

The Open Society

Journal of the New Zealand Association of Rationalists and Humanists

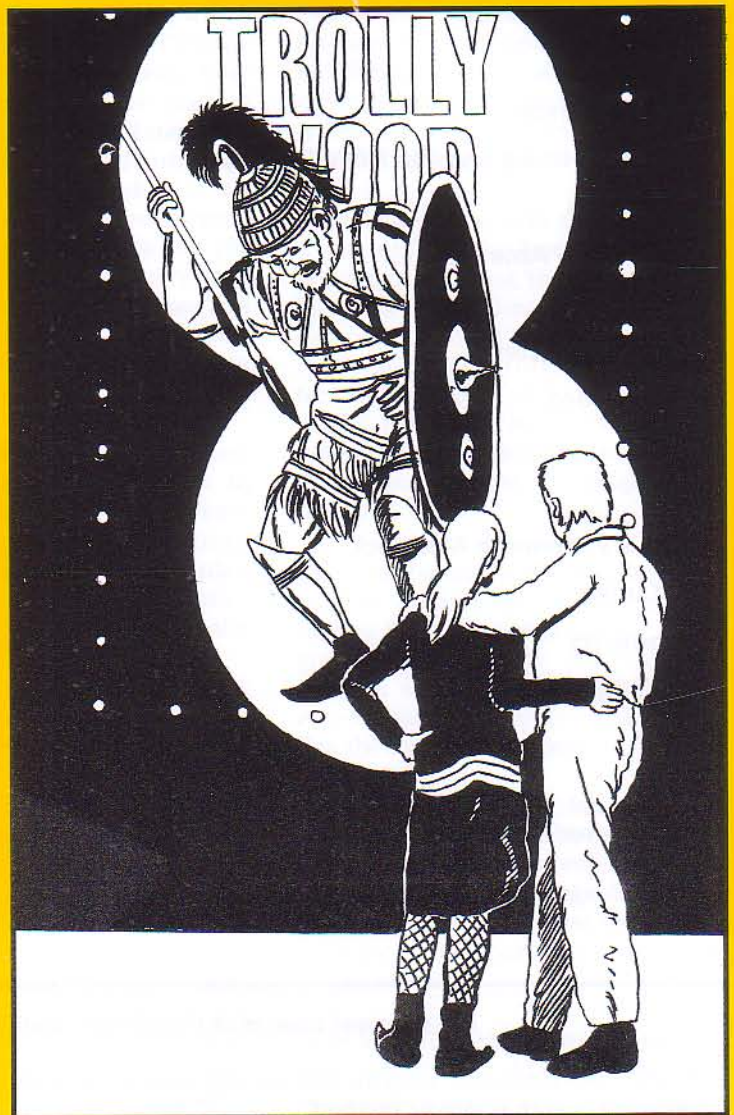
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**The Rewards of
Being an Atheist**

The Maxim Institute

**Voltaire's House and
the Bible Society**

Happiness



Ben Radford reviews Troy, the Movie

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The principal objects of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists are:

to advocate a rational, humane and secular view of life without reference to supernatural agencies and which is compatible with scientific method

to promote a tolerant, responsible and open society

to encourage open-minded enquiry into matters relevant to human co-existence and well-being

Braveheart Theology

It seems to me that pundits have missed an essential point with regard to the controversial film *The Passion of the Christ*. The two main questions have been: how accurate to the New Testament is the film and to what extent is it anti-Semitic? But in an important way, these questions blur into one another, and are in fact the same question.

Now, the film concentrates on several themes which lend themselves to an anti-Semitic reading. The cruelty and indifference of the crowd, all of whom are Jewish, is a constant feature. And Satan walks through the Jewish crowd with little attempt at differentiation. Then there is the protracted attempt to get Pilate off the hook, and throwing back blame on 'the Jews'. Pilate is intimidated by Caiaphas, the high priest who was in fact appointed by Pilate and in no position to dictate to his master.

The beating the Roman soldiers inflict on Jesus happens in the context of assuaging the vicious Jews and I understand that the blame-allocating phrase "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt 27:25), though dropped from the English subtitles, is still actually said in Aramaic. But even if it is dropped entirely the irony is that, in its attempt to appear less anti-Semitic, the film is now less true to the New Testament original, where the Jews are continually derided and vilified. And after Jesus's death, an irate God cracks the Jewish temple in half but only rattles the solver of Pilate's palace.

Then there is the whole question of the influence of the mystic German nun Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774-1824), whose posthumously published work *The Dolorous Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1833) was an important source for this film. Emmerich's visions were ecstatic, frenziedly mystical, and deeply anti-Semitic.

As has been widely reported, Mel Gibson is from the ultra-conservative

wing of the Catholic Church, which rejects the (now much watered-down) reforms of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65.

Among the most significant of the Vatican II reforms which Gibson presumably rejects is *Nostra Aetate*, which reversed the hitherto official Catholic dogma that the 'perfidious Jews' bear collective responsibility of the death of Christ. It is then a fairly small step from opposing *Nostra Aetate* to denying the Holocaust, as Gibson's father is on record as having done. But the essential point to remember in all this is that *The Passion of the Christ* is not simply anti-Semitic in parts, or even that, taken as a whole, it happens to be anti-Semitic. *The Passion of the Christ* can be nothing other than anti-Semitic.

To explain this, we need to grasp a couple of important historical points. In true Catholic fashion, the film concentrates on the iconography of the cross. The cross was absent as a Christian symbol before Constantine. Until then Christian symbols were things like palm branches, peacocks and fish.

The cross became the central Christian symbol only after Constantine's vision of the cross in his dream the night before a critical battle. The story goes that Constantine saw the cross and with it came the words "Conquer by this". The next day, he did just that, defeating his rival Maxentius.

Why does this matter? Because the cross is a symbol which concentrates on the suffering and death of Jesus, rather than other, more uplifting symbols of resurrection and new life. And inevitably, when focusing on someone's death, attention turns to who is responsible for that death. Enter the Jews.

In *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, an important study of Christian anti-Semitism, the Catholic historian James Carroll put it this way: 'When the death of Jesus – rendered lit-

erally, in all its violence, as opposed to metaphorically or theologically – replaced the life of Jesus and the new life of the Resurrection at the heart of Christian imagination, the balance shifted decisively against the Jews.'

This is what happened when the cross became the archetypal Christian symbol. If, then, one is going to focus on the cross as a symbol, it becomes practically impossible to avoid some element of anti-Semitism.

Carroll goes so far as to say that there is a discernible line from Golgotha to Auschwitz, and that 'the hatred of Jews has been no incidental anomaly but a central action of Christian history, reaching to the core of Christian character.' Anti-Semitism was a central action of Christian history because Christianity emerged out of Judaism and had to define itself against the people of its birth.

The New Testament itself is the brainchild of Marcion (85-160 CE), described by one New Testament scholar as the greatest anti-Semite in antiquity. Marcion wanted to expunge all references to Judaism and Jews and to abandon the Hebrew scriptures.

He failed to achieve that, but he did succeed in fashioning the New Testament, which outlined the many faults and iniquities of 'the Jews', regardless of the fact that Jesus himself was Jewish. And once the cross became the central symbol, by extension

Jews had to become even more the central enemy than Marcion contrived them to become. And in becoming the enemy of Jesus, the Jews could easily be seen as the enemy of God, for whom no mercy is possible.

So, if a film is going to represent the New Testament faithfully and focus on the iconography of the cross, the real question becomes the more tragic one of 'how could it not be anti-Semitic?'

Religion

as social cement and cement overcoat

Kenneth Maddock

A couple of years ago I attended a meeting of the Blackheath Philosophy Forum in the Blue Mountains near Sydney. The speaker was David Armstrong, a prominent Australian philosopher, who once contributed to *Question*, published by the Rationalist Press Association as a successor to the *Rationalist Annual*. He mentioned his freethought views, but added that with advancing age he had become more sympathetic to religion, being inclined now to see its value as a social cement. Leaving aside the question of whether cement is a desirable substance, I would argue that this perspective recognises one aspect of religion, and so captures part of the truth about it, while leaving a second aspect in the shadows. Because the two are linked, it is misleading to discuss one in isolation from the other. This further property may be described as a cement overcoat for the mind. Now one, now the other aspect of religion - the social or the intellectual - will loom the larger, depending on time, place and the interests of the observer. It is only analytically, however, that the two can be separated; for both are ever present in life and there is a never ending interplay between them.

Among early theorists who grasped this duality of function was Plato's uncle Critias, an atheist and leader of the Thirty Tyrants who took power in Athens amidst confusion and dismay resulting from defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Religion, he argued, was a wise invention intended to delude men

and make them afraid. It tamed their lawlessness and made them amenable to control. That is to say, religion provided social cement (rules, sanctions and sentiments suitable for sustaining an ordered community) and cement overcoats to prevent minds from straying (spectres which excite fear, stories which deceive, spells which captivate).

Twenty two centuries after Critias, the New Zealand anthropologist Reo Fortune expressed himself to much the same effect (though without the cynicism or the supposition that a ruler of inventive mind hoodwinked the masses) when describing the religion of the Manus islanders of Melanesia (*Manus Religion*, 1935). Each household worshipped an ancestral ghost, the deceased father of the household head. His skull hung in the house, and it was believed that he upheld morality by punishing the unexpiated sins of his kindred, as well as acting spitefully to inflict suffering on unrelated households.

Fortune made the point that by attributing ills and mishaps to punishment by ancestral ghosts, and by discovering via an oracle what expiation was due, the Manus were able to maintain their moral code without appearing to act personally against offenders. It is a device for passing the buck from the living to disembodied presences haunting the village. Critias, had he known of it, might have seen it as worthy of a ruler. As Fortune put it, 'a primitive moralist

and communer with the ancestor, who interposes to correct a sin, does not appear to be a rude and meddlesome interferer with the sinner's private affairs, provided always that the sinner believes ... in the primitive communer with the ancestor.' Presumably this arrangement safeguarded solidarity by taking some of the heat out of personal relationships and making it less likely that grievances would fester to the point of provoking a showdown between members of the same household or village. In our modern societies a comparable result is achieved by having consultants diagnose what is wrong with an organization. They can be saddled with responsibility for anger and fear caused by their proposals, thus diverting attention from the insiders who engaged them.

The function of religion is not limited to such social achievements as sustaining order within a community, stimulating fellow-feeling among its members and providing relief from the burden of responsibility. Intellectually it enables us to create and highlight differences between ourselves and surrounding humanity by providing symbols and dogmas to serve as marks of identity. It may be that unlike other people we circumcise our penises or better still subincise as well (an operation discreetly referred to as 'the terrible rite' in the older anthropological literature), or we practise female circumcision or male menstruation, or we affirm that God is one/three/many/&c, or we abstain from

pork/beef/alcohol/making graven images/marrying outside our caste/playing games on holy days/&c (tick your choice). Or perhaps we distinguish ourselves by doing none of these things, deriding them as superstitious conceits - a true triumph of onepmanship.

Marks of identity define an in-group's place in the world and make its members stand apart (usually in terms flattering to themselves) from outsiders (often pejoratively identified as barbarians, foreign devils, infidels, lesser breeds, Gentiles and the like) who favour some other fashion in cement overcoating. Cement need not, of course, be religious in character, and I realise that other varieties of it can hold together the members of a group, fix their minds and set them apart from outsiders. At present, however, my interest is limited to the religious variety of cement and to in-groups which owe their definition, partly at least, to considerations of religion. But just what is an in-group?

The underlying idea must be as old as mankind, but the concept seems to have been given explicit form by William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), an American sociologist, who contrasted it with that of the out-group. Humanity does not present itself to us as an undifferentiated mass but is divided by kinship, locality and so on into groups which vary in size according to the level of social development. Members of a group have interests in common, cooperate with each other and tend to live peacefully together. If they did not they would jeopardise their chances of survival. Towards other groups they feel suspicion, rivalry and hostility. In practice, of course, there may be marriage alliances, trade ties and other bonds with some of the out-groups, but these are apt to be shifting and uncertain. That they cannot be fully relied on is shown by special measures taken to protect traders and ambassadors (unnecessary if trust and goodwill were the norm), of rules against quarrelling or bearing arms at religious festivals and of such seemingly contradictory sayings as 'We marry our enemies.' The equally contradictory 'Love your enemy' appeared late on the scene and has seldom received more than lip service, even from Christians in whose religion it originated.

