%	19	47
Modernist Catholic	5.0	38%	11	51
<b>Latino Catholic</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Other Christian</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Other Faiths</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Jewish</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Unaffiliated</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43</b>
Unaffiliated Believers	5.3	28%	37	35
Secular	7.5	29%	27	44
Atheist, Agnostic	3.2	19%	27	54

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, Bliss Institute University of Akron, March-May 2004 (N=40000)

Table 3: Worship Attendance and views of God, by denomination, US 2004

	Worship Attendance:			View of God:		
	Regular	Often	Rarely	Personal	Impersonal	Unsure
<b>ENTIRE SAMPLE</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Evangelical Protestant</b>						
Traditionalist Evangelical	87%	11	2	89%	11	0
Centrist Evangelical	36%	41	23	60%	37	3
Modernist Evangelical	23%	46	31	12%	56	32
<b>Mainline Protestant</b>						
Traditionalist Mainline	59%	33	8	75%	24	1
Centrist Mainline	33%	45	22	28%	55	17
Modernist Mainline	19%	46	35	4%	58	38
Latino Protestants	63%	31	6	57%	33	10
Black Protestants	57%	33	10	54%	44	2
<b>Catholic</b>						
Traditionalist Catholic	87%	11	2	56%	44	0
Centrist Catholic	45%	36	20	34%	59	7
Modernist Catholic	21%	49	30	4%	56	40
Latino Catholic	47%	41	12	35%	55	10
Other Christian	57%	28	15	43%	43	14
Other Faiths	40%	35	25	12%	62	26
Jewish	24%	49	27	10%	45	45
<b>Unaffiliated</b>						
Unaffiliated Believers	9%	33	58	15%	70	15
Secular	1%	20	79	2%	28	70
Atheist, Agnostic	1%	16	83	0%	5	95

**Legend:**

Worship attendance: 'regular': weekly or more; 'often': 1-2 a month to a few times a year; 'rarely': seldom or never;

View of God: 'Personal': God is a person; 'Impersonal': God is a spirit or force; 'Unsure': not sure or doesn't believe in God;

Source: The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004 : Public Opinion on Religion and Public Life, John C. Green, Senior Fellow in Religion and American Politics, Pew Forum, and Director, Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, University of Akron, September 9, 2004

Table 4: Comparative Church Attendance, US & GB, all surveys combined (1982-2004); World Values Surveys

	US	GB
More than 1/week	14.2	4.3
Weekly	29.5	9.6
Monthly	15.0	8.1
Holydays	8.1	7.4
Other holidays	2.1	3.6
Yearly	6.2	7.5
Less often	8.1	9.7
Never	16.4	49.5
Don't Know	0.2	0.1
No Answer	0.2	0.2
Total	(100%)	(100%)
Number	6906	3651

Table 5: Belief in God, US & GB, (%), World Values Survey

	US	GB
Personal God	65.5	30.9
Spirit or life force	24.7	39.0
Don't know what to think	5.9	16.7
No spirit God or life force	1.7	9.6
Don't Know	1.2	2.8
No Answer	0.9	1.0
Total	(100%)	(100%)
Number	4164	3651

# Religion on U.S. College and University Campuses

Betty A. DeBerg from the University of Northern Iowa presents some of her research on the current state of religion among US students.

Religion on U.S. college and university campuses has been of growing interest in the States for over a decade now. Scholars have scrutinised the place of religion at church-related, or denominational, colleges; have surveyed college and university students regarding their religious beliefs and practices, and have studied the ways in which religion is taught in academic departments of religious studies. In addition, private endowments and other granting agencies have made rather large sums of money available for various kinds of religious programmes on campus. My intent in this article is to survey some of the most important parts of these scholarly and institutional developments, hoping to give readers in the U.K. and beyond a better understanding of the American scene.

## I. Context

I want, first of all, however, to remind readers of three trends. I will simply assert them rather than describe them in detail. First, since the 1980s, the cultural and political power of conservative Christians in the U.S. has been growing, both inside and outside the academy. Second, the U.S Supreme Court since then has been rendering decisions that are more and more likely to protect religious expression on public campuses and to force public universities to provide free access to university facilities and funds to student religious groups.<sup>1</sup> Third, the emergence of radical Islamic groups and ideologies has lent a new urgency to the study of religion in the academy and among those who oversee national foreign policy and internal security.

**Colleges and universities have come under heavy criticism for alleged secularism and anti-religious bias by conservative ‘insiders’.**

The first means that colleges and universities have come under heavy criticism for alleged secularism and anti-religious bias by conservative ‘insiders,’ some of whom are on the faculties of rather prestigious universities. The second means that colleges and universities may no longer refuse the use of facilities and the funding out of student activity fees to explicitly religious student organisations. In the past, many public universities had refused to fund

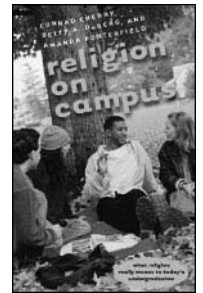
religious organisations on the basis of the ‘separation of church and state.’ The third trend means that there is more interest in and support for the academic study of religion, especially Islam, than perhaps there was a decade ago.

## 2. The Secularism Debate

For many of us scholars of U.S. religion and culture, the first round in the religion-on-campus debate came in a series of books by religiously conservative scholars arguing that even church-related colleges<sup>2</sup> have become very secularised – have given up their sectarian religious identity altogether, or had so marginalised it as to make it virtually meaningless. Probably the most influential of these is George M. Marsden’s, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (1994). Marsden has held positions at Calvin College, a college of the Christian Reformed Church (of Dutch origin); Duke University; and is now in the University of Notre Dame. Perhaps the most shrill and hostile critique of contemporary church-related higher education came from James Tunstead Burtchaell, then on the faculty of the University of Notre Dame, in his book, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (1998). The third most important book in this group is by Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (2001).

The research project that Conrad Cherry, Amanda Porterfield, and I undertook in the late 1990s, *Religion on Campus* (2001), was an attempt to respond to the criticism of those I mention above by looking at the college and university experience from a student perspective. What is the nature of religious life on campus for students? How is religion actually practised and taught on campus? Do students experience a secularised environment on campus? In order to answer these kinds of questions, we spent significant time on four campuses – a Roman Catholic university, a Lutheran liberal arts college, a historically Black Presbyterian college, and a large public research university with a religious studies department. We were on campus as participant observers attending religious worship and other functions on campus; sitting in on religious studies courses; and interviewing students, faculty, administrators, and campus ministers, and the like.

We discovered that the ethos of these campuses was not anti-religion, but rather conducive to religious expression and belief. Students had a wide range of options for religious community, practice, and study – more options





than they utilised. Certainly there is more religious pluralism on U.S. college and university campuses than ever before (the large state university I studied had over 30 officially

registered student religious organisations), so perhaps these places are less 'Christian' in that there are more students, faculty, and staff on campus who are adherents of religions other than Christianity. But being less Christian does not mean being less religious, or that the undergraduate culture was any less religious in the 1990s than it had been generations back.

And certainly, as well, most academic departments of religion, or religious studies, now teach a wide range of religious traditions rather than mostly courses on Christianity as they did in the past, so that part of the university may look less 'Christian,' as well. But we found no strong institutional bias against or barriers to religious practice at these schools. In fact, we found that religious practice among students was encouraged by campus officials because it promoted community, increased student retention, and provided extracurricular social options beyond binge drinking and the bar scene.