The thesis that religion provides social cement is well expressed in the Book of Rites, an ancient Chinese work: 'Ceremonies are the bond that holds the multitudes together, and if the bond be removed, those multitudes fall into confusion.' Less edifying than the thoughts of Chinese philosophers are the realities of Dahomey (or Benin), a 19th century African kingdom admired by the economist Karl Polanyi, whose romantic primitivism has been entertainingly dissected by Roger Sandall, an Auckland graduate in anthropology (*The Culture Cult*, 2001). The Dahomean multitudes were not short of social cement. According to Polanyi, theirs 'was an unbreakable society, held together by bonds of solidarity over which only naked force eventually prevailed.' The force was British imperialism. Solidarity, it may be noted, went hand in hand with what Polanyi admits to be 'acts of repulsive cruelty, religious mass murder, and endemic techniques of treachery in the political field.' For example, 4,000 prisoners were sacrificed to the gods after one military victory, and boys and girls were trained in the executioner's art by being given knives with which to hack at the heads of living victims.

It would be unfair to blame religion for everything gruesome in Dahomean society. But their religion certainly contributed to the horrors. What is more, the examples I gave of atrocities show how an in-group, the members of which are held tightly together by religious and other forms of cement, defines itself in opposition to out-groups, including some of its own members who, for whatever reason, come to be regarded as beyond the pale. Thus the same

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social cement which disposes David Armstrong in favour of religion breeds antagonisms which, historically and at all levels of social development, have frequently disturbed the peace and caused many to suffer.

That freedom of the mind is also at risk when people clad themselves in cement overcoats will be accepted without much question in rationalist circles. The hunting down and extermination of heretics in Christian countries in the past is too well known to need labouring, but many examples could be added from societies of every description, not only in earlier times but at the present day. The murderous attitude of some Muslims to apostates and infidels shows it, as do the rigid conditioning achieved in some varieties of tribal initiation and the attributing of wickedness to unbelievers (regardless of exactly what it is in which they do not believe). In these and other examples, a pattern of thought as well as a pattern of behaviour is systematically and often cruelly instilled. Other possibilities are closed off, differences suppressed, lives forced into a rut.

It may be objected that religion is more complex and ambiguous than my free-thinking argument allows and that by treating only two aspects I have donned a cement overcoat of my own. The objection is well taken, but to say that religion has other aspects does not deny the existence or importance of the two I emphasise or the reality of the interplay between them. In conclusion, then, not only is religion a variety of social cement, but the cementing of relationships within a group fosters and is fostered by rivalry and hostility between groups and by the punishing of deviant members; in short, cohesion is encouraged and divisiveness promoted in a mutual feeding frenzy. Religions in all their diversity have usually been conducive to the flourishing of these seemingly opposed but in reality complementary processes, and to the narrowing and rigidifying of thought and sentiment in the name of identity. It follows that religion is not to be lightly recommended.

Ken Maddock was an Honorary Associate of the NZARH before his untimely death in 2003. See the obituary on page 21.

The Rewards Of Being An Atheist

Steve Cooper

For hundreds of thousands of years of human existence, there was no way of accumulating knowledge or history. No one could write or read. Almost everything that happened would have been forgotten within four, or at most five generations. Magic and myth ruled mankind. Science was undiscovered. Fairy tale myths and unseen god controllers were the only way of explaining how the world was created or who caused droughts, floods, storms, plagues and many other pests. A limited knowledge of agricultural methods, building and hunting would have been passed down from father to son. Women also passed down their food gathering skills to their daughters but nothing was recorded.

Because of the lack of written records, ancient history faded into oblivion. We became largely dependent on archaeology to give us information about early history and development in our world.

Writing grew out of commerce. It all started about three thousand BCE to record the sale of produce. This happened in a place called Sumer, a country in Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The first attempt could be called memory aids. Small sketches of the goods traded were made on pieces of damp clay which were then baked in the sun. The next step came many years later when someone cut a wedge shaped stylus from a reed. This enabled traders to make a variety of designs each of which represented a word. Over many years pictograms developed and extended into a kind of writing called Cuneiform. The word cuneiform comes from two Latin words: Cuneus, meaning wedge and Forma meaning shape. Cuneiform writing gave us a window into the social behaviour and philosophy of these ancient people.

The Sumerians had built huge ziggurats or temples in which they could worship their many gods. There were gods for every facet of life and weather condition. Everyone believed that their desires could be provided by the gods or by magic. A wise person would seek to placate the gods by sacrificing to the personally favoured god who was thought to be in control.

Universal Laws of Nature

When a person prays to his god, he must of necessity assume that the laws of the universe are governed by spiritual forces. He must also assume that those universal laws can be bent and manipulated by a supernatural power in answer to his request. Otherwise why would he pray? But science and reason tells us that the universe is governed by laws which are not flexible but are impersonal, automatic and immutable. This idea was stated by Sir James George Frazer in 1890 in his book *The Golden Bough*. The universal laws are neither kind nor cruel, they do not display emotions or favouritism.

This is a powerful argument against the Christian teaching. The Bible, particularly the New Testament, is crowded with stories of magic. Turning water into wine, curing lepers and the blind by speaking to them, calming a storm by commanding that it be still, walking on water, and raising the dead back to life, are all contrary to the laws of the universe and could not possibly have happened.

We need to think carefully about this. If indeed the laws of the universe are impersonal, automatic and unalterable, ancient belief in magic is a false notion which occurs only in the imagination of the believer. A prayer is an expression of

a wish which will have a lottery's chance of being fulfilled. If the prayer is for a fine day which could occur in any event, the rain may or may not happen. Rain will fall only when the atmospheric conditions are there which cause rain to fall. We humans can read the signs and anticipate rain but we cannot manipulate it. Any object which is heavier than water will sink in water. A steel boat will float in water only when its weight is less than the weight of water it displaces.

The sun will set every evening and rise every morning regardless of cloud cover. Season will follow season year after year, the moon will pull the tides in and out twice a day. Water will always seek to flow to a lower level. The pull of gravity has always existed.

Every living thing, animal and plant will eventually die and be no more; there are no exceptions. We will leave behind a part copy of our own genes in our progeny and their memory of us. Some of us will become ill and will take medicine to ease our suffering but we will all die. These are some of the universal laws which cannot be changed.

So-called divine healing is a form of hypnotism. When the pastor conducts a healing occasion the people have a keen expectation and willingness to comply. The healing happens in the minds of the benefactors; it is not an act of God or divine spirit. Religion is largely dependent on magic or near magic. No prayer can manipulate the immutable laws of the universe.

I am sure all rational people must agree that the human brain is the storehouse of all our knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. Our brain is our only mental repository from which we each draw our reactions to the passing parade of life.

Our brain is the power house which gives us the ability to think, react, decide or choose. When we die, our mortal mental repository with all its vast record of experience, beliefs and memories must be lost and decay with the rest of our mortal bodies.

The following extract is from *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* by John W Draper, University of New York, December 1873.

We must remember that everything around us is in mutation; decay follows reproduction and reproduction decay, and that it is useless to repine at death in a world where everything is dying.

The thought of dying need not be at all frightening. It is rather a peaceful conclusion to a completed life. The result of dying is oblivion, an eternal sleep. All our fears will perish with us. You and I will no longer exist.

The universal laws include the movement of this earth. We can find marine fossils upon hill tops and mountains because at one time they also were under the sea and have been pushed up by earthquakes or other forces. I remember that in 1931 a severe earthquake destroyed the small town of

Napier and pushed up a shallow bay by about two metres. What had been a tidal arm of the sea is now a green field grazing sheep.

My wife and I were part of a university geology field trip walking through a new road recently cut into a hill. Suddenly I saw the lecturer gazing intently at the sandstone wall. He took two or three steps forward and picked a shark's tooth out of the bank a little above his eye level. The question is how was a shark's tooth deposited hundreds of metres above sea level? It was deposited in the sea thousands of years before pressure pushed the land up many metres. Even the tectonic plates are slowly pushing other plates. Geologists tell us that New Zealand is slowly moving in a northern direction.

We humans are able to enjoy the beauty and benefits of this world and a good life by using our brains to protect ourselves from conditions which may cause suffering.

Magic and Religion

We now know that one truth will not disagree with another truth. A truth cannot be nullified by another truth; one or both concepts are false statements. Magic is a false concept because it can-

not agree with the immutable laws of the universe. If a person acts from love or fear of god, he or she is a religious person. Another person could do the same act from a humanistic or social responsibility point of view. The one is conforming to the standard imposed by his religious teaching but not necessarily his personal desire. The non-religious person acts from compassion or sense of social need and personal dignity.

To claim, as the Bible does, that a storm on a lake could immediately be turned into a calm by a word of command by Jesus would be called a miracle or an act of magic. The idea of magic was accepted as truth and was thought to be achieved by acts of a god and a proof that gods existed. Magic became a world wide notion before scientific ideas proved it to be a falsehood. Millions of people still believe in magic.

Magic preceded religion. The early Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia were steeped in magic. They believed in spirits but had no religion and no god. The Maori of New Zealand also believed in spirits but had no god until the missionaries arrived. The same applied to the Eskimo people and to other races. As magic gave way to religion, so religion is now giving way to the greater knowledge of science.



The New Testament is the main authority for Christians. It is largely built on mythical stories. The first gospel to be written was Mark about 70 to 100 CE. Certainly it was written after St. Paul's epistles as there was no mention of a gospel text in any of Paul's writings. Mark never mentions the Virgin birth or any of the childhood stories of Jesus. Matthew and Luke were written about 10 years later and increased the mythology with many magical stories. John appeared another 10 or 20 years later and seems to have no factual basis. He has Jesus repeatedly stating that God is his father and that he has communication with God. That does not make the statement true. His only proof is the supposed miracles Jesus is said to have done.

A Christian today will say "Of course I believe the Bible stories, Jesus was divine and can do anything." So according to them, God established the immutable laws of nature and then disobeys his own laws. Utter nonsense! The immutable laws of nature cannot be changed.

A verse in the Bible says, 'For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath and humans have no advantage over the animals; all go to the one place; all are from the dust and all turn to dust again.' (Ecclesiastes 3:19). It seems that the author did not believe in a life after death. The idea of a heaven and a hell in another world was borrowed together with solstice celebrations and other festive occasions from pagan religions which were much older than the Christian religion.

God, heaven, hell, good and bad spirits are myths created out of ignorance and fear by our ancient ancestors. Today there is no reason to believe the ancient mythologies. Personal maturity and integrity cannot be found in religion, mainly because faith in a religion constitutes a permanent state of childish dependence on something or a person outside the self.

Why I Rejected Religion

The following are some of the realizations which made me finally and totally abandon the notion of Christianity and its God.

1. The Bible is a faulty source of knowledge. It contains hundreds of serious contradictions, scientific impossibilities, immoralities, absurdities, unfulfilled promises, inaccuracies and obscenities. Here is just one example. The Bible states that God cannot lie,

Numb. 23:19, Prov. 12:22, Heb. 6:18. It also states that God sends lying spirits, 2 Thess. 2:11, I Kings 22:23. So we learn that God does lie by proxy.

2. The basis of Christian thought is that Jesus died a substitutional death for the sins of mankind, 'thus cleansing them from all sin.' It is unjust to charge an innocent person with the crimes of someone else. Equally, it is a travesty of justice to attribute the virtue of someone else to a guilty person. Yet this is the Christian doctrine which sprang from the ancient Hebrew belief in animal sacrifice for the sins of the people. It is convoluted ancient Hebrew reasoning unworthy of intelligent human beings.

3. The Christian religion relies on unprovable suppositions :

(a) that there is a supreme creator God;
(b) a human person has an eternal soul;
(c) the memory and guilts of this life can be transferred to another existence.

When there, the sins of mankind may be punished in a never ending hell fire. So the whole basis of Christianity is unscientific ancient superstitions and colossal cruelty.

4. The Christian religion diminishes human dignity by dependence on an unscientific myth. It tends to rob a person of the most important asset of self-esteem or self-worth by regarding him to be unworthy by himself. In its place it offers borrowed virtue. It must first convince a person of unworthiness before offering the supposed imputed virtue of Jesus. The religion denies that human virtue is purely a human quality and a facet of our innate social nature. Religion always encourages dependence on a divinity instead of human potential.

5. The Christian religion is an elitist anti-social doctrine equal to tribalistic racism. It divides people into believers or the damned. Its history is full of cruelty, wars and suffering. Christians, Jews, Muslims all worship the same God. Not only have they killed each other, they fight their own kind in the name of the same God. Millions have died because of belief in God. The American psychologist Dr Eric Fromm said

There is perhaps no phenomenon which contains so much destructive feeling as the moral indignation which permits anger, envy and hatred to be acted out under the guise of virtue.

This certainly applies to the Christian religion.

6. The Christian faith is founded on two basic beliefs. The first is that an almighty god does indeed exist, that he must be obeyed and worshipped before he will bestow his favours upon his supplicants. The second basic belief is that the spirit of mankind lives on after death, that there is another rewarding life beyond the grave.

These two basic notions stand together. If either god or life after death is not true, the whole structure of religion must collapse. Yet there is absolutely no scientific proof that either assumption is true. This is scary stuff! These two beliefs have been accepted by hundreds of billions of people for thousands of years. But that does not make those conclusions true.

Here are some rewards for being an atheist:

An atheist becomes a person of worth in his or her own right. There is no place for any borrowed pseudo-virtue.

He or she becomes king or queen of his or her own life and part of the social community.

One is not accountable to priests or any religious leader.

One acquires intellectual and emotional freedom, lack of guilt and no fear of death.

One gains personal honesty and freedom as a complete human being free from inner conflicting opinions.

A person believes in one's own virtue, gaining personal maturity and integrity.

It is a way of living a socially acceptable life in harmony with other human beings about us.

One looks to science and common sense reason to answer uncertainties.

When I got rid of religious conflict, I automatically become a humanist. We are all social animals who enjoy the company of other social animals. It is part of our innate natural heritage and becomes easy for us to show compassion, be honest with each other, tolerant and friendly to all people and gain approval by obeying the laws of the country.

Steve Cooper is the author of *To Hell with God?* (1991) and *Origins of the Christian Faith* (2000) among other works. He is an Honorary Associate of the NZARH.

Southern Lights

Russell Dear

To Die A Martyr

Some time ago, in the correspondence pages of this magazine (Spring 2003), Professor Antony Flew wrote about the 850 Jehovah's Witnesses who died in the Sachsenhausen Concentration camp during World War Two. He described them as martyrs and left me with the feeling that he thought there is something noble in martyrdom. On a number of levels I have always had difficulty with the concept.

First, I think, from the examples that come to mind, is the thought that for many of those involved there is an element of death against one's will. Consider the case of the Jews at Masada. After the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman armies, the last point of Jewish resistance resided in Masada where Jewish fighters and their families began to collect. The Roman general Flavius Silva marched against them in 72 CE and subsequently took the citadel. His soldiers found only two women and five children alive - they had managed to hide unseen in a cave. The Jewish leader Eleazar had persuaded the others to kill themselves rather than fall into Roman hands. Ten were chosen by lot to kill the remainder, then commit suicide.

This example parallels the Jonestown massacre in 1978 where 913 members of The People's Temple religious cult died in a mass suicide rather than give in to the authorities. On this occasion, leader Jim Jones 'persuaded' most of his followers to drink orange juice laced with cyanide. They were 'helped' by his henchmen. Some of those unwilling to join in were shot. In both cases it is obvious that many people only complied because they felt they had no option. They were overawed, probably overwhelmed, by their leaders. Some obviously had doubts and tried to escape death; a few were successful.

On another level I'm inclined to think that the motives and rewards of martyrdom are so relative. What is one person's martyrdom is another's foolishness. The Catholic authorities in South Vietnam

just prior to the last Vietnam war believed Buddhism would undermine their authority and sought to restrict, even suppress it. Buddhist monks, following the example of Thich Quang Duc began to immolate themselves, making the ultimate sacrifice for what they thought was a desperate cause. Across the China Sea in Japan, from 1597

Christians it was a hedonistic lifestyle after death (now there's a contradiction), for Kamikaze fighters it was eternal happiness, for Shahids it is 72 virgin women (or young boys, depending on choice).

I'm sure that for many there seem no alternatives to martyrdom. If you can't see any alternatives then maybe there aren't any, but then again it's more likely that, being constrained by your own lack of imagination, you just can't see them. For some who can see the alternatives, the loss of face, how their actions would appear to others, precludes their choosing them. Being a coward is one thing, being thought a coward by others is something quite different.

On this one I'm with Galileo who believed science was not worth martyrdom. In such a situation, like Galileo, surely it is better to tell the other side what they want to hear. For example, outwardly give up your religion while inwardly still holding it. Go along with the other belief system and work to sabotage it on the quiet.

If only a few more of those martyrs in World War Two had pretended to support Nazism, then maybe more lives would have been saved, more hardship prevented. I wrote 'a few more' there because it is known that a number of people during the war, while outwardly appearing to follow the dictates of the regime, were actually working quietly to reduce its effects. The film *Schindler's List* comes to mind.

So what is noble about martyrdom? As I've said before, it depends where you stand. Relativism rules. It's probably better, if possible, to avoid it by putting out any image of yourself that ensures survival while quietly indulging in subversive activity.



* Can I put gravity on hold for you, as well ?

onwards, more than 6000 Christians died under torture for refusing to give up Christian beliefs. Islamic terrorists, Shahids, voluntarily give their lives in the cause of Jihad. They consider themselves martyrs.

For religious martyrs, afterlife rewards seem to be the motivation. For

God's Own Think Tank

Paul Litterick

Society is exhibiting a serious pathology of the family. [1]

This ringing statement is the central point made by the Maxim Institute in its lengthy submission to Parliament on the Care of Children Bill. But what does it mean? Nothing: it looks clever and suggests that the author has some knowledge of the social sciences, but it simply does not make sense. Whoever wrote it obviously does not know the meaning of the word pathology.

It may look like pedantry to criticise a single sentence in a document which runs to thirty-two pages and over twelve thousand words, but the rest of the submission is not much better. After rambling on about pathology for a while, the author then considers *The Importance and Benefits of Marriage*, beginning with a summary of the work of John D. Unwin, a British anthropologist who "studied 80 civilisations" and "in his 1934 study *Sex and Culture* (Oxford University Press) he noted that a common thread ran through all of them: he found that 'history does not contain a single instance of a group becoming civilised unless it has been absolutely monogamous, nor is there any example of a group retaining its culture after it has adopted less rigorous customs'". [2] All well and good, except that the author of *Sex and Culture* was **Joseph Daniel Unwin** and he did not claim to be an anthropologist.

This attribution might seem unimportant, but for the fact that no less than nineteen conservative Christian websites make the same mistake and summarise the book in exactly the same words as Maxim's submission; there are several hundred similar sites which at least get the author's name correct. On the other hand, an extensive search of significant books and websites on anthropology or human sexuality fails to reveal any reference to J D Unwin's work, for good reason: he was barking mad. In fact, Unwin studied the research on 80 'uncivilised' societies and concluded that sexual continence was a

significant factor in their development, but at the cost of the subjugation of women. [3]

From this brief examination of a single reference, we can conclude the following: (a) Maxim did not read the book they were quoting; (b) they knew nothing of its author; (c) they were ignorant of its place in academic literature (d) they cribbed all their information from some fundamentalist website.

This somewhat careless attitude to citations is a bit queer coming from a body that claims to perform "timely, accurate research and analysis on key policy issues" in order "to promote the key principles of a civil society". [4] The rest of the Care of Children Bill submission demonstrates the quality of this analysis. It includes seemingly credible references to research about homosexuality, same sex relationships, same sex parenting and more or less everything about gays apart from their taste in interior decor. However, as Craig Young of *GayNZ* has revealed in several articles Maxim obtained most of its citations wholesale from sources which at best could be described as unreliable, and at worst, fraudulent; Young's phrase was "Christian Right junk scientists". [5] The most notable is Paul Cameron, a virulently anti-gay activist who once said that gays should be exterminated and has been expelled from the American Psychological Association and condemned by the American Sociological Association for his research methods, an unusual double first.

Maxim also throws in a few unreferenced slurs and some research findings which are true but misleading, such as "a lesbian has an increased risk of getting breast cancer than a heterosexual woman" - the truth is that women who do not bear children or breastfeed have higher risks of breast cancer, and that lesbians generally are more likely to drink alcohol and smoke, which are also risk factors. A childless woman who drinks and smokes would be at risk, regardless of her sexuality. Maxim won't

like this, but the effect of those clauses of the Care of Children Bill which resolve issues around children conceived by assisted reproductive technologies will make it easier for lesbians to bear children and so reduce their risk of breast cancer.

One only needs to be slightly acquainted with the Social Sciences to realise that there is no expertise brought to bear on this issue, only a partisan selection of evidence which supports Maxim's prejudices. Their wilful ignorance does not stop here, however; it can be found in abundance among Maxim's extensive body of publications. When discussing Law, Government, Philosophy or Literature, Maxim's writers reveal themselves to be wiseacres. Despite much intellectual posturing, it is obvious that the Republic of Letters is a foreign country to these people. There is little depth to any of their notions and less understanding of the issues they claim to master. This is hardly surprising, since most Maxim staff seem to have degrees in Marketing, but at heart it reveals an estrangement from academic discourse. Maxim views intellectuals as suspect: Post-Modernist neo-Marxians who practice Ethical Relativism, to use some of their favourite buzz-words.

So, who are these people and what do they want? [6] Maxim's official folklore, as described in an article in *North and South*, [7] describes a coming together of concerned citizens, under the guidance of John Graham, Chancellor of Auckland University. These worthies looked at the state of New Zealand and decided that Something Must Be Done. So they went forth and found able helpers for their task.

That is one way of looking at it, but the reality is a wee bit different. The man chosen to lead the Institute was Bruce Logan, former principal of Middleton Grange School, whose primary objectives are:

to encourage students to accept the

sole authority of the Bible and to develop a systematic approach to its study; to teach individual subjects so that students begin to learn what it means to be created in the image of God; to teach students that they are fallen creatures who require the salvation provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. [8]

Middleton Grange provided Maxim with accommodation for its research staff among the school's fallen students. Maxim also has an Auckland headquarters in the former home of the conservative Christian mayor of Mt Roskill, Keith Hay, under a three-year, rent free-loan from his family trust.

Logan's deputy is one Greg Fleming, whose career history began with the Lifeway Trust and who then became general manager of Parenting With Confidence in 1999. According to the *North and South* article, Fleming went to the US in mid 2001, where he became fell under the spell of reformed Watergate conspirator Charles 'Chuck' Colson. Like so many white-collar criminals, Colson (who was the keeper of Nixon's Black Book of political opponents) found God when he got in trouble and has made a living from it ever since; he has never admitted that his crimes were wrong. When he is not saving crims for Christ with his Prison Fellowship organisation, Colson fulminates in print about the state of the world. He is a lot smarter than most fundamentalists and his essays have at least a patina of intellect. Much of Maxim's thinking is borrowed from Colson with little alteration.