### 3. The Religious Lives of College and University Students

The *Religion on Campus* project has not been the only analysis of college and university student religiosity in the U.S. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, conducted a major national survey of college students' spiritual lives in the early 2000s. HERI researchers surveyed 112,000 students at 236 diverse colleges and universities. Results indicate that this generation of American students is highly 'religious' and even more 'spiritual.' On the spirituality scale, 83 percent 'believe in the sacredness of life,' and 80 percent 'have an interest in spirituality.' On the religiousness scale, 79 percent 'believe in God,' and 81 percent 'attended religious services.' Words are always easier than actions, though. On the spirituality scale, only 47 percent 'seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually,' and on the religiousness scale, only 40 percent 'follow religious teachings in everyday life,' although 82 percent performed volunteer work before they entered college and 70 per cent report that they are 'trying to change things that are unfair in the world.' There may be an internal disconnect between students' perceived religious or spiritual lives and their activities and career goals. Also, many high school students in the U.S. do volunteer and charitable work because activities such as these look good on college and university applications for admission and scholarships.

College students are religious in ways that tend to support the 'two-party system' in U.S. religion – one party that is socially and religiously conservative and expresses little religious scepticism, the other socially and religiously liberal with higher degrees of scepticism, ecumenical worldview and ethic of caring. The survey indicated vast differences between the two parties in opinions about legalised abortion, sex outside of marriage, same-sex

marriage, and legalised marijuana. Little difference between religious conservatives and liberals was discovered on issues of the death penalty (most believe it should not be abolished), role of women, racial discrimination, affirmative action, and gun control (most support it).

There are high levels of tolerance across these two parties, also. Christian exclusiveness is on the wane in this generation. Eighty-three percent agreed that 'non-religious people can lead lives that are just as moral as those of religious believers,' and 64 per cent that 'most people can grow spiritually without being religious.' And 63 per cent disagreed with the statement that 'people who don't believe in God will be punished.'<sup>3</sup>

Many observers of college and university students have made the claim that current students seem to be more religious than the previous generation – that there is a kind of religious revival on campus. This is difficult to substantiate apart from hunches and anecdotal evidence. Studies of the religious attitudes and practices of current students will, however, give us a sound basis upon which to compare them with future student generations.

College and university officers charged most directly with student extracurricular life on campus, those who work in Student Affairs departments and the like, in the last decade have become much more interested in religion. The meetings and conferences sponsored by the professional associations for student affairs officers, for example, now include more papers and other programmes about religion on campus, the religious lives of college students, and the religious/spiritual dimensions of young adult development.

## College students are religious in ways that tend to support the 'two-party system' in U.S. religion.

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A handful of large private foundations have given rather large sums of money in support of religion on campus. These grant-funded projects are too numerous to even list here, so a couple of examples will have to suffice. The John Templeton Foundation funded the HERI study described above, as well as the *Journal of College and Character*, an on-line journal published by the Hardee Center for Leadership and Ethics in Higher Education at Florida State University. This journal often publishes articles about spirituality and religion, as well as on the topics of leadership and ethics mentioned in its name.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the largest current privately-funded initiative affecting the religious lives of college students as been the 'Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation,' funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. Eighty-eight church-related colleges and universities in the U.S. were awarded approximately \$2 million each to design classroom and extracurricular programs that engage students in theological, or religious, reflection on the vocational decisions they face and the career decisions they will make upon graduation.<sup>5</sup>



## 4. The Academic Study of Religion

Another contested point about religion on campus is the nature of the academic study of religion as it is taught in college classrooms. Charges have been levelled by conservative Christians that a critical approach to religious texts, beliefs, and practices 'destroys the faith' of students. So the *Religion on Campus* research team sat in on religious studies courses, interviewed faculty members who taught them, and surveyed students in their classes to try to get a better idea of how religion, or religious studies, is actually taught on campus. We found that, virtually across the board, faculty approached their subject matter with an empathetic but critical/analytic approach that respected religious traditions and religious people at the same time that the scholarly perspectives and tools of university disciplines were used to analyse religious phenomena. Yet, religiously conservative students in religious studies courses did not complain in the surveys we conducted that their faith had been weakened or destroyed by their college or university religious studies courses.

## Large private foundations have given rather large sums of money in support of religion on campus.

But other scholars are not as happy with the academic study of religion as were we. For a history of the academic study of religion in the U.S. (and of the American Academy of Religion, which is the scholarly association for religion professors) as well as a very pointed criticism of the field from a conservative Christian scholar, see D. G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education* (1999). Hart portrays the academic study of religion as a misguided field founded and maintained over the years by people with dubious motives.

## 5. Conclusion

I hope it is now obvious that the study of the religious lives of college and university students, as well as the teaching of religion on these campuses, is a burgeoning topic for scholarly research and professional concern in the U.S. It is fair to say that in the past, scholars of U.S. religion have not attended sufficiently to generational aspects of religious belief and practice, so attention to young adults is long overdue (as is attention to the religious lives of children, for example). At the same time, those who have been charged with overseeing the extracurricular, non-academic opportunities for students enrolled in colleges and universities have in the past often neglected the religious or spiritual dimensions of personal identity and campus community, so the developments I describe here are also overdue. And as a practitioner and teacher of the academic study of religion, I believe strongly that healthy and well-supported religious studies departments at colleges and universities are vital to understanding one's own culture as well as the perspectives and practices of those in other cultures. So what, in my judgment, was begun by a conservative Christian lament over the secularisation of

higher education in the U.S. has become a multi-faceted and rich movement consisting of scholarly analysis and pragmatic institutional strategies all focused on the teaching and practice of religion on campuses and the religious lives of the students who inhabit them.

- 1 There are two main categories of institutions of higher education in the U.S.: public (or state-supported) universities, and private colleges and universities. Many of the private colleges and universities were established and are still operated by religious organisations.
- 2 By 'church-related,' or 'denominational,' I mean colleges and universities that were founded and are still governed by large national religious bodies or 'denominations,' such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America which is the largest Lutheran denomination in the U.S., or the Roman Catholic Church, or the United Methodist Church, or the Southern Baptist Convention.
- 3 Results of this survey are published as, *The Spiritual Life of College Students: A National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose*. Available online: <http://spirituality.ucla.edu/reports/index.html>. In addition, Anna Greenberg conducted a study of 18-25 year-olds, the report of which, *OMG! How Generation Y Is Redefining Faith in The iPod Era*, is available online: <http://www.rebooters.net/poll/rebootpoll.pdf>.
- 4 <http://www.collegevalues.org/>
- 5 <http://www.ptev.org>

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## BIVINS NOTES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

- 5 See Robert W. Whitaker, ed. *The New Right Papers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).
- 6 See Michael Cromartie, ed. *Religion and Radical Politics: The Religious New Right in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center Press, 1993); William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996); Matthew C. Moen, *The Transformation of the Christian Right* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1992); and Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics* (New York: Westview Press, 1996).
- 7 See George Lakoff's *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 8 Christian Smith, *Christian America?: What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), p. 4.
- 9 Linda Kintz, 'Culture and the Religious Right,' p. 7 in Linda Kintz and Julia Lesage, eds. *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). See also Michael Lienesch's *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
- 10 See John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

# Designed? Or Evolved? Or Both?

John MacDonald Smith looks at ongoing attempts to defend 'creationism' in the USA under the name of 'intelligent design'.

I'm writing this during the quincentenary of my old college, Christ's Cambridge. More importantly, it is also Charles Darwin's old college and I am asked to offer comment on the ideas of some people whose intention is to undermine his most penetrating insight into the nature of reality. They think Darwinism threatens their beliefs.

You could sum up the underlying idea of what Daniel Dennet has called *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* by saying that there is nothing in the universe which has not emerged by a lawful process out of something else in the universe. As Charles Lyell wrote in 1830: 'All former changes of the organic and inorganic creation are referable to one uninterrupted course of physical events governed by the laws now in operation ...'

## What is Science Doing?

We can begin with the traditional belief in the Judeo-Christian God as rational, free and omnipotent. This leads to the consequence that the cosmos is ordered, rational and radically contingent. It could be the way it is, or not; and it might never have existed at all. It is therefore comprehensible only by experiment: you have to dismantle it in order to see what it is like before you can understand it. Then, as Whitehead has remarked, 'every detailed occurrence can be correlated with its antecedents in a perfectly definite manner, exemplifying general principles.' Faith in the rationality, repeatability and lawfulness of events is born out of faith in the reality of a metaphysical First Cause.

Keith Ward thinks this is all there is to be said: 'The existence of the laws of physics ... strongly implies that there is a God who formulates such laws and ensures that the physical world conforms to them.' Actually, it does nothing of the sort. While this prescriptive view of natural law might, more or less, have fitted in with the anonymous, undefined 'particles' of Newtonian mechanics, it's a different story now that we know more about the natures of the things which make up the universe, and the ways they relate to each other. Nowadays we understand natural law rather more as a reformable, falsifiable *description* of the ways in which things relate to each other. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine how one could have a universe in which there was only one object, for relatedness is fundamental. Things interact in *those* ways because they are *those* things with *those* characteristics, creating situations which we can understand as arising from their properties.

We have moved on from first-order 'classical' Newtonian ideas to a fuller acceptance of the rationality and comprehensibility of the cosmos on its own terms, and we summarise our understanding in what are still referred to as 'Laws of Nature.' But they are description, not instructions.



In his Royal Society Lecture 11.04.06, Prof. Steve Jones (UCL) compared the belief that a god created the world to the theory that 'babies are brought by storks'.

## Disagreement

Some people find it difficult to integrate this universally agreed understanding with the way they see their beliefs. The influential American theologian Alvin Plantinga thinks that natural laws are 'perhaps best thought of as regularities in the ways in which (God) treats the stuff he has made.' He wants to replace current methodologically naturalistic science with what he calls 'Augustinian Science' which allows for miracles as well as laws. But this is simply not how we do science and is not the right way to do science; you will never understand the universe on its own terms if you introduce a metaphysical element into it.

## Movements like Intelligent Design are a feature of an American religious scene which feels itself threatened, confused and uncertain.

William Dembski is a professor at the Southern Baptist theological seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Lecturing on 'What Every Theologian Should Know About Creation, Evolution and Design' he, too, wants to invoke a metaphysical component in science. His sleight of hand is to identify methodological naturalism with the pointless, meaningless purposelessness with which, for instance, Richard Dawkins sees natural phenomena and to claim that this is the only alternative. To it he opposes what he calls the Intelligent Design Thesis and we shall examine this shortly.



Owl's eye

## How Evolution Works

Ongoing attempts to revive creationism in the US and introduce it into schools in the UK, prompts clarification of Darwin's ideas of a century and a half ago. He began, as it were, in the middle of a

billennia-long process and arrived at an explanation for what he, and anybody else who cared to look, could see in the here and now. Selection, and change through historical accident has become central to thinking in biological science. Darwin did not ask, and could not have answered the question if he had, how it started – how life emerged from non-life. Theologians may think, with Keith Ward, that 'while one cannot absolutely rule out chance ... the existence of an intelligible, integrated, elegant process tending to produce states of value is far more likely on the hypothesis that there is a Cosmic Mind which wills it to be thus.'

God of the Gaps? Metaphysical Science? God as a scientific concept? Others will differ from Ward and there are not lacking some rather interesting ideas which could explain, not only how life began but how the universe itself came into being as a result of an evolutionary process. But this need not imply atheism, for God is not a thing among things.

## Well-organised movements which see science as an enemy

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The basis of Darwinism has four parts. Firstly, every organism produces more offspring than will eventually survive to maturity. Secondly, random variations will occur among the offspring. On the other hand, traits do tend to be passed on. Finally, traits which make the individual fitter will tend to increase in the population. In addition, evolution by natural selection acts on the individual, one life at a time.

Every individual is trying to earn a living by successful adaptation to an environment consisting of other individuals as well as the inanimate world. This involves a complex process of co-evolution between species, symbiosis in which they assist each other's survival, and shaping the environment over periods of time long enough to create fitness-enhancing change and speciation.

## Paley, Darwin (and Dembski and Behe)

William Paley was an undergraduate and Fellow of Christ's from 1759 to 1775, at the height of the eighteenth century dialogue on science and religion. Newton's *Mechanics* had, it was thought, disturbed contemporary believing, so Ralph Cudworth (also Christ's) and the Cambridge Platonists set themselves the task of proving the reality of spirit through scientific enquiry. Paley's work typified this holy alliance between Georgian Anglicanism and natural philosophy and his *Evidences* was required reading in the University until 1921. Paley was not a Platonist; what he did was to suggest that a 'clockwork' universe shows evidence of design. If, walking across a field you kick your foot against a rock, you think nothing of it. But if you find a watch instead you immediately conclude that such a complex mechanism must have a designer.

That this need not be the case was demonstrated by the work of Charles Darwin who entered Christ's in 1828 and in fact occupied Paley's rooms in the College. We have outlined the elements of his understanding of how things work out. Thus, one might be tempted to think that the eye is so complex, like Paley's watch, it must have been designed and therefore requires a Designer. But suppose in some very primitive creature, due to the presence of some chemical in a group of cells, which is necessary for the proper functioning of the cells, or even by accident, they become light-sensitive. This is not improbable. An ad hoc development of this nature would give selective advantage to those members of the species, which possessed it, over those that do not. Eventually all members will possess it because those that do not will be bred out. Then, very gradually over millions of years this new development will be refined – into an eye. The members of the species in which refinements do not occur will be bred out, unable to compete in the race for survival.

Actually, the eye has evolved several times over the past in several different designs which presumably suit the needs of the animals they evolved in. This is the Darwinian way of thinking to which William Dembski, Michael Behe and others take exception. They want to return to a Paley-esque, pre-Darwinian way of explaining the animal kingdom because, like Plantinga, they think that methodological naturalism is necessarily and inevitably atheist.

Michael Behe denies the adequacy of selection in evolution to develop, unaided; certain necessary systems which he claims are 'irreducibly complex.' That is, you need every part of the system to be in place simultaneously for it to work properly and it is therefore so improbable that it should evolve that creative mind is needed for it to exist. His analogy for



this 'Irreducible Complexity' is a five-part mousetrap, which will not work unless all the bits are present (actually it can be made to do so with four of them.)

It is clear from the evolution of the eye, that this complexity is not irreducible, so why, unless one has an axe to grind about naturalism, should it be thought that occurrences in nature cannot be a natural development? That really is the question: what is Behe frightened of? What is wrong with the idea of small-step, long-term, self-creation of the most complex mechanisms for enhancing the animal's fitness and creating new species?

## In 2004, a survey found that 37% of Americans wanted creationism taught in schools – not just alongside evolution but in place of it

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We have also noted William Dembski's resentment at a way of doing science which asks how far one can explain the behaviour of one part of nature in terms of other, related parts. He wants to adopt the approach of Plantinga and claims that what he calls 'intelligent design' is at work in the world in the form of creative mind – though he is careful to maintain that this is not God. He proposes an 'explanatory filter' based on the Occamist notion that explanations should be economical. Start with regular, unbroken law and if that fails to answer the question, try chance. If chance fails then for Dembski the only option left is design. One of his examples is very humble: a bacterium swimming upstream in a glucose gradient with its flagellar motor rotating – a sort of propeller sticking out of one end. Dembski thinks this appendage cannot develop without external help, and, indeed, in his written work there is a lot of complicated mathematics to show just how improbable this kind of thing might be.