According to Fleming "in their individual lives all Maxim staff are Christians who come from a variety of denominations and theological understandings". However, and just in case you should be worried that Maxim is a Christian right organisation, "the Maxim Institute isn't a church or a Christian organisation. The principles we're advocating, while they're very consistent with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, are not unique to Christianity, in fact they're shared by many civilisations and religions across time. That's what makes them so strong". However, when talking to a Christian fundamentalist website Maxim states "We have yet to discover a better universal ethic than that reinforced by the Christian faith". [9]

Maxim is also heavily involved in such projects as Compass, which aims to keep children from fundamentalist families within the fold when they go off into the big wide world, by giving them a Worldview (or, to use another favourite

term, a *weltanschauung*). Their secular nature would also come as news to Graeme Lee of the Evangelism 2004 Committee, who describes Maxim as a ministry. [10]

Nevertheless, in public Maxim pretends to be a secular organisation. All this subterfuge gives them a few problems when it comes to public debate: they cannot afford to admit that their agenda is of the Christian Right and they have nothing more than platitudes and contradictions to offer in its place. So, when a mosque was built at Hagley Park Community College, Maxim fumed and demanded a separation of church and state, shortly after it had written approvingly of state-funded religious education under the Integrated Schools system. Similarly Bruce Logan got into an awful mess over Matt Robson's proposal to have prayers in Parliament removed. In a *NZ Herald* opinion piece, he babbled about law and tradition and gave us such priceless pearls of wisdom as "The common law is based on a contract whereby authority is granted only to those who exercise it according to a higher law which they cannot challenge. This is the secret of our freedom".[11] A secret indeed, knowable only to those few who can understand what Logan is talking about, a band which may or may not include Logan himself.

You will not find any specific advocacy of Christianity on Maxim's website or in its publications. There is some blather about churches being essential to Civil Society but no mention of the G word on Maxim's website. This is for strategic reasons: New Zealanders will not buy religious politics or politicised religion. So Maxim hopes that we will fall for all the talk of values, tradition and morals. What is obvious, however, is that Maxim's targets are the three G's most feared and hated by the Christian Right: Girls, Gays and Government. Girls are trouble, gays are unspeakable, Government is secular. If all goes to plan, it is to be replaced by Civil Society. This seems to mean that voluntary organisations (we can safely assume that this means churches) will provide education and welfare. There won't be much need for either, in any case, because people will behave: The Family will be the primary institution of society and if everyone keeps their knees together we won't need a welfare state.

If pressed, Maxim will describe itself as conservative, but this is not the conservatism of the British Tories, but that of the American religious right which took over the Republican party during the 1980s. It has a constituency among fundamentalist Protestants and ultra-montanist Catholics, as well as the broader

mass of disaffected white males and callers to talkback radio; in short, a coalition of the wailing.

At present Maxim's bogus research and dismal statements about events make them laughable, but they are quite serious about wanting to change the country's direction. Maxim's marketing professionals are working hard to change public opinion, forming groups of supporters and equipping them with tools to promote their message, such as the letter-writing wizard that sends one letter to over eighty publications nationwide. If they get their way, New Zealand will become a narrow, small-minded place where the prejudices of religious bigots dominate politics, run by the sort of people who think masturbation is a sin and Harry Potter is the work of Satan. Maxim's Civil Society is nothing more than a front for a takeover of politics by the Christian Right.

Don't say you weren't warned.

Paul Litterick is Secretary of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists and an Editor of *Open Society*

Notes

1. Care of Children Bill, Oral Submission (sic), Maxim Institute Section 1
2. *ibid*, Section 2
3. JD Unwin *Sex and Culture*, 1934
4. www.maxim.org.nz/main_pages/about_page/about_whatwedo.html
5. www.gaynz.com/aarticles/Political.asp
6. Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One*, 1948, page 1
7. *North and South*, November 2003
8. www.middleton.school.nz/objective.htm
9. www.christianschools.org.nz/maxim.htm
10. www.challengeweekly.co.nz/Iss14-2004.htm
11. www.nzherald.co.nz/storydisplay.cfm?thesecion=news&thesubsection=&storyID=3529573

Human Happiness: What is it?

Tatyana Pesotskaya

I believe we need to rediscover what happiness means and research it from a secular humanist perspective. The object is available in so many forms that no one has the ultimate solution or definition. But we don't need that. Nature provides us with a wide range of opportunities where we can seek and achieve happiness, happiness that we desire. By being reflective and analyzing the routes of human happiness, we can accomplish our goal and give meaning to one's life.

We all believe in the central importance of the value of human happiness here and now. We are born once. We cannot be born twice, we are not 'masters of the future', but we are masters of today, masters of our own actions and theorems. So we cannot put things off for 'the right time'. The right time is now, and the truest philosophy of life is to enjoy the present, to enjoy today without fear for tomorrow. Realising that life has an end, we have to find a meaning in every day and every minute. How amazing life is and how precious is this moment!

Life regarded as a complete whole at the present moment is the good life.

An old Sanskrit proverb says: "Yesterday is but a dream, tomorrow but a vision. But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day." Regardless of how good or bad the day is, value the present moment. Feel passionately about something or someone, it actually offers solutions to inner emptiness or existential personal crisis. Yes, earthly happiness is imperfect. The relativity of happiness remind us that pleasure and pain are interdependent. And Carl Jung was absolutely right: "The word happiness would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness." Happiness is a journey but no one knows where the road goes. Only time. "The time to be happy

is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so." (Robert Ingersoll).

I am a happy person, I have a great family, I have one special man in my life, I have great friends. Yes, "to love is to place our happiness in the happiness of another" (Gottfried von Leibniz). The full life cannot be experienced alone, friendship, love, sexual pleasures, they are so essential to human happiness. The world we live in created so many opportunities for our personal fulfillment. Whatever exists in our lives, it is in this world, in the world of shared experience, therefore our chances to succeed and get what we really want depend upon our own efforts and our relationships with others. "To have joy one must share it. Happiness was born a twin" (Lord Byron). So, what is happiness? A feeling, a kind of excitement, that might be explained in terms of biology? A process of achievement? Or a perception of an ideal form? A physiological state can be identified with a number of classic symptoms: delight, poor appetite, sometimes euphoria, they are often similar to those, when we fall in love. The excitement is soon replaced by calmness and reflection, and a sense of well-being, that can be also identified as happiness.

A recently new conception of happiness comes from the works of University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. His concept of 'flow' refers to an experience of people, being so involved in an activity (climbing a mountain, playing a game, writing a book) that they lose track of everything else, and they cannot reflect on how they feel. Its after the experience, 'looking back', when we say that it was the happiest moment. We reconstruct a special moment in memory and attribute happiness to it. 'Flow' is a state of consciousness with an intense concentration on an activity. People who seem to feel most positive clearly know what

they have to do to achieve a goal. Elements of dissatisfaction and complexity are the necessary components of 'flow experience', goals are not yet attained. A wellness life-style itself is a goal. The way you think, the way you work. Just try to observe it, you will definitely find something that should be improved, either the quality or probably the whole structure. Making a decision and looking forward to another brand new day is a first step in self-improvement programme. Whether it is a decision to lose a few pounds or to change something in your life, it is your decision and it has a meaning. Don't care if others would not support you, don't give up your goal, otherwise you'll lose your inner balance. Remember that dream you had when you were 17 or 20? Did you make it true? If not yet, try to do it for the sake of your own happiness. Even if the dreams seem a bit old, why would you let them go? These are your natural true-self-expressions and they are a part of your wellness programme, a kind of self-respect, an appreciation of your individuality, as it is. Try to apply those dreams to present conditions, and you will find happiness in this dazzling process of achievement. Happiness is not a result of fortune, "happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy".[1]

In order to analyse human happiness, let us attach ourselves to different meanings and objects; the variety of forms and interpretations are fascinating: we shall try to illustrate the perception of a happy reality, routes of happiness: it may come from the joy of deeds well-done, goals achieved, knowledge, reason, satisfaction; family, close friendships, love, trust, beauty, delight; from shared experience, shared joys, sorrows; from living a good and fully realized life;

"it is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely, well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely, well and justly without living pleasantly" (Epicurus); from optimism, cheerfulness, positive thinking; economic well being; cultural education, moral principles that are in agreement with one's philosophy of life; gardening or climbing a rock, enjoying sunset or just singing a favorite song:

The goal is in itself.

If you observe a really happy man you will find him building a boat, writing a symphony, educating his son or looking for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi desert. He will not be searching for happiness as if it were a collar button that has rolled under the radiator...He will have become aware that he is happy in the course of living life twenty-four crowded hours of the day. (W Beran Wolfe).

Supposing we are active, very active, 24 hours a day, however we still continue to seek happiness. Compare your current level of happiness with something else, aren't you satisfied? You already have all you need, the rest is your creativity and strife for a fully realised life. I do not remember who wrote the following words, mere words, but with a deep meaning: A man cried because he had no shoes until he met a man who had no feet.

It often seems like we are in need of something, but can't have it. And we say how unhappy or frustrated we are. Finally, we get it, but suddenly we don't know what to do, too much or too unexpected. We find that it is not the thing we really need or desire. We realise that it was just a step to something else, perhaps, more great and meaningful. But we are not sure. Defining it as just a step isn't fruitful, otherwise we shall seek for a special meaning from day to day, passing by and wandering the unknown roads. Your happiness is near. Look around, walk around, it is between too little and too much.

It is generally agreed that life satisfaction is a component of happiness; when it comes to sources of unhappiness recent studies speak of a growing number of existential disorders or existential problems. Before that Erich Fromm described us "a society of notoriously unhappy people - lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive and dependent people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying to save". [2]

Aristotle in Nicomachean Ethics discusses the concept of eudaimonia. What is eudaimonia? Self-fulfillment through

personal excellence and use of reason; eudaimonia is well-being, happiness. Yet Aristotle wrote that only a small number of people, those having admirable intellectual capacities, can achieve it. The foundation of one's willingness to undertake new projects was described in the following statement: happiness depends upon ourselves.

That's for sure! We need to develop motivation, cognitive skills and make wise choices. Remember Abraham Lincoln saying: "People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Dale Carnegie presented general psychological parameters and conditions of



happiness in a neat form: "Did you ever see an unhappy horse? Did you ever see a bird that had the blues? One reason why birds and horses are not unhappy is because they are not trying to impress other birds and horses." We always compare ourselves with others. Therefore, happiness is relative not only to our past experience but also to our comparisons with others.

We are free to choose any kind of interpretation, and undoubtedly the list of guidelines for happiness can be enriched and questioned, different individuals have diverse objects to value; but the exciting challenge is to discover the thought which truly expresses your inner self.

Men find happiness neither by means of the body nor through possessions, but through uprightness and wisdom. (Democritus)

It is neither wealth nor splendour, but tranquillity and occupation, which give happiness. (Thomas Jefferson)

Tranquility and rationality are the cornerstones of happiness. (Epicurus)

Should happiness be the goal of life or is it an ordinary experience? Let us ask ourselves, first of all, and arrange our thinking so that happiness can easily be increased. "For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness" (Ralph Waldo Emerson). Indeed, there is no value in life except what we choose to place upon it. We can see the world from the highest mountain, we can build a castle, but would it be so important, if a person, you love, is far away?

Happiness is natural, therefore it can be found and observed every day and everywhere, in everyday delights, joys, intellectual pleasures, excitement, love, sex, healthy life-style, in common moral excellencies, in the world of shared experience, in all those uncountable possibilities that you are thinking of now, happiness comes from knowing who we are, what we can do and that we, ourselves, can make our dreams come true, achieve our goals and keep moving forward.

If we are fully involved in our favourite activity, if we have projects and clearly defined goals, we become more enlightened, more active, more happy. Our continued well-being needs everyday support. While truly expressing our creative nature, we add, not only to ourselves, but to those people who are around us, we discover new horizons,

become innovators, masters of our own lives. We can succeed. Life is always the process of becoming. And happiness is an ability to enjoy this life, believe, plan, hope, dream, love, trust, there's no limit.

Can money buy happiness? Different psychological surveys show a weak correlation between income and happiness. We need food, rest, warmth, care. Money matters. But "the second piece of pie, or the second \$100,000, never tastes as good as the first" (David G Myers). Most people agree that money can't buy happiness. Nevertheless, we believe that a little more money would make us a little more happy and comfortable. Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow reports that 84 percent of people also wished they had more money, and 78 percent said it was 'very or fairly important' to have 'a beautiful home, a new car and other nice things.'

Having described a wide variety of approaches to happiness, it is time to conclude and share a few guidelines for one's wellness programme. Increasing positive emotions, taking control of your time, seeking work that engages your skills and interests; and what is important - giving priority to close relationships and self-development. Looking happy - acting happy - being happy. Let your mood brighten. Smile warmly and the sun will lighten your world. Happy people are optimistic, loving and forgiving. Happy people are wise and caring. Happy people are more willing to help those in need. Happy people are more tolerant and successful.

...To be HAPPY you must be reasonable...you must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passions and learned you place in the world and what things in it really serve you. To be happy you must be wise...

(George Santayana)

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Dedication

To Nathan, my love, who has contributed to my success and personal growth by inspiring me, loving me and lighting up my world. I thank him for sharing with me in every way, for introducing to me George Santayana and enriching my worldview, for guiding and teaching, for hoping and planning, for believing in our projects and dreams. I thank him for

being a very special and deep man, for making my life complete.

Footnotes

1. *Free Inquiry*, Volume 18, Summer 1998, No. 3, p 33

2. *ibid*, p 29

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Adam's Rib

Anne Ferguson

Rationalism Saves

A few years ago, while I was sitting on the Little Theatre committee, plans for some extensions were knocked back by the Council Building Inspector because they did not comply with earthquake regulations. Much grumbling from an ever cash strapped theatre group. However, not long before there had been the Edgecombe earthquake. Thanks to building regulations, tiresome though they may be, there had been no loss of life.

This argument won the day and properly complying extensions to the theatre went ahead. Compare this scenario with the devastation we sometimes witnessed when earthquakes occur in other countries which either have no Building Code or where someone has slipped someone a backhander to cut corners.

"Rules are made to be broken" – the excuse one often hears trotted out when someone wants to do something contrary to the rule book. The statement is, of course, a nonsense. Rules are made to set a guide line, a code by which, for the greater good, the members of a community are expected abide. Rules may have the intrinsic quality of being breakable but that is not their purpose.

Many sorts of rules exist: school rules, road rules, even this Association, dedicated to a free, open society, has Rules. There are unwritten rules. And what are the Laws of the Land but a set of rules to which its citizens are expected to adhere?

At Citizens' Advice Bureau, for which I work as a volunteer, a hardy

annual query is from clients who have made a purchase but, on getting it home, have decided they don't like it and attempt to return it to the shop. The shop refuses to accept the return and give the customer their money back. "But I thought they had to," wails the client. Not so. To comply with the Consumer Guarantees Act the trader must sell goods which have nothing wrong with them, or clearly state the fault if in a 'sale', but are not obliged to take the product back. The trader hands over the product, the consumer hands over the money and a contract is completed.

The water is, of course, muddied by some stores having a policy that goods may be returned 'no questions asked'. Ignorance of the law may result in consumers finding they have lost money and got stuck with a product they do not want but no great harm has been done. Just a disgruntled consumer who has learned a little bit of law – the hard way.

The concept that ignorance of the law is no defense, while possibly sound as a principle, has always seemed to me to be a bit unfair. No one can be expected to know everything, particularly in a field as complex and esoteric as law. At the very least, the miscreant should be let off with a caution.

Rules, Laws follow a similar process in the making. After much discussion, the governing body, be it Committee, Management Board or Parliament itself, draws up a rule or law, it is voted upon and becomes established. If found to be unworkable it may be amended or rescind-

ed but, for the period it is in place, that is what holds sway.

Why do some people seriously flout society's laws? If I had the answer to that one ... Perhaps the more productive question to ask is: why do some people quite happily go along with some laws but not others. Take driving on the correct side of the road. 'Keep left' or 'keep right' - it depends which country you are in. However, if two cars hurtle toward each other on the same side of the road they will inevitably collide with an almighty crash. That is a Law of Nature. Even yobboes have enough common sense to drive on the correct side of the road – unless drink, drugs and/or an excess of testosterone have put rationality to flight.

Laws, therefore, that are based on rationality have a better chance of being obeyed rather than ones based on superstitious beliefs and self-delusion.

Apart from a few anomalous little laws, like not trading on Christmas and Easter day, New Zealand's laws are remarkably free of religious influence. Even Consumer Law, which specifies traders should not mislead but operate in a fair and honest way, is based on common sense ethics.

In his last 'Letter from America' Bill Cooke (a worthy successor to dear, departed Alistair) alludes to the fact that New Zealand is among the least corrupt of countries while being one of the most secular. Perhaps this climate of constructing laws based on common sense ethics is a contributing factor. An encouraging state of affairs.

Voltaire's House and The Bible Society

David Ross

There is a popular anecdote among Christian apologists that Voltaire (1694-1778) once remarked that the Bible would soon become a forgotten book, but the house in which he made this prediction later became the headquarters of a Bible Society who used it to publish or distribute Bibles.

This ironic tale has been repeated in many books and web sites [1], frequently with contradictory details. The location of the house is usually given as Geneva [2], sometimes as Paris [3], and there are even occasional references to Germany and Austria.

The Bible society in question is variously identified as the Geneva Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society. And the date this society is said to have occupied Voltaire's house ranges anywhere from twenty years to a hundred years after the death of Voltaire.

It is also noteworthy that the more ill-advised versions of the anecdote refer to Voltaire as an Atheist when he was in fact a Deist.

Voltaire Vindicated?

Most writers give no sources or citations for the anecdote; if Voltaire ever made such a predication about the fate of the Bible I was unable to trace it while researching this article.

But was Voltaire's house used by a Bible society? As a first step to obtaining an answer, I contacted

the Bible Societies of France, Switzerland and the UK to seek verification of the story.

A categorical denial was received from Pierre Barreto, Communications Officer of the Alliance Biblique Française:

That absurd rumor [was] born some time ago in the US but it is completely false: no house where Voltaire lived is currently or has been occupied by a Bible Society, and not even by a printing company working for a Bible Society, neither in France nor in Switzerland.

Dolly Clottu, Secretariat of the Société Biblique Suisse, wrote that:

We don't have and can't find any other information about this popular anecdote. I have asked a former General Secretary who lives in the surroundings of Lausanne and he is definite: he has never heard about this story.

Rosemary Mathew, Librarian of the UK Bible Society, responded, "the question of Voltaire's house is one that crops up every so often and we have a couple of documents which prove the story false".

These little-known documents held by the UK Bible Society include a record of correspondence between Margaret T. Hills (1898-1972), Librarian of the American Bible Society, and Voltaire's biographer, Theodore Besterman (1904-1976),

who was director of the Institut et Musée Voltaire in Geneva. In response to a query from Hills about the Voltaire anecdote, Besterman wrote:

... None of Voltaire's homes is or ever has been connected in any way with any Bible Society. This applies to all Voltaire's homes, whether in France, Germany, Switzerland, or anywhere else. [4]

Hills concluded by expressing her hope that "none of the present American Bible Society folks are guilty of propagating this tale".

And according to another report on the anecdote:

...the closest affirmation of this version of the story is that the British and Foreign Bible Society depot in Paris stands on a site once occupied by a prison for those convicted of minor offences (embezzlement, debt, etc.) in which, according to the choice of sources, Voltaire may or may not have been confined. No other residence of his has been an office of any Bible Society. [5]

In the face of such authoritative denials, how did the anecdote originate? The earliest mention I have found occurs in Sidney Collett's *The Scripture of Truth*, originally published in the UK in 1905:

Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that

in one hundred years from his time Christianity would be swept into history. But what has happened? Only twenty-five years after his death the [British & Foreign Bible] Society was founded. His printing press, with which he printed his infidel literature, has since been used to print copies of the Word of God; and the very house in which he lived has been stacked with Bibles of the Geneva Bible Society. [6]

The Scripture of Truth (later published in the USA under the title *All About the Bible*) remained in print for many years; and if the Voltaire myth did not begin with Collett he was at least responsible for giving it widespread circulation. Although he gives no sources or references for the anecdote, his book continues to be quoted uncritically by latter-day apologists. [7]

The origin of the myth?

The available evidence suggests that the entire story probably arose from a misunderstanding of the 1849 Annual Report of the American Bible Society (ABS). In the appendix of that report we find an account of a speech given by William Snodgrass, an officer of the ABS:

...The committee had been able to redeem their pledge by sending \$10,000 to France, the country of Voltaire, who predicted that in the nineteenth century the Bible would be known only as a relic of antiquity. He [Snodgrass] could say, while on this topic, that the Hotel Gibbon (so-called from that celebrated infidel) is now become the very depository of the Bible Society, and the individual who superintends the building is an agent for the sale and receipt of the books. The very ground this illustrious scoffer often paced, has now become the scene of the operation and success of an institution established for the diffusion of the very book against which his efforts were directed. [8]

An inattentive reader of the above paragraph could easily have mistak-

en it to mean that the Bible Society had acquired a property formerly owned by Voltaire. The building referred to by Snodgrass was in fact a hotel in Lausanne, Switzerland, named after a completely different sceptic, the historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794).

It seems reasonable to conclude that someone misread this 19th century document and began the Voltaire myth that continues to be "commonly reported until this day".

The Hotel Gibbon

A word needs to be said about the Hotel Gibbon, which appears to be the source of the myth. This hotel was constructed in Lausanne in 1839, not far from the site of La Grotte, the villa in which Gibbon completed his famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [9]. The hotel served as a depot of the British & Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) from 1846-1858. An officer of the BFBS, James Graydon, "...established depots at Neuchatel, Berne, Zurich, Chur, St. Gall, Schaffhausen, Geneva, the Hotel Gibbon at Lausanne (in the garden of which Gibbon wrote the last line of his History in the moonlit night of the 27th June 1787) ..." [10]

A letter from Graydon published in the 45th Annual Report of the BFBS states:

I believe that the Gibbon Hotel is already quite a brilliant and truly rejoicing exception, as it respects the dissemination of holy writ, in the multitudinous list of hotels throughout Europe, if not the world. And is it not an extraordinary exception when we consider that the hotel bears the name, and is built in the very ground so long and often paced by him who so thoroughly hated the Gospel and did so much injury to its blessed cause? ... Some 4,000 copies of His word have now been sold in that very hotel. [11]

Gibbon was unpopular with devout Christians because of his sceptical treatment of Christianity in his *Decline and Fall*.

The Hotel Gibbon ceased to be a depot of the BFBS in 1858. The BFBS Annual Report for 1859 states:

The Committee regret to state, that the depot so long established at the Hotel Gibbon, Lausanne, has been necessarily withdrawn, in consequence of the new proprietor, after a brief experiment, declining to charge himself with the responsibility of superintending the sales. This depot has existed for nearly twelve years, and during that time, not fewer than 15,000 copies had been sold to travellers and others frequenting the hotel. Arrangements have been made for transferring the depot to a well-known bookseller's, situated in a frequent part of the town. [12]

It should be noted that although Voltaire and Gibbon both lived in Lausanne at various times in the 18th century [13], neither man lived on the actual site of the Hotel Gibbon.

Conclusion

By now readers may be curious to know the real fate of the various houses where Voltaire resided during his life:

Voltaire's mansion in the town of Ferney-Voltaire, France, is today a museum and arts centre.

His mansion in Geneva, Switzerland (Les Delices) is the headquarters of the Institut et Musée Voltaire.

Voltaire lived in two different houses in Lausanne. Neither of these houses is standing today. [14]

Voltaire died at what is now No. 27 Quai de Voltaire in Paris, France. This building is today occupied by a restaurant (Le Voltaire) and an antique dealer.

As to La Grotte, Gibbon's villa in Lausanne, the house was demolished in 1896 to make way for Lausanne's Central Post Office.

The Hotel Gibbon in Lausanne ceased to operate in 1920. The building has now become the head-

quarters of the Société du Banque Suisse. [15]

Acknowledgments

In addition to the Bible society officers quoted in this article the author wishes to thank: Jacquelyn Sapiie of the American Bible Society; Carl Freeman of Ferney-Voltaire; Jean-Jacques Egger of the Archives de la Ville de Lausanne; and François Jacob of the Institut et Musée Voltaire, Geneva.

David Ross is Treasurer of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists, as well as an Editor of Open Society

Notes

[1] "Voltaire declared over a century ago that God is dead, but his house today is headquarters of the Bible Society" - Letter to *The New Zealand Herald*, 3rd August 2003 by Wyn Fountain of Kohimarama, Auckland. Here we find a confusion within an error: it was Nietzsche, not Voltaire, who pronounced the death of God.

[2] "Voltaire, the skeptic, predicted that the Bible and Christianity would be swept into obsolescence, but only fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles." Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press), 1968, p124. The Voltaire anecdote has been removed from the revised edition of this work (1986).