Dembski has been criticised by Michael Ruse for separating chance, law and apparent design overmuch: usually all appear at once, mixed up together. In addition, his Intelligent Designer is not absolved of responsibility for malmutation, which is no less due to chance than is fitness-to-survive.

Movements like Intelligent Design are a feature of an American religious scene which feels itself threatened, confused and uncertain. World events, it thinks, have pushed it into a corner where its perceived responsibilities require a supporting narrative which most people will understand as myth. The Bible is read literally: there will be Armageddon in the Holy Land; Jesus will return and

initiate the Rapture and so on. Hence in 2004, a survey found that 37% of Americans wanted creationism taught in schools – not just alongside evolution but in place of it.

This is all of a piece with ideas going back decades – to the Scopes Trial of the 1920's but nowadays more sophisticated. Intelligent Design and Irreducible Complexity are the thin end of a wedge leading to Creationism, and are well-organised movements which see science as an enemy. The Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture is only one of a network of organisations, funding foundations and lobby groups dedicated to overthrowing what they think of a 'scientific materialism.' At the heart of the campaign is what it refers to in its manifesto as 'The Wedge Strategy': a wedge is to be driven into the 'tree' of 'materialistic science' at its weakest point, which is Darwinian evolution. A new, faith-based science is being called for, with the worrying consequence that this leads to a dismissal of what is called the 'chimeras of popular science': global warming, pollution problems and ozone depletion along with the pursuit of ruthless free-market economics. It begins to look both suspiciously like pseudo-science with a political agenda, and we know where we last saw that kind of thing.

In addition, it is also lousy theology and perhaps, exemplifies that religion really is a human creation.

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### Further Reading

The list could be enormous, so here are a few starting points. Of course, Richard Dawkins' masterly explanations of biological evolution come high on the list, and all his books are worth reading. Daniel Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* is also a classic. Meanwhile Lee Smolin's *The Life of the Cosmos* describes how the universe itself may have originated in an evolutionary process; while Stuart Kauffman's *At Home in the Universe* describes how self-organisation plays a significant part in driving the evolutionary process. Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* explains, if that is the word, Irreducible Complexity; while William Dembski wrote a rather forbiddingly mathematical book called *No Free Lunch* to help us to understand what Intelligent Design is about. Michael Ruse's *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?* and *The Evolution-Creation Struggle* present his answer to Behe, Dembski and Creationism. Finally, *New Scientist* for October 2005 offers an entire section on Fundamentalism, which is worth reading.

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John MacDonald Smith was formerly a Parish Priest, Hon. Secretary of Clergy Against Nuclear Arms and is a freelance theologian.

**Please send your letters to:**

Sofia Letters Editor  
 Ken Smith,  
 Bridleways,  
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 revkevin19@hotmail.co.uk

**American Consumerism**

The British Empire, run on *The Odes of Horace*, was, particularly at the margins, a force for good. Look at the railways of India or Zimbabwe now, for instance. When my Grandmother was born there, the life of the average black was better, and gross national product, higher, than it is now. To suggest that ‘consumerism Americana,’ or the gross and uneducated American Empire, is any kind of successor is to belittle our historic achievement. America is the rotten protégé. India is of course looking a lot more hopeful. We need proactively to revive imperial British values, in particular a sense of decency, fair play, austerity and of ‘looking out for each other’ and, in particular, ensuring a lifelong study of Horace to help repulse the revolting (they did revolt) if not evil tide of American consumerism.

Note: *The Odes of Horace* translated James Michie (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964)

Sincerely  
 Christopher Truman  
 TRUMAN433@aol.com

**Rembrandt’s Jewish Bride**

Their flesh is the tall light of candles.  
 Her ember skirts smoulder.  
 His sleeves are buttered with gold.  
 Their mouths, so recently trembling round their vows,  
 have settled like butterflies.

You see a fine trilling in the wires of his hand,  
 fanned on her breast,  
 feel the moist tips of her fingers  
 on his skin at last,  
 touch the unconscious fold  
 of dark silk her other hand  
 begins to part.

The rest is shadow,  
 an umber gentleness of rest.

Kate Foley

**Unsubstantiated?**

I enjoyed the current issue of *Sofia*, No 76. But wonder whether its contributors might try harder to avoid unsubstantiated assertions of belief. I quote: ‘There is no life after death.’ I have never really been interested in ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ but in knowing. Therefore, I tend to welcome most assertions accompanied by some attempt at proof. Whether the proof is inductive or deductive, or a mixture of the two, I don’t mind, but it helps to lessen the dogmatism of unsubstantiated assertion. After all, if in mathematics proofs are automatically required to be offered to substantiate proffered ideas of numeracy, why not an equal rigour in verbal opining?

Sincerely  
 William Oxley  
 PWOxley@aol.com  
 Devon

**Planetary Citizens**

Over recent years I have become increasingly preoccupied by the fate of our planet. The seriousness of the situation humanity has created for itself is not only unprecedented but far surpasses in its urgency any other issue. It also transforms the way we understand ourselves. I have therefore been very pleased to note how responsive the editor of *Sofia* has been to this crisis. Radical changes are now required in both our self-understanding and our lifestyles – but in ways we are not quite sure – and it seems the SoF is well positioned to address these. The inspirational writings of Don on the new language of Life and Lloyd Geering on The Greening of Christianity take us well beyond the traditional religious boundaries to a new understanding of our planetary life with its new mysteries and challenges.

I, for one, welcome this development. The exploratory style of *Sofia* seems wholly appropriate for our new situation and I have been grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion in its pages. With its admirable graphics and inspirational presentation I find it a pleasure to read and I hope its discerning editorial policy, with its sensitivity to the lyrical wonder of our world, will continue.

Yours,  
 Dominic Kirkham  
 paul@paulkirkham5.wanadoo.co.uk

**Abuse of metaphors**

David Hatton’s quotation from *The Da Vinci Code* reminded me of an epigraph to a chapter of *A Reasonable Faith*, by ‘Three Friends’ (1884). There, credited to Lord Palmerston, appears the statement: ‘Half the wrong conclusions at which mankind arrives, are reached by the abuse of metaphors.’ (Well, that’s a relief. Now I don’t have to read *The Da Vinci Code*.)

Sincerely  
 David Parlett  
 1 Churchmore Road, London SW16 5UY

## Still steeped in Masculinism?

I refer to Stephen Mitchell's letter in the March edition of *Sofia* which refers to the world's major faiths and the faith communities. What have I to do with these? I cannot escape my upbringing – (as a Congregationalist) – nor would I want not to have had contact with a great Reformation tradition, nor can I or anyone else avoid being in, and a creature of, history. All the same, these 'faiths' are all constructs of patriarchal cultures, as such are morally flawed at best, and have had as much of the oxygen of publicity as they deserve. *Sea of Faith* is still mired in masculinism.

Sincerely,  
Anna Sutcliffe  
14 Drummond Court, Leeds LS16 5QE

## Nontheism

I share something of Stephen Mitchell's distaste for the word 'nontheism' (*Sofia* 76, p15). It is not perfect. But what term would Stephen use to distinguish those who are not theists (usually defined and understood as 'believers in a Supreme Being') from those who are?

*Non-realists?* That was Stephen's (and Don Cupitt's, and my) preference a few years ago, but as he now acknowledges, 'no-one liked the word and no-one would think of resurrecting it'. Atheists? But that has come to be understood as a rejection not only of God as Supreme Being but also of God as potent metaphor, symbol or human construct, which would not fit most of us in *SoF*. *Humanist?* Well, that's at least a positive term, defining us as pro-rather than anti-something, and it seems appropriate for a network that explores and promotes religious faith as a *human* creation: but it too has its problems of definition, generally requiring us to qualify it, as in 'Quaker humanist', 'religious humanist', or whatever.