[3] "It was Voltaire, the French sceptic, who wrote in his study in Paris: 'I will go through the forest of the Scriptures and girdle all the trees, so that in one hundred years Christianity will be but a vanishing memory.' But the very room in which he wrote those words was later purchased by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and was packed from floor to ceiling with Bibles." David John Donnan, *Treasury of the Christian World*, edited by A. Gordon Nasby (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1953.

The quotation here attributed to Voltaire bears a suspicious resemblance to a statement actually made by Thomas

Paine (1737-1809) in his *Age of Reason* (1795):

I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an axe on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow.

[4] Margaret T. Hills, *Voltaire Did NOT Say It!* Unpublished and undated article (?c.1960) held by the UK Bible Society. Besterman was evidently unaware of the existence of the Hotel Gibbon, as he goes on to incorrectly state that "there is no such place; this is obviously a mis-translation of 'hôtel Gibbon,' which simply means Gibbon's house".

[5] *Did Voltaire Say It?* Unpublished article dated 28 March 1972 with apparent signature 'M. B.', held by the UK Bible Society.

[6] Sidney Collett, *The Scripture of Truth*. London: S W Partridge & Co. Sixth Edition, 1910, p.63.

[7] See for example Geisler and Nix, op. cit.; Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Here's Life Publishers, 1979, p. 20). In correspondence with the present writer, secretarial staff representing Geisler and McDowell acknowledged that these apologists could not provide independent verification of Collett's account.

[8] Annual Report of the American Bible Society, 1849. Appendix, p. 98.

[9] Louis Polla, "Lausanne D'Hier et D'Aujourd'hui", *24 Heures*, 2nd August 1994.

[10] William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*. London: John Murray, 1904. Some sources incorrectly state that Gibbon had lived on the actual site of the hotel, or that La Grotte was converted into the hotel after his death. The hotel was built long after Gibbon's death, and was in a different location from La Grotte.

[11] Cited in *Did Voltaire Say It?* Op. Cit.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Louis Polla, *Rues de Lausanne* (Lausanne: 24 Heures), 1981.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Louis Polla, "Lausanne D'Hier et D'Aujourd'hui", Op.Cit.

Are Atheists dangerous? Apparently so, according to Ron Sims, the Democratic candidate for the governorship of Washington State. Sims was asked at a televised debate if he would appoint Atheists to a judgeship. Sims responded "I think it's important for a person to feel they are not the only answer and that if they don't have to account for what they say and what they do, those people are very dangerous. People who think they are the beginning and end of every question and answer are very dangerous people. Anyone who does not hold a belief in a higher authority is a very dangerous person"

Not only are we dangerous, but atheists are not competent to be journalists, if we are to believe one Dominic Steele, who works with an organisation called Christians in the Media in Sydney. Writing in the Sydney Anglican newspaper, Southern Cross, Steele said "it isn't enough for a report to be strictly accurate in that there are no false quotes or sentences. The whole story needs to be packaged and presented in such a way that it accurately describes reality". This is something atheists cannot do, "because the foundation of their universe - their basic worldview - is faulty, and ultimately they will never portray reality accurately".

Apparently, "the only way that we can be holistically truthful is if we grasp what lies at the base of all reality...the message that Jesus is the Son of the Father." An absence of this knowledge did not stop several Australian journalists uncovering some very unpleasant truths about the activities of clergy in both the Anglican and Catholic churches in Australia in recent years.

Which leaves us wondering, would these people dare say the same thing about Muslims or Jews?

Letter from America

Bill Cooke

Uganda

It took a long time for the humanist community to take much notice of Africa. The longest-standing commitment to Africa has come from African-Americans for Humanism, an organization founded in 1989 by Norm Allen and Paul Kurtz. Since then Norm has quietly been building up contacts, giving African humanists a voice in the *AAH Examiner*, sending out material from Prometheus Books, and occasionally visiting Africa. Things began to pick up in 2001 when the first major humanist conference was held in Nigeria. The conference was paid for by the Center for Inquiry and the Center for Inquiry–Nigeria was set up shortly afterwards. Its executive director is Leo Igwe, a dynamic and enterprising humanist leader.

So it was great to visit Uganda in 2004 to take part in the first major international humanist event since the Nigerian conference. There were actually three conferences in Kampala, which ran into each other. First was the IHEU youth conference at which about sixty young people from Africa and Europe took part. Then there was a day-long conference at which the Ugandan Humanist Association (UHASSO) was established. And then came the international conference, under the title 'Humanist Visions for Africa'.

The first impression worth mentioning was of the youth and passion of the African humanists. Many of them had struggled to Kampala on buses, even hitch-hiking. A young teacher from Tanzania spoke of the discrimination he faced by the religious authorities of his school for not toeing the orthodox line. A group of students from Nairobi University spoke of their sense of isolation in an environment expecting outward conformity to religious norms. But the most memorable talk came from a young Rwandan woman about the genocide in her country. She had not been scheduled to speak and her talk was entirely unrehearsed, but she gave a

full sense of the horror the country had undergone. It really was very moving.

Another feature of the conference was the expression given to other forms of discrimination. In Uganda homosexuality carries with it a maximum of life imprisonment, with scary sentences even for those who fail to report homosexual activity to the police. Not surprisingly, then, the few Ugandan homosexuals brave enough to show their face began speaking up at the conference. The conference agreed that this form of discrimination was unacceptable in an open society.

Nobody was ready for the press reaction. *The New Vision* paper carried an article the next day under the headline 'Homos meet in Kampala'. All of a sudden a series of humanist conferences had become 'the first ever conference to discuss the rights of homosexuals.' And the cartoon in the following day's paper would not get past a human rights tribunal in New Zealand. It portrayed some very caricatured gays mincing off to a conference, taunting police in full confidence of not being arrested while the other large conferences of donor nations were still in town.

All the other issues the humanist conferences discussed over five days dissolved into irrelevance as we had now been branded a 'homos conference'. The hotel where the conferences were held was visited by the police, though no arrests were made.

The New Vision ran a major op-ed piece a few days later where Paul Waibale Senior confessed to being 'gravely amazed' to hear that Ugandan law had been flouted in so cavalier fashion by 'two associations I have never heard of, namely the Uganda Humanist Association and the International Humanist and Ethical Union.' Roy Brown, IHEU president, went out of his way to correct the misinformation, but I don't think the *New Vision* was interest-

ed in presenting the conference honestly. I hope UHASSO can survive the negative publicity surrounding that.

Had *The New Vision* really wanted to get its knickers in a twist, it could have stayed to listen to Dr Sylvia Tamale of Makerere University give a fiery indictment of the patriarchal conservatism in Ugandan society which conspires to hold women down. There were also some good presentations on Third World debt, globalisation, and the rise of Islam.

After the conference it was wonderful to see the office of UHASSO. Just down the road from Makerere University, in a building being comprehensively renovated, the only room already occupied is the UHASSO office. Closing the door on all the concrete dust and noise, the 200 titles donated by Prometheus Books sit proudly on shelves alongside the two tables and the two computers. The Center for Inquiry came to the conference with a donation of US\$2000 for UHASSO (and the Norwegian Humanists gave \$1000), so it was inspiring to see the money being used in this way.

Now, after the negative publicity has died away, I was able to regain confidence in UHASSO's future. The leadership of this organisation is dedicated, intelligent and realistic. And after this conference, they are now a focal point for humanists from all the neighboring countries. I couldn't help feeling hopeful as I left the country. Hopeful for Uganda, and hopeful for humanism.

Radford Reviews

Benjamin Radford

Glory, Honour, Love, Revenge (etc)

Troy

Stars: Brad Pitt and Eric Bana.
Director: Wolfgang Petersen.
Product Plugs: None

A girlfriend once walked out on *Gladiator* after less than three minutes. "I don't get the swords and stuff," she said. I told her it was an epic. She rolled her eyes and informed me that anything that even looked like an epic was now off the rental list. Wolfgang Petersen's new film *Troy* is the epic's epic, and if her eyes rolled at *Gladiator*, she'll need extensive ophthalmic surgery for this film.

The story is based on *The Iliad* by Homer (the poet, not the Simpson). The Trojan War is sparked when Paris (Orlando Bloom), the prince of Troy, takes Helen, the queen of neighbouring Sparta, away from her husband. Rival king Agamemnon unites Greece ostensibly to avenge his family's honour but in fact to spread his empire. To that end he enlists the famous, glory-hungry rogue warrior Achilles (Brad Pitt) to help take on the great walled city of Troy.

Troy is full of grandiose ideas: Glory, Honour, Love, Revenge, Sacrifice, and so on. The cinematography reflects this as well, with plenty of rousing music and sweeping camera shots designed to convey the vastness of the clashing armies and the scale of empires. Though the ideas are big, the characters tend to get lost in the explosion of grandeur. While the principals stand out just enough to distinguish themselves, even they are pretty one-dimensional. Pitt's Achilles, for example, is

a tantalising but hopelessly remote figure driven by rage and glory. Is he truly an invincible warrior? If so, what glory is there in his fame, since his mortal opponents fall before him like wheat before a scythe? Despite Pitt's efforts, Achilles is all brawn and brooding, with little depth.



If the warriors tend toward the shallow side, the women fare even worse: their main function is often to look beautiful, be treated as property, and swoon at the tip of a helmet. The original might not have had strong female characters, but surely in adapting the epic screenwriter David Benioff could have made some effort.

There's a lot of *Gladiator* and *Lord of the Rings* in *Troy*; fighting battles and laying siege are the main orders of the day. The battle scenes are impressively choreographed and filmed, though, as in many such films, after a while the clashing swords and stabbings get repetitious. The film's short title belies its length; at over two and a half hours, *Troy* gets a little tiresome. Petersen's pacing prevents boredom, though he admits far too many melodramatic goodbyes, solemn vows, and the like. The story, condensed though it is, could have been more succinct and therefore more effective.

The cast does a fine job within the roles they have to work with. Director Wolfgang Petersen is known for films such as *The Perfect Storm*, *In the Line of Fire* and *Air Force One*, all with plenty of action and no skimping on expense. He is certainly a good choice to handle such ambitious material. Originally slated to be filmed in Morocco but moved to Baja California and Malta, the production suffered various setbacks including set-destroying hurricanes and oppressive heat that caused some of the more than 1,000 extras to faint. *Troy* is reportedly one of the most expensive films ever made at about \$200 million, a truly epic uniting of special effects, extras, and production values. It's a good film, though given the hype, cost, and effort, it really should have been a great one.

Ben Radford is the Managing Editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine, the journal of CSICOP

Books

***Intelligence of Apes and Other Rational Beings*, by Duane M Rumbaugh and David A Washburn; (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003)**

Duane M Rumbaugh and David A Washburn have written an engaging and detailed overview of intelligence in nonhuman animal research that focuses on great ape experiments in comparative psychology with chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas. Work with orangutans, siamangs, gibbons, and rhesus monkeys is also included.

Critical of the traditional behaviourist views of Harry F Harlow and B F Skinner, among others, the authors interpret reasoning and creativity in primates as a direct result of the interplay between organic evolution (nature) and social experience (nurture) giving rise to emergents, ie, higher cognitive abilities and new problem-solving behaviours. Of particular importance is chapter eighteen, which presents the authors' own theory of Rational Behaviorism. This position stresses the crucial role that both brain complexity and learned skills play in developing primate cognition and social interactions. (For many, the obvious physical similarities between apes and humans is not extended to include their mental similarities.)

Rumbaugh and Washburn also refer to ground-breaking scientific research in both ape-language research and computer-oriented experiments performed at the Yerkes Primate Research Center and especially at the San Diego Zoo. These cross-species studies confirm

the direct relationship between brain complexity and higher intelligence, as well as the glaring psychological similarities between the great apes and our own species. In terms of evolution, there is a common ground and historical continuity between the nonhuman primates and human beings. In short, concerning animal biology and psychology, Descartes was wrong while Darwin remains right.

Such rigorous studies in the biosocial aspects of other primates clearly demonstrate that our species differs merely in degree, rather than in kind, from the great apes. This fact has far-reaching ramifications for philosophy and theology, particularly concerning value theories and religious beliefs. At a time when creationism and fundamentalism are challenging the evolutionary sciences as well as maintaining the absolute uniqueness of the human being, books such as this one are of singular importance.

For its provocative insights in and scientific approach to the subject matter of ape and monkey intelligence in terms of primate evolution, this significant work is highly recommended for all naturalists and humanists.

H James Birx

H James Birx is professor of anthropology at Canisius College, Buffalo and is editing a five-volume Encyclopedia of Anthropology. He is an Honorary Associate of the NZARH

***Media Myth Makers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us*, by**

Benjamin Radford, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003)

Ben Radford is the Managing Editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine, the journal of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), and co-author, with Robert Bartholomew, of *Hoaxes, Myths, and Manias: Why We Need Critical Thinking* (Prometheus, 2002). And on top of that, Radford is a film reviewer for a newspaper in New Mexico and on his own website, Radford Reviews. We feature his review of *Troy* on page 18.

Media Myth Makers is engagingly written, with lots of amusing human-folly stories. Beginning with some fairly simple examples of media manipulation of language in advertising, the book gets progressively more serious, leading up to sinister accounts of media irresponsibility after the Columbine school shootings and September 11.

Along the way, Radford makes some very pertinent points. For instance, after the Columbine School massacre the media presented two, contradictory, accounts of the students' reactions to the killings. The teenagers of Columbine were portrayed as too satiated by violence from video games to care about the outrage, while also being such delicate flowers to have the army of grief counsellors working overtime. Each version was peddled according to the political or religious views of the peddler.

Radford is also interesting on overseas news. He notes that foreign news on American television has

dropped from about 40% of overall news content in 1977 to between seven and 12% in 1997. I fully believe this, as the general standard of foreign news reporting in the United States is abysmal in the extreme. And the general knowledge among Americans about the world outside the United States leaves an awful lot to be desired. Our local Buffalo television news stations habitually begin with a local accident or some blood and gore (the rule is: if it bleeds, it leads) story. And if an overseas news story somehow finds its way into the news, it usually has some American slant to it: Americans being killed by horrid foreigners or Americans showing, once again, their moral excellence to the benighted heathen.

But *Media Myth Makers* is by no means a hymn of hate against 'the media'. He says repeatedly that there are many responsible, intelligent journalists out there who do a good job. And Radford tends to ignore the high-quality (though desperately underfunded) public television channel, which produces high quality news. There is an important sense in which the subtitle of the book is misleading, because *Media Myth Makers* is also about how the media can be misled. Lobbyists, corporations and government news manipulators can, and do, use the media for their own ends. The media, in this sense, is as much caught up in the problem as it is the perpetrator of it.

As with many books outlining some social or political malaise, it is easier to itemise the problem than to suggest solutions. Radford doesn't shirk responsibility from proposing solutions, although how realistic they are is another issue. Radford's solutions look like a charter of rationalism: responsible reporting by the media, greater media literacy among the public, more context in reporting, and taming our emotions which fuel the demand for sensationalism and living vicariously through the drama in the lives of others. All well and fine, but how do we manage all that?

Bill Cooke

***The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, by Karen Armstrong. (London: HarperCollins, 2004)**

From American judges who put up sculptures of the Ten Commandments, to intransigent Jewish settlers, to the power plays in Iran and Saudi Arabia the beliefs and actions of fundamentalists appear beyond comprehension to those of us who have been thoroughly secularised.

Karen Armstrong has studied the history and fortunes of fundamentalist movements in the world's three major monotheistic faiths and has produced a book that must be read by anyone who wants to get their head around fundamentalists and why they do what they do.

To begin with, one has to come to grips with the concepts of 'mythos' and 'logos', Greek terms signifying what was seen as complementary ways of viewing the world and getting at truth. Mythos was concerned with deeper, eternal, 'meaning of life' type truths - it doesn't equate to our modern meaning of 'myth'.

Logos is something we are all familiar with - it is scientific truth, truth that relates to external reality. The two originally were seen to work hand in hand, but with the rise of Logos since the 1600s the varying tactics that religion used to keep mythos alive form the basis for much of this book.

One of the lessons of Armstrong's work is that fundamentalism arises as a result of persecution - be it real or imagined - and as far as real persecution goes the Jews have as valid a reason as any to circle the wagons of belief.

From the start of the book in 1492 when Ferdinand and Isabella signed the Edict of Expulsion as an attempt to rid Spain of Jewry, to recent times with the Holocaust and numerous wars on Israel to drive the Jews into the sea. Their story is fascinating, especially the internal politicking between secular and orthodox with regards to the Zionist movement.

The Muslims, also, have felt persecution (real or imagined). Not only have they disagreed with colonialism when Christian empires ruled over them, but secular Muslims have done their part to fuel fundamentalist paranoia with Ataturk in Turkey, Nasser in Egypt, and the Shah in Iran all doing their bit to make their populations believe that their world was under attack. And not without justification. All three of those leaders had a broadly secular outlook and were nasty characters.

Compared with Judaism and Islam where one can at least understand where the fundamentalists are coming from (although not agreeing with them), when reading about the rise of fundamentalism in America and the complaints that fundamentalists have, one is left with the impression that they really have nothing to complain about and are just a bunch of petulant spoilt brats.

The worst they find to complain about is that a) people are allowed to do things they don't agree with and b) the Supreme Court interprets the First Amendment as saying that they should keep their religion to themselves. Of course this is my interpretation - Karen Armstrong is much more understanding.

Despite some minor errors of interpretation that we humanists can see from a mile off and easily account for, this book gets 10 out of 10. It is a must read.

Hayden Wood

Hayden Wood is a Council Member at the NZARH as well as one of Rationalist House's Office Managers and keeper of our Library.

Obituary

Emeritus Professor Kenneth Maddock (1937-2003)

NZARH Honorary Associate 1998-2004

Ken Maddock was born and raised in New Zealand. His father was an intermittent member of the Rationalist Association, and Maddock remembered reading the Rationalist Press Association's famous Thinker's Library books at home. In 1955 he began studying law at Auckland University, but recalled being more interested in Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw and Edward Gibbon. At some point, Maddock realised he was more interested in anthropology, and changed courses.

And during his time at Auckland University, Maddock followed his father's footsteps into the Rationalist Association, which was then experiencing a ferment of change, growth and argument. The sectarian Stalinism of the 1950s had alienated many people from the Association and was threatening to reduce it to a squabbling irrelevance. Then along came a new generation of more liberal minded people, many of them university students like Ken Maddock who spoke of humanism rather than rationalism and of democracy rather than socialism. In June 1960 Maddock joined the editorial board of the *NZ Rationalist*, then under the editorship of the mercurial Odo Strewe.

A year later Maddock took over the editorship of the journal, which was now renamed *Polemic*. *Polemic* sought to do what *The Open Society* is now trying to do; promote humanism and rationalism without being sectarian and unduly narrow in focus.

Sadly, *Polemic* lasted only one issue as the official journal of the Rationalist Association. One more issue was produced privately, but it was far too ambitious to last on enthusiasm alone. *Polemic* was a

noble experiment that was doomed to fail. The audacity of *Polemic* and its failure haunted senior rationalists for thirty years, who took it as a warning against giving too much power to the young and the keen.

A few years after the *Polemic* debacle, Maddock left for Australia, where he spent the rest of life. He was awarded a PhD in anthropology at the University of Sydney and in 1969 took an appointment at Macquarie University, also in Sydney, where his academic career was spent, until his early retirement in 1995.

Maddock's academic career was devoted to understanding the lives and beliefs of the aborigines. His two best-known books were *The Australian Aborigines: A Portrait of Their Society* and *Your Land is Our Land*, a study of the aboriginal land rights question. Both these books were published by Penguin, went through many editions and were very influential. After his retirement, Maddock was a private consultant on aboriginal land issues. He travelled widely and was respected by all parties for his knowledge of and commitment to the rights of aborigines.

I came to admire Ken Maddock's short-lived but highly valuable contribution to humanism in New Zealand while researching for *Heathen in Godzone*. So I tracked him down in Sydney and invited him to become an Honorary Associate of the NZARH. He was delighted to hear from us and accepted the invitation. In his acceptance letter he paid *The Open Society* the compliment of saying it was 'quite like what some of us then wanted'. Maddock took an active interest in the Association, con-

tributing some excellent articles and reviews, most notably a survey of the life of the New Zealand-born anthropologist Raymond Firth, which appeared in the Autumn 2003 issue, only a few months before his death.

Maddock was also a committed anarchist. His most protracted writing on the subject was an article called 'Pluralism and Anarchism' in the radical journal *Red and Black* in 1966 and which can now be found on the web. He also wrote for a radical publication in Sydney called *Heracitus*. At the time of his death he was beginning a biography of the great anthropologist A R Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955).

Ken Maddock learned he had cancer in 2001, aged 64. Soon after coming out of intensive care in 2002, Maddock read Paul Edwards' brilliant expose of reincarnation. 'During this critical period,' he wrote later, 'I experienced vivid dreams or hallucinations. The subject matter of some (train journeys, being in the vicinity of an Aboriginal initiation) can plausibly be explained by condition. I regret to say, however, that none of the images passing through my enfeebled mind suggested scenes of a previous life, pointed to the likelihood of a life Beyond or persuaded me that I might soon be reinventing myself by invading some woman's womb.' Despite being a large, powerfully-built man, Ken Maddock lost his battle with cancer, and died on June 2 2003, aged 66. Ken Maddock is survived by his wife Sheila, a daughter and two sons.

Bill Cooke

Comments

Paul Litterick

It's not easy being Rael. A recent press release from the Raelians (who like to think of themselves as an Atheist church) supported Intelligent Design, the newest iteration of creationism. ID's usual adherents are Christian Fundamentalists, who use its argument from ignorance to demonstrate that God must have taken a personal interest in designing all living things. The Raelians have a different viewpoint. Their creation myth involves aliens from a distant planet coming to Earth and using it as a giant laboratory, designing and creating all sorts of things (including us) before going on their way. So Evolution is out; the variety of species, and their various imperfections, can be attributed to the obvious fact that they are experiments, some of which were less than successful. This might explain why humans are available in several different colour schemes.

On the face of it, the Raelians' argument makes a good deal more sense than the idea of a supernatural god doing all the work, but it has led them to some problems. At a recent NZARH meeting, Max Wallace told us that the Raelians in Australia tried to claim tax-free status as a religion. The Australian Revenue Department (which must contain more philosophers and theologians than we would have supposed) refused their claim. The Revenue's reasoning was that a religion requires belief in a supernatural entity or entities. As the Raelians worship beings that are perfectly corporeal, but inhabit a distant part of the Universe, they do not qualify.

The message is simple. Believe in something that defies the laws of physics: get money. Believe in something plausible but unlikely: go jump.

Not so long ago, after the Roman Catholic church in New Zealand announced it would set up an office to deal with sexual abuse allegations against its clergy, *The NZ Herald* published a cartoon which suggested that a very large office would be needed. The response from the Church to this satire was immediate: Cardinal Thomas Williams wrote an indignant letter.

The Cardinal's main argument, apart from whining that everyone was being beastly to the Church, was that a mere two percent of his clergy had been sexually abusing children in their care. One wonders, in passing, how a bank's customers would respond if the CEO proudly claimed that a mere two percent of his staff had embezzled funds. It would, in any case, be more accurate to say that two percent of the clergy were caught: with the best will in the world, no one could expect a 100 percent clear-up rate for any crime, particularly one which requires great courage on the part of the victim to report.

The best will in the world was certainly not apparent in the Church's response to complaints against Father Alan Woodcock, who finally was convicted in May for offences that took place between 1978 and 1987. His employers, The Society of Mary, first received complaints about sexual abuse from boys in his care in 1982. They responded, belatedly, by moving him from the school where he was teaching to other schools where he could commit similar crimes; this widespread practice was known as the 'geographical solution' and has been Vatican policy since 1962. They also had the clever idea of imposing a set of rules on him, including directions that he leave the door to his bedroom open if a boy needed to see him, "unless the visit is of a confessional nature or a similarly private matter". They also advised him to get a passport "to cover any possible eventuality", which presumably meant getting him out of the country when things got too difficult. This eventuality eventually eventuated and in 1988 he was sent to Ireland, a popular geographical solution that worked for some time. It was only after a Herald investigation in 2002 and a lengthy extradition process that he was brought back here to face his crimes.