Perhaps Stephen would prefer that we disavow labels, in the interest of promoting what he feels is 'the common agenda of the wider world and the faith communities'. But how do we contribute to this agenda effectively and honestly if we avoid describing ourselves as what we are? And what are we? Are we not modern people for whom the God of theism, the 'Supreme Being' of Bible, creed and hymn-book, is dead, and for whom religion is a heart and mind commitment not to God as supernatural person or mystical force but to the *predicates* of God, the wholly human virtues of compassion, truth and justice?

Stephen may prefer to side-step the critical distinctions between theism and nontheism, supernaturalism and naturalism, and that may be politic for an Anglican priest with parishioners and a bishop to satisfy. But I am in a different (and no doubt easier) position. The God of theism is dead to me. That God is religion's (and the world's) problem rather than its solution. Gods are but human creations: 'they have their day, and cease to be'. That's why 'nontheist', imperfect as it may be, is a label that speaks to my condition, and to the condition of the 27 contributors to *Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism* – the book I was writing about in the article to which Stephen refers.

I believe that, far from 'robbing the Network of its vitality', an open commitment to nontheism is what keeps the Network vital, honest, and distinctive in the great religious debate of our times. And if the word 'nontheism' grates, what better alternative can readers propose?

Sincerely  
David Boulton  
Hobsons Farm, Dent, Cumbria LA10 5RF  
davidboulton1@compuserve.com

## Let the Dogs Bark

I always let my dog Sasha bark by the window  
every time friends come to visit us,  
or the postman rings the bell or delivers the letters,  
or somebody just knocks at the door...

And I take part in my dog's excitement by barking along:  
'Wow-Wow-Wowwww ...!'  
howling freely and fearless with my dog, getting carried away  
with her bark,

for I know that the mothers in the poor neighbourhoods  
of Peru, Chile, Argentina or Croatia and Kurdistan  
let their dogs bark and bark just to renew their hope,  
the feeling  
that their sons are coming home after they've been taken away  
many years ago ...

Alfredo Cordal  
Translated by the author

Chilean poet and playwright Alfredo Cordal lives in London. He was exiled by General Pinochet's coup that overthrew President Allende 1973. The poem 'Let the Dogs Bark' is published in bilingual text in *Latin American Literary Anthology*, ed. Jorge Salgado Rocha (Latin American Literary Workshop 'Pablo Neruda', London 2004).





Tony Windross reviews

## **Tomorrow's Faith: A New Framework of Christian Belief**

by Adrian B. Smith

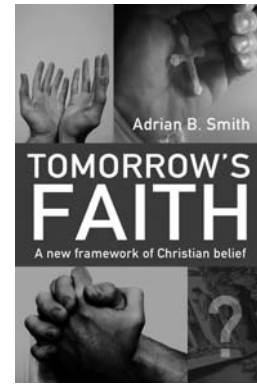
O Books (Winchester) 2005. £9.99. 160 pages. Pbk. ISBN: 1905047177

*Tomorrow's Faith* is an accessible guide to contemporary thinking about Christianity, carried out through an examination of what lies behind the claims made in the various Creeds of the Church. Its 30 short chapters make it ideal for dipping into as well as for use in discussion groups. Each one begins with a summary of a traditional understanding of the topic, put alongside a contemporary understanding. The chapter then explores the way that the former has, for most thoughtful people, become transformed into the latter.

Adrian Smith is a prolific author and popular teacher, and the book is written out of his long experience of the needs and questions of those on the edges of faith. Liberal rather than radical in its assumptions, the book contains plenty to get members of church congregations thinking and arguing, but maybe has rather less for those of a SoF inclination, who have probably moved beyond a view of religious faith as based on the holding of certain propositional beliefs.

Much of the book involves debunking some of the more obvious sillinesses that literalism involves, but it's not clear how far down the non-realist road Smith is prepared to go. At times he employs an apparently realist approach, with God implicitly taken to be an objective being, at least as measured by the use of active verbs: 'God *requires* of us' (px); 'God *asks* for our love' (px); 'God *reveals* himself' (p11); 'God *created* us' (p52); 'God *expects* of us' (p96). Perhaps these expressions are all being used metaphorically, but in any event they are likely to grate with those who no longer talk or think like this. At other times he employs religious language in what seems to be an unambiguously metaphorical/mythical sense: 'we think of Heaven being not a place in the sky but another dimension of being' (p54). Much less for the SoF person to object to there, although some might like an indication as to how he proposed to unpack 'another dimension of being'.

The writing is straightforward, so much so that he sometimes displays a clarity of vision that many in SoF will find remarkable: 'We all originate from the same source, the mind of the Creator, and we are all destined for the same ultimate experience of unity with the Divine' (p46). Really? And again: 'The Divine Will is manifested to us through the continuing day-to-day process of creation' (p68). *The religious problem is trying to do justice to our sheer ignorant inarticulacy (if we are really honest) in*



reviews

the face of the brute fact of our existence, whilst continuing to cling to the idea that religion offers us a way of responding to this in a positive way. Some will have a greater need for words, on the grounds that they at least give us some sort of handle on the world, which means (on a good day) that we might be able to convince ourselves that it isn't in fact quite such a mysterious place as we feared. People in that category will find the examples of Smith's clarity of vision reassuring, whilst the rest may be content to pass over them in silence.

Those who are struggling with traditional understandings of Christian doctrine will find this a very helpful book, in that it takes their problems seriously and gives pointers towards some of the alternative ways of moving forward. Many in SoF however will have taken that step already, and are probably looking for something rather more radical. However, everyone who is not a thoroughgoing literalist will find much of interest here. And because it is not off-the-scale radical it can be safely put into the hands of the many members (and potential members) of congregations who are looking for something that is challenging but not too theologically frightening. The value of the Suggestions for Further Reading at the back is enhanced by helpful comments on each book. No mention of Don Cupitt, but Lloyd Geering appears twice as does John Spong. In addition there are suggestions as to how the book might most profitably be used in discussion and study groups.

*Tomorrow's Faith* is to be recommended to anyone interested in Christianity, although those at the conservative or radical ends of the theological spectrum are likely to have certain reservations about it. It is a useful addition to the body of material available to enquirers, and shows that although banality and mindlessness are endemic in much of the Church, there are ways in which thoughtful people can continue to take religion seriously.

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Tony Windross is Vicar of St Peter's, Sheringham, Norfolk, and a member of SoF Steering Committee. His book *The Thoughtful Guide to Faith* was published by O Books in 2004.

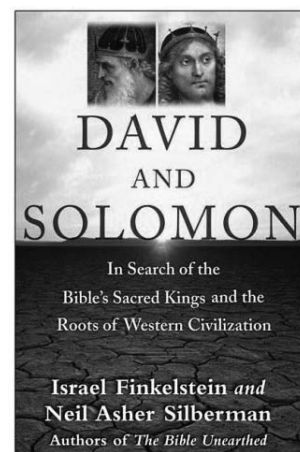
# Identity Theft

Dominic Kirkham reviews

## ***David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition***

by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman

Simon and Schuster (New York). 2006. 352 pages. Hbk. £13.44. ISBN: 0743243625



reviews

There seems to be a new spirit abroad – a kind of faith induced anti-rationalism, perhaps even the looming prospect of a new closure of the Western mind. In an age of growing religious fundamentalism and biblical literalism the findings of biblical archaeology present an interesting anomaly, and possible antidote.

Take, for example, the sweeping conquests of King David over the Philistines and Canaanites, recorded in great detail in 2 Samuel 8, 10 and 12. Evidence of violent destruction unearthed at such famous sites as Meggido and Tell Qasile (modern Tel Aviv) seemed to confirm this narrative. However, more careful reanalysis of pottery, architecture and radiocarbon datings reveal that Philistine life in the southern coastal plain and Canaanite life in the northern valleys of Palestine continued uninterrupted well into the tenth century BCE, almost a century after the so called expansion of the united monarchy. Neither is there any evidence from this period of Jerusalem's emergence as the capital of a powerful empire. So what happened to King David?

The search for the truth behind the Bible text is the theme of the distinguished Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and his collaborator Neil Silberman (henceforth F&S). In this, their most recent work they review the implications of the extensive new archaeological findings in Israel over the last decade. A case in point is the pharaoh named Shishak, who in the Bible is reputed to have destroyed Jerusalem in the reign of King Rehoboam, grandson of David (1 Kings 14:25-26). A relief discovered in Karnak does indeed record the exploits of a pharaoh with a similar sounding name (Sheshonq I) who destroyed numerous Canaanite settlements. New excavations to the north of Jerusalem do indeed reveal the destruction of those settlements named in the Egyptian relief, but in the early tenth century well before the time of Rehoboam! Even more intriguing is that the settlements destroyed are in the heartland of Saul's power base and there is no mention of Jerusalem. The conclusion of F&S is that the focus of Sheshonq's campaign was the hub of Saul's 'kingdom', which was probably a significant highland chiefdom, in contrast to 'the dimorphic bandit chiefdom to the south', i.e. the territory of David, where there were no settlements of any significance. As a city Jerusalem just didn't exist! It seems David was no more than a petty bandit chieftain.

Accumulating cycles of oral tradition are exaggerated and transformed according to 'successive layers of political and theological interpolation.' This is not a natural process but a manipulative one, culminating in a monopolistic view

of history which, written over two centuries after the events, now goes by the name of Deuteronomistic: F&S describe it as an 'aggressive and uncompromising ideology not evident in earlier traditions, advanced through the zealotry of holy war.'

A feature of this vision was the promotion of the Davidic dynasty and the cult of the god of Judah based in Jerusalem. A parallel theme was the vilification of the Omride dynasty and the Kingdom of Israel for apostasy from this 'true God'. The Bible hardly mentions Omri, yet, apart from being the first biblical figure to have extra-biblical verification, it was he who created the first recognisable kingdom in the area. His was a powerful state centred on Samaria with lavish building projects in a recognisable architectural style, a court with a hierarchy, literary class and professional army. It's just that all its attributes were transferred to the kingdom of Judah! Archaeology reveals there was a united monarchy, but it was ruled by the Omrides, not the Davidides, and its capital was Samaria, not Jerusalem.

The scale of this Deuteronomistic deception is breathtaking: probably the first case of identity theft in history. As F&S conclude, 'The 'Court History' of David thus offers a whole series of historical retrojections in which the founder of the dynasty of Judah in the tenth century is credited with the victories and the acquisitions of territory that were in fact accomplished by the ninth century Omrides.' Perhaps only the word 'chutzpah' can describe such audacity.

The trigger for this literary activity seems to have been Judah's becoming an Assyrian vassal state, some two hundred years after the time of David. Far reaching changes then began to take place which saw a prosperous kingdom emerge and with it the creation of the ideology of a Davidic Kingdom. Ultimately, the story would be given an eschatological twist with the murder of King Josiah – the great Deuteronomistic hope – at Megiddo or Armageddon: a name which haunts us still.

One final irony. Much of the deconstruction of David's history, which typifies the work of F&S, has grown from the new archaeological discoveries made possible by the annexation of the West Bank: the ideological legitimization of the state of Israel has been undermined by its political expansion. Cynics might say that the banditry now going on there is the real legacy of the historical David. How strange that such an iconic figure should turn out to be little more than what we would now call a terrorist!

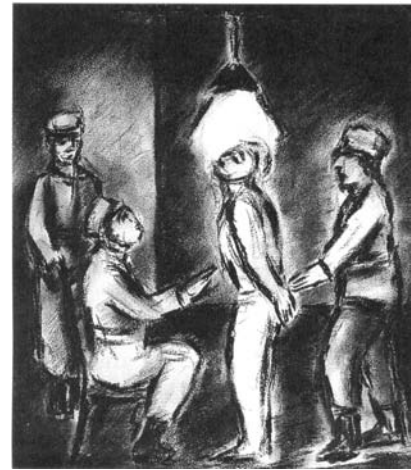
Cicely Herbert reviews the film  
***The Road to Guantánamo***  
directed by Michael Winterbottom

An effort of will was required by me to sit through the recent television showing of Michael Winterbottom's film *The Road to Guantánamo*, and I fear that the film may well have proved over-strong meat for many viewers. Based partly on interviews given by three British men – known as the Tipton Three – who survived over two years' incarceration in the notorious prison, the film vividly recreates the events that led to their capture and the subsequent wrongful imprisonment without trial.

The story begins in 2001 when Asif Iqbal sets off from the Midlands, to travel to Pakistan where he will meet and marry his intended bride. He is accompanied by three friends and at some time on the journey the men decide to go to Afghanistan, where they are caught up in the bombing of the country by US Forces. It was not quite clear to me why this diversion was made, perhaps simple curiosity, but it turned out to be a disastrous decision. One of the friends disappears and is never seen again. In the film we see the men captured and then herded into metal containers on lorries, to be transported across country. The men are crammed together in conditions that would be inexcusable for cattle going to the slaughter house – and, as was probably intended by the director, this scene made one think of the transport of Jews to the concentration camps in World War 2. One despairs that humanity seems to have learned so little over the intervening years. The men are then flown to Cuba and incarcerated in Guantánamo Bay prison, where they are held without trial for over two years.

There the Americans subject their prisoners to treatment that, without doubt, amounts to torture. In one almost unbearable scene, in order to extract a confession from prisoners, the prison guards chain them, in a crouching position, to the floor of their wire cages, while blinding lights flash and heavy rock music pounds out at an ear-splitting volume.

In March 2003 Asif Iqbal, Ruhai Ahmed, and Shafiq Rasul were released without charge and returned to England, left to pick up their lives in whatever way they could. I imagine that their part in recreating their experiences and the making of *The Road to Guantánamo* must have been cathartic for them and may have helped them to recover some sense of identity, after experiencing a form of 'hell on earth'. At this time in our history we seem to have the nightmare scenario where ordinary human values have been overridden in a desire to extract maximum revenge for the deaths caused by acts of terrorism, and, most centrally, for those lives lost in the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York on the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001.



reviews

During the week in which *The Road to Guantánamo* was screened by Channel Four, a moving documentary film was shown on BBC TV which explored the lives, behaviour, and society of the Bonobo Apes, a species mainly to be found in the great rain forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo. These utterly delightful creatures are apparently a throw-back to our own ancestors and they are a salutary reminder of how much nicer we might have turned out to be. Certainly, the Bonobos could teach us a thing or two about how to live together peaceably. Members of the group care for each other, and in one instance the group is filmed taking turns to look after a small orphaned ape, whom male and female Bonobos alike feed and comfort. Not without reason are the Bonobos known as 'The Good Ape.' I am no sociologist but I feel that it is not a coincidence that the female of the species is the dominant influence in the group, and that maternal love and physical contact between the creatures are an important aspect of their society. The documentary ends with the almost complete destruction of the Bonobo habitat, ravaged during the civil war that raged in the Congo, in which time much of the forest was destroyed and the apes killed to provide food for humans. However, it seems that a glimmer of hope remains. Since the war ended a few surviving Bonobos have been found, which leads one to believe that one day that extraordinary, peaceable society may once again thrive.

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*The Road to Guantánamo* will be on general release and available on video.

Recommended reading: *Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim's Journey to Guantánamo and Back* by Moazzam Begg (Free Press, £18.99).

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Cicely Herbert is one of the trio who founded and continue to run Poems on the Underground.