The Church claims this is all in the past and that things are done differently now. You wouldn't think so if you had heard Denis O'Hagan, the Provincial Father of The Society of Mary, talking to Sean Plunkett on National Radio. Woodcock had a conviction for a sexual offence with a 17 year old boy before he joined his first school, and they knew about it. Father O'Hagan protested that the victim was a man, so this conviction was irrelevant to their decision to hire him. Father O'Hagan then tried to claim that we were, all of us, largely ignorant of the consequences of sexual abuse back in the 1980s.

The truth is, the Society of Mary and the Roman Catholic Church in New Zealand did everything they could to cover up abuse cases. It was only when victims complained to the media that any action was taken. The action they took was to attempt to keep the problem under their mitres: in 1994, the Society of Mary sought advice from Judge Peter Trapski on how to manage the media after a complaint about Woodcock became publicly known.

The response from Church headquarters was not much better. In 1998, the bishops released a protocol, *Te Houhanga Rongo A Path To Healing*. This established an elaborate procedural structure for dealing with complaints, which nevertheless still managed to leave the Police out of the matter. Now, as more cases surface, they have established an office, but don't expect too much from that. The press release reveals that "The purpose of this office is to evaluate and oversee the Church's procedures for dealing with complaints of abuse", which are "dealt with by the professional standards committees in each of the country's six dioceses and by those operated by religious orders."

However, all this evasion has come to nought: in the wake of the Woodcock case, the church has finally decided that it will refer sex abuse cases directly to the Police. So, there is one good outcome. Another is that the Police are considering investigating the men who covered up Woodcock's crimes.

Letter

Are you the owner of a small business? Do you want to stop your employees from speaking in their own languages? Are you worried that they might want to join a union? Well, here is the answer to all your worries. It's called RELIGION.

Yes it's true. By joining a small, obscurantist sect you can remove rights from your workers in an instant! It's easy and it's fun. Just read this true story and find out how it can be done:

Fort Richards Laboratories is a company in South Auckland. Not long ago, its owner, Maurice Clist, ordered his immigrant workers not to speak in their own languages in the lunch room, under pain of dismissal. He considered this to be a safety and health issue.

The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union begged to differ and sought to exercise their rights under the Employment Relations Act to talk to the workers. But Mr Clist knew the Act as well. He is a member of the Exclusive Brethren and Brethren don't join unions because they believe in something called a master-servant relationship (don't worry about this making sense; we are talking about a religion after all). There is a clause in the Act which allows Brethren not to join a union in workplaces which have compulsory union membership (not that compulsory unionism still happens, but that is beside the point). Mr Clist used this clause to gain an exemption certificate preventing his workers from talking to union organisers, because he (the employer, remember) is a member of the Brethren.

Before you rush to join the Exclusive Brethren (you won't find them in the phone book; they are exclusive, remember) bear in mind that you will have to give up certain things, including your computer. They don't approve of Information Technology. There is a public school in Wellington which provides separate classes for Brethren students. Under an agreement with the elders of the sect, the school refrains from teaching them about computers or Evolution.

Interestingly enough, Fort Richards Laboratories has an email address.

Dear Bill

Many Humanists will be interested in an article by John Stenhouse of the University of Otago in the April 2004 number of the *New Zealand Journal of History*. The article is entitled *God's Own Silence*. He complains of the virtual marginalisation of religion in much of New Zealand writing of history appearing in the first half of the 20th Century.

He deplores what he calls the acceptance of the secularisation thesis, which implied the decline of religion and the rise of secular modernity. "On such readings", he says, "the demise of organised Christianity as a culture shaper appeared inevitable as the extinction of the Maori has seemed to many Nineteenth Century commentators". He blames particularly historian Keith Sinclair for this tendency and quotes the letters saying that the prevailing religion of New Zealand has become a "simple materialism". He does, later in the article in one context however, give a more realistic description of secularisation:

The secular nationalist tradition appealed to many New Zealand Christians who favoured a secular society as understood not as an atheistic or irreligious society but as religiously liberal and tolerant, free of sectarian divisions and ecclesiastical domination.

Here I wish only to draw attention to the article but wish to comment on the use of the expression God's Own (or Godzone) for New Zealand. Stenhouse only refers to Seddon's use of the expression at the beginning of his article. It is relatively well known that the expression was popularised in its use in a poem *God's Own Country* by Thomas Bracken (1843-1898) who also was the

author of *God Defend New Zealand*. Ironically, Bracken was a freethinker for many years and a friend of Robert Stout. His association with Stout and the Freethought Lyceum is shown in my article on New Zealand's Freethought Heritage in *NZ Rationalist and Humanist*, Winter 2001. The poem, *God's Own Country* was first published in 1893 (see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand 1905*, Vol IV). Bracken was not received into the Roman Catholic Church until 1896 (*Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Vol II 1993).

Stenhouse's article in the *New Zealand Journal of History* tries to revive something of the Christian past in contrast to the general tendency of gradual sectarianism.

Jim Dakin
Wellington

It happened in June

June 1 1946, Fawn Brodie excommunicated from the Mormon Church for writing the truth about Joseph Smith

June 2 1840, birth of Thomas Hardy.

June 2 1923, birth of Barbara Smoker, NZARH Honorary Associate.

June 2 1924, American Indians become citizens of the United States.

June 3 1098, crusaders sack Antioch and put thousands to the sword.

June 3 1657, death of William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of blood.

June 4 1968, UN general assembly approves the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

June 5 1947, the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe is unveiled.

June 6 1832, death of Jeremy Bentham.

June 7 1954, Alan Turing, pioneer of the computer, commits suicide.

June 8 632 CE, traditional date given for the death of Muhammad.

June 8 1809, death of Thomas Paine.

June 8 1970, death of Abraham Maslow, founder of humanistic psychology.

June 8 2000, Texas Governor George W Bush declares this day the 'Day of Jesus'.

June 9 1995, Center for Inquiry in Amherst, New York, is opened.

June 10 1692, Bridget Bishop becomes the first of the people executed during the Salem witch trials.

June 10 1929, birth of E O Wilson, father of evolutionary psychology.

June 12 1964, Nelson Mandela sentenced to life imprisonment.

June 13 323 BCE, death of Alexander the Great.

June 14 1954, 'under God' added to US Pledge of Allegiance.

June 16 1902, birth of prominent evolutionist George Gaylord Simpson.

June 16 1963, Valentina Tereshkova becomes the first woman into space.

June 16 2000, Pope John Paul II ratifies encyclical , which confirms the superiority of Catholicism

June 17 1963, US Supreme Court rules compulsory Bible reading in schools as unconstitutional.

June 18 1981, first genetically engineered vaccine (to prevent hoof and mouth disease) was announced.

June 20 2002, China announces it will build desalination plants using used fuel from nuclear reactors.

June 21, World Humanist Day (northern summer solstice).

June 21 1905, birth of Jean-Paul Sartre.

June 21 1994, Bradlaugh House inaugurated in London.

June 21 1998, Ngaire McCarthy becomes the first Maori president of NZARH.

June 22 1633, Galileo forced to recant his views on the heliocentric universe by the Inquisition.

June 22 1887, birth of Julian Huxley.

June 23 1902, Albert Einstein starts work at the Swiss Patents Office in Berne.

June 23 1912, birth of Alan Turing, pioneer of the computer.

June 24 1915, birth of Fred Hoyle.

June 25 1908, birth of W V O Quine.

June 26 1945, United Nations Charter signed.

June 27 1954, the world's first nuclear power station starts producing electricity in Obninsk, USSR.

June 28 1914, assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

June 29 1895, death of T H Huxley.

June 30 1908, meteorite destroys 2,200 square kilometers of forest at Tunguska, Siberia.

Honorary Associates of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists

Gianni Bartocci	Antony Flew	Michael Martin
H James Birx	Levi Fragell	Taslima Nasrin
Sir Hermann Bondi KCB, FRS	Ida Gaskin CNZM	Jean-Claude Pecker
Ray Bradley	Maurice Gee	Ian Plimer
Steve Cooper	Dame Barbara Goodman	Anwar Shaikh
Richard Dawkins	Finngeir Hiorth	Yunis Shaikh
Warwick Don	Bernard Howard	Barbara Smoker
Zoë During MBE	Paul Kurtz	Dame Catherine Tizard
Denis Dutton	Lavanam	David Tribe
Sanal Edamaruku	Richard Leakey	Ibn Warraq
Brian Edwards CNZM	Tim Madigan	Lewis Wolpert

Focus on...Michael Martin, who has co-edited an important work called *The Impossibility of God*. One of the articles in it, from Raymond Bradley, is reproduced from this journal.

Humanist Noticeboard

NZARH Charles Southwell Awards

2003: Michael Laws, writer and columnist
2002: Andrew Williams, secular state champion
2001: Dr Philip Nitschke, euthanasia campaigner
2000: Dr Zoë During, women's health campaigner
1999: Brian Rudman, crusading NZ Herald journalist
1998: Dame Cheryl Sotheran, on behalf of Te Papa

Remember the NZARH in your will

Unlike the churches, the NZARH has to pay its own way in the world. No matter how small, a contribution to the NZARH in your will helps ensure the continued survival of humanism in New Zealand. Just specify the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists in your will.

The Humanist Outlook

hosted by Jeff Hunt and Joan McCracken

Wellington Access Radio

783 AM, times vary

Want some straightforward film reviews? Visit www.radfordreviews.com

Humanist Services

Justices of the Peace

Barbara Carr, Auckland (09) 436 1126
Wayne Facer, Auckland (09) 528 4465
Dame Barbara Goodman, Auckland (09) 520 1233
Ngairé McCarthy, Auckland (09) 372 3322

Humanist and Secular Celebrants for Marriages, Funerals and Rites of Passage

Auckland

Dame Barbara Goodman, Auckland (09) 520 1233
Peter Hansen, Manukau City (09) 622 1400
George Pirie, Manukau City (09) 536 5033
Barbara Shaw, Auckland (09) 528 6293

Taranaki

Jeanne van Gorkom, New Plymouth (06) 753 2311

Wellington

Sheena Hudson (04) 389 2270

South Island

Charles Manhire, Christchurch (03) 355 8315

Fifty Years Ago

That the Association must continue its drive for the ownership of a building is self-evident. Altogether, part from its capital value, the possession of a suitable building would permit of the holding of lectures and social gatherings at any time desired. Ownership of our own premises would raise the status of the Association, and it also envisages the following advantages, a social centre for members with writing room, cafeteria, reading room, etc, and opportunities to develop work among youth in a manner not possible at present. These and other reasons make the purchase of a building at an early date, a most desirable project.

Arthur O'Halloran, *NZ Rationalist*, February 1954

A Directory of New Zealand Freethought

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Ph (09) 373 5131 Fax (09) 379 8233
Celebrant Service: (09) 622 1400
Internet: <http://www.nzarh.org.nz>
email: heathen@nzarh.org.nz

The Auckland University Atheist Club can also be contacted at this address

The Skeptics

Or NZCSICOP - New Zealand Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal
c/o The Secretary
PO Box 29 492
Christchurch
Internet: <http://www.skeptics.org.nz>
email: claire.lecouteur@xtra.co.nz

New Zealand Humanist Society

Box 3372
Wellington
Internet: <http://www.humanist.org.nz>

The Wellington branch of the Humanists can also be contacted at this address.

New Zealand Humanist Charitable Trust

Public Trust
PO Box 5024
Wellington

Hawke's Bay Freethinkers

c/o Robyn Church
Secretary
2 Millar Street
Napier

Northland Freethinkers

c/o Ian Score
6 Edge Street
Onerahi
Whangarei

Waikato Freethinkers

c/o Peter Murphy
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Taranaki Humanists

c/o Jeanne van Gorkom
26a Pembroke Street
New Plymouth

Christchurch Humanist Fellowship

c/o 158 Panorama Road
Christchurch