# 400 Moi?

Kate Foley reviews

## the Rembrandt/Caravaggio Exhibition at the van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam until 18 June.



Rembrandt Self-Portrait

reviews

400 Moi ? asks the huge blown-up etching of Rembrandt, with its trademark vermicelli hair, potato nose and quizzical mouth. Considering his bankruptcy and the trouble he had in later life getting his rich and powerful patrons to pay what they owed, he might well relish the irony that 400 years after his birth, his self portrait, dwarfing the corporate logos beneath, is plainly visible over one of the best known views in Amsterdam, pulling in the punters for what is a genuinely exhilarating exhibition.

How modest of the Dutch, you might think, to share their national icon with that braggadocio symbol of southern baroque, Caravaggio; but doesn't it dilute Rembrandt's impact? Despite the Texan brag in the visitors' book 'Caravaggio is Best' this thoughtful juxtaposition of the two masters of light and darkness, separated as they were by a generation, only leads to a better understanding and a deeper reverence for both.

There is a strong, uncluttered thread of narrative in the exhibition which takes you to the heart of the paradoxical similarity and difference between the northern and southern masters.

The story begins with some paintings from the Utrecht Caravaggisti, Gerard van Honthorst, Dirck van Baburen, and Hendrick ter Brugghen. In 1629, Constantijn Huygens, influential young secretary to the stadhouder, Frederik Hendrik, who fell instantly in love with the work of Jan Lievens and Rembrandt, in their Leiden studio, nevertheless expressed the view that they would do well to get themselves 'finished' by a visit to Italy. Although this was not within the pocket or perhaps the inclination of the two young painters, they were not immune to the Italian influence; in particular they could see the fine chiaroscuro effects and new realism achieved by the home grown Caravaggisti.

This may be glimpsed in *A Soldier in a Gorget and Plumed Bonnet*, which was probably Rembrandt's first *tronie* or head of a type of person, rather than a portrait. Used as a bait for the art market in order to show what might be achieved in a commissioned portrait or large history painting, such as Rembrandt desperately wanted to paint, it is one of many small early paintings. Here, drizzled like honey on the armour, the folds of a lumpen face, the crusted curlicues of the feather in his hat, we see Rembrandt's early love affair with the many sourced light that he is to paint almost like an entity itself. Here, too, is the darkness of a shadowed eye, a concealing hat, a background that will not reveal, only hint.

Impossible to list the richness of this trove of paintings from 22 named sources plus the Dutch-owned ones, plainly hung, each painter in a proximity to the other, that stuns with its correspondences and profound disparities. For example Rembrandt's *Holy Family*, with a typically Dutch bourgeois trio of besotted mother, uxorious father, replete baby, all carved out of the tenderest shadow, is focussed on the drop of milk, still hanging on Mary's breast. While next to it, Caravaggio's lithe little Christ (*The Holy Family with St John the Baptist*) has something of Cupid about him and his mother's black eyes, despite the careful focus of light on her child, gaze out of the picture and beyond.

Similarly, in Caravaggio's *The Betrayal of Christ* the drama of light shooting down the arm of the arresting soldier points to the feverish embrace between Christ and Judas while adjacent, in Rembrandt's *The Denial of St Peter* there is a defeated, sorrowful silence in the lamplit face of the saint.

Caravaggio's *Love Triumphant* shows a lusciously painted winged boy, every fold in his ivory belly and sex lovingly portrayed, wearing the expression of a very fly rent boy and carelessly bestriding the scattered symbols of a previous age's faithfulness. Rembrandt's *Ganymede* however, is a fat little putti, still with his milk teeth and his face scrunched up with the terror that makes him pee in the grip of the eagle.

Restless, ruthless, dramatic and street-wise as Caravaggio was, in paintings like the *Supper at Emmaus* and *The Conversion of the Magdalen* the drama of light and dark is lit with a thoughtful tenderness. The tenderness of insight is all but habitual with Rembrandt but his magnificent history paintings, like Belshazzor's Feast, sculpted out of light and dark, also make clear what this exhibition is trying to explain, the tangled, fascinating roots of creative influence.

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**On a practical note**, buy your joint discount ticket – 25 euros covers the Rijks Museum and its Rembrandts too, including the *Night Watch* – at the AUB ticket shop on the Leidse Plein, thus avoiding the terrible queues at the van Gogh Museum; do go upstairs to visit the small exhibition on the influence of Rembrandt on van Gogh; and do buy the excellent catalogue.

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Kate Foley lives in Amsterdam. Her latest poetry collection is *Laughter from the Hive* (Shoestring Press, Beeston, Notts., 2004).

David Perman reviews

## ***The Erotics of God***

by Sebastian Barker

Smokestack Books (Middlesbrough). 2005. £5.99. 76pages. Pbk. ISBN: 0954869168

Sebastian Barker prefaces this book of poems with a quotation from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'The soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.' Anyone who has dipped into Blake's long, dense Illuminated Book and tried to comprehend it ('the weak in courage is strong in cunning') will realise that what Barker intends here is a warning as much as a motto. Like Blake, he conceals in simple, rhyming quatrains an adult lifetime of reading deeply in philosophy, theology and Christian church history. Unlike Blake, Barker supplies his own 'exegesis' – an informative page of Epigraph to begin, eight tightly-packed pages to follow the title sequence and a final page of biographical notes on the book's second sequence, 'Spirit of the River' about friends and influences.

What does *not* concern Barker, except as a launch pad for other arguments, is to explore eroticism or erotic love. His understanding of eros is closer to Plato's love for the beauty of a higher being than the modern Greek word, *erotas* – passion. In fact, even in his most explicit poem, the Erotic Impulse of the title speaks and tells him:

I am the impulse to be free  
within the source of bliss,  
The impulse to be loved and stately,  
ecstatically this.

He cites Origen who found the Greek version of *The Song of Songs* used the terms *eros* and *agape* more or less interchangeably, and acknowledges the fascination Medieval Christians, like Bernard of Clairvaux, had for erotic love, allegorising it as the relationship between God and the soul or Christ and the Church. So within the embrace of his eros the thrice-married Barker includes marital love (or the 'martial' contract as he anagrammises it), his children, the blackbird on his green lawn, the moon and starry skies, prayer, poetry, wine and 'rosaceous wonders' – all the members of the Rosaceae family: rose, cherry, hawthorn, rowan and pear.

Against these divine 'erotics', Barker sets the identification man makes with his own power over and above the power of God and nature. This he calls the 'Heideggerian mistake', after the identification Heidegger made in the thirties between the power of Hitler and that of God and nature. Heidegger later acknowledged his mistake and this for Barker is a paradigm of the fall of man. But the enemy of Barker's 'Son of Man' is not just philosophical; like Blake's he is all around us. There is the Termite Man, from John Boorman's film *The Emerald Forest*, inhabited by Beautiful People, cannibalistic Dangerous People and archetypal clockwork Termite Men, who act as if blind to the truth of God and nature. There are also the



'Nuthoods' of another poem, who 'think nothing of bulldozing towns and villages while families are in the buildings. They speak from the dead to explain their actions. They are the ideologues of the political philosophy of the nation state, which has usurped all consideration of God and the power of God.'

*The Erotics of God* continues Sebastian Barker's immensely thought-provoking, perilous pilgrimage through Western Philosophy, with the great thinkers of the past as his mentors and the reality of temporal power as the enemy. In 1992, he published *The Dream of Intelligence* in which he adopted the persona of Nietzsche and reinterpreted the philosophy through the life. This present book is the final part of a trilogy. Its predecessor, *The Matter of Europe* (2005), employed an enormous family tree to bring the cosmic, anthropological and cultural history of man bang up to date in the experience of a twenty-first century poet. *Damnatio Memoriae: Erased from Memory* (2004) was his first stage in redeeming and rescuing love from its contemporary dross. Occasionally the poetry sags under the weight of the exegesis but Barker is always interesting, always someone to engage with, argue with and enjoy.

As poetry, the second half of the book is more satisfying. The poems here are fluent and personal. In one sense, it would have been good to have met this poet and grown familiar with his voice, before being plunged into the wealth of his reading. For he is one-hundred-per-cent human, as he says in 'A Song for Saint Peter':

Prostrate me before the fiery shrine.  
Fix me up with a glass of wine.  
Guide me around the good and the wise.  
Tender me gently the rich supplies.

Put me to bed with my wife and I  
like a man of sense will soundly die.

---

David Perman runs the Rockingham Press, which publishes poetry and Hertfordshire local history. His biography of the 18th century social reformer *Scott of Amwell: Dr Johnson's Quaker Critic* was published in 2001 and his poetry collection *A Wasp on the Stair* in 2004. He has recently joined the SoF Network.

reviews

# The other 9/11

María Eugenia Bravo Calderara was a young university teacher at the time of the coup that overthrew President Allende of Chile on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973. She was rounded up and confined with thousands of others in the Santiago National Stadium, imprisoned and tortured, finally escaping to England, where she has lived ever since. In the National Stadium, she found herself praying, not to God, but to Don Quixote the 'knight of the doleful countenance' and to his earthy squire and 'side-kick' Sancho Panza, because, she says, they represented 'humanity' in a terrifying world that seemed to have completely lost it.



## Prayer in the National Stadium

I pray to you, St Quixote,  
visit me today  
and in this dreadful night of fear  
comfort my delirium,  
give me strength to stand  
this long night and those to come  
even longer and darker  
in their cruel hands.

St Sancho,  
as this twilight turns to grey,  
come and give us bread,  
the true sure tenderness  
that is in my blood,  
the one thing necessary  
for ever and ever  
Amen.

## And I Cried

And they were torturing children, mother,  
they were stretching their bones, mother,  
and giving them electric shocks, mother.  
Hour upon hour, mother,  
interminable ages, then ages again, mother,

and their shrieks were all round me, mother,  
and to blackest black the demented world, mother,  
whirled giddy with grief.

And I cried as I have  
never cried before, mother,  
I cried in a frenzy, mother,  
desperate to my last fibre, mother,  
and the children screamed  
in more and more anguish, mother,

and I cried, mother,  
as I will never cry again  
as long as I live.

## Private Soldier

For you, short, dark, under-fed, with sweaty hands,  
who know nothing of grammar, accents and declensions,  
your turn had come that year  
to be called up for military service,  
in the army at the lowest rank,  
just a private with no stripes.  
Today I sing to you.

Because  
when I had no eyes you lent me yours  
and when I was cold you lent me your coat.

Because  
at that time when fear and isolation  
were at their most overwhelming,  
you rolled me a cigarette.  
You brought me a painkiller, ointment,  
delivered an urgent note to my family.

How we cared for each other in those dumb hours,  
your shivering was my shivering  
and one and the same demon dominated our lives.  
I know about your powerlessness  
in the vicious night  
and your despair under the shrunken sun.

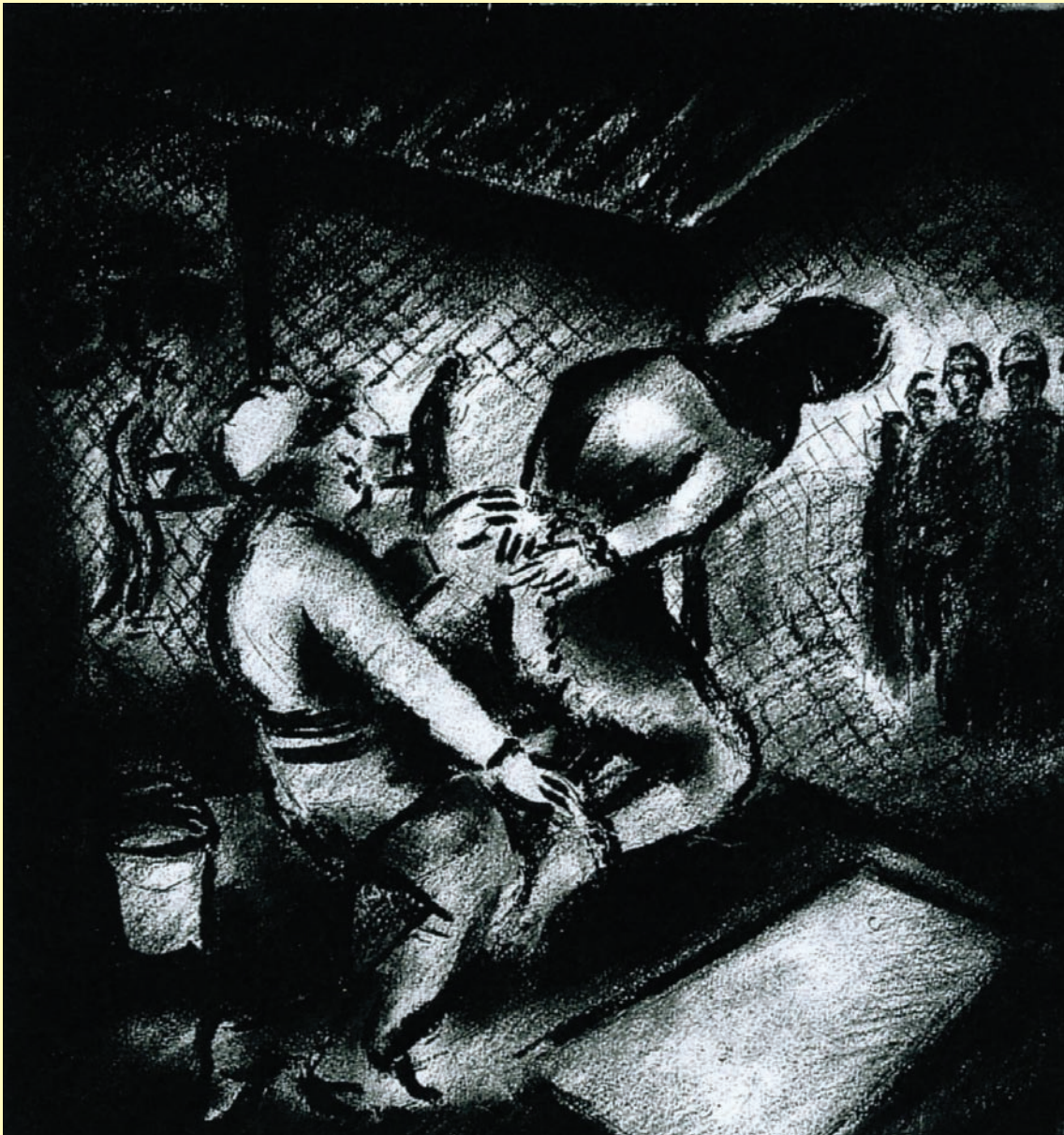
I did not see you and I saw you.  
I never knew your name  
or where you came from,  
the roll-up, the painkiller, the blind eye turned,  
the anonymous biscuit, the delivered note.  
You did not tell me your name or where your home was  
but I know what you are called. Human.

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The above poems, translated by Dinah Livingstone, are taken from María Eugenia Bravo Calderara's bilingual collection, *Prayer in the National Stadium* (Katabasis, London 1992). She lives in London and her poems have appeared in many anthologies, including *Captured Voices*, an anthology for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, edited by Janna Letts and Fiona Whytehead (Victor Gollancz, London 1999).



# *Guantánamo*



*‘a legal black hole’*