When I realized that after writing over twenty articles, I haven’t written the editorial of this issue I thought: God, what the hell do I write now? You see even an atheist like me calls on the help of God for something so small like writing an editorial.

In the very first verses of The Iliad, Homer is asking the Gods to lead him and help him write the adventures of Ulysses. Since there are no Gods to help me and I’m sure with some of the things I wrote there will be no gods from now and on…here we go.

Religion is a tough subject and there are a lot of ways you can tackle it, after nearly fifty articles I think we did very little, even the minute just before we publish issue 9 of Ovi magazine I’m thinking about things we forgot to mention.

We never mentioned, for example, how much religion and faith has helped in human history. How many times religion kept nations united and even led them to their liberation; as a Greek, I know very well how much faith did for four hundred years while the Greek nation was suffering under the Ottoman Empire.

Despite what the church has done, and this is something I wrote in my articles, there is one thing religion does well, it inspires love for people, respect and faith during the most barbaric periods, especially regarding European history.

The separation of religion and church is necessary and I think you can see that we are aware of that in most of our articles. You can never blame the Koran with what the mullahs are preaching and the acts of a few priests in USA could never discredit the faith of millions of Catholics.

One last thing, we were a bit unlucky in the sense that even though we tried we couldn’t find somebody who would write about Islam from the Muslim’s side. With our poor knowledge we know that what we hear from the fanatics has nothing to do with the teaching of the Koran and we would really appreciate if somebody could send us something about it.

At this point I need to thank all the people who contributed in this issue. Ricardo Báez-Duarte, Tony Butcher, Christophe Berthoud, Mark Hayton, F. A. Hutchinson, Maippi & Matti, Nic Mepham, Michael Mugweru, Oobio, Satya Prakash, Riku Pyhala, John Ray, Jan Sand, Phil Schwarzmann, thank you all and I hope you will continue contributing.

Thank you to all the people who read the Ovi magazine, thank you for breaking new visit records every day. I hope some of you (from Japan, I could see, Chile, Romania and more, since the list is very long) decide to write articles, submit opinions or even reportages from your countries.

Thank you for reading our articles and a big thank you to all the blogs for talking about us. There are some who don’t agree with us but in a time when instead of dialogue people argue using bombs that some people start a dialogue with us even disagreeing is fantastic.

I just hope we have contributed something to the issue ‘religion’ with this issue of Ovi magazine.

Enjoy the magazine
Thanos Kalamidas
On March 4, 1966, John Lennon was misquoted as saying that the Beatles are “bigger than Jesus”, but that was after six successful albums. This is the ninth issue of Ovi Magazine, which has been steadily growing in popularity since its inception at the beginning of the year, so what can we claim to be bigger than in this religion issue?

I’d better be careful with my analogy, since Lennon’s comments led to people burning Beatles albums and boycotting Beatle merchandise, and we don’t want our readers trashing their computer monitors on our behalf. Religion is a fiery subject and there is a little something for followers of most faiths among our pages.

Whether you agree with it or not does not concern us, these are our opinions, these are our guests’ opinions and the great thing about opinions, compared to beliefs, is that they are easily changed if we hear a compelling argument. Therefore, if you read something that you consider blasphemous or out of order, then post your comments in our forum and you may influence our ideas and opinions.

I mentioned our guests’ opinions because religion has inspired many people to submit work for Ovi and they all offer alternative points of view on all manners of religious topics. We have nearly fifteen guests writing, drawing, illustrating, photographing or filming for issue nine and I would like to take this moment to thank each of them for their contribution.

You may have noticed the website is slowly changing, there are certain parts closing down in preparation of new sections for 2006. Design of the new website is underway and Thanos is confident we will have it ready for the big one-zero issue.

We have almost had a whole year of Ovi and it has been quite an experience. Over 350 different articles have appeared on our pages and Thanos and I have each written around 150 each over the course of nine issues. We have met countless new people through Ovi and so many people keep offering encouragement for the future that this also a good chance to thank each of you.

I shall end by mentioning one of those strange twists of fate, issue nine of Ovi is about religion and the man I worship wears the number nine on the back of his Newcastle United shirt. Spooky coincidence!

Asa

Issue 10 will be online around December 15th and the topic will be “Time” in honour of the New Year, so if you have any ideas that you would like to contribute then contact us via the usual email: asa@ovimagazine.com
In the name of God

By Thanos Kalamidas

Religion has mainly to do with incapacity of humans to explain nature with their limited knowledge. In the beginning, the thunder and the storm was unexplained and humans explained it as part of a super being and His or Her’s moods. So suddenly Zeus’ anger became thunder and the floods explained as his brother’s anger, Poseidon God of the waters, sea and rivers. You can find similar examples in all the beliefs in ancient history all around the world, with nations that never met each other, like the Incas and the Indians. Later, the Jews were the first to bring the idea of one God, ruler of all and everything followed from the rest.

Somehow, in all religions, if you can call religions some pan-gnostic beliefs, have and had two things in common. There was always a leader among the sometimes huge number of gods and all the gods are very serious. They do forgive but only after the believer shows their total obedience. They are ready to punish any flight from the beliefs in the worst way which includes endless torture. They expect their beliefs to spread all around and they don’t recognize the right of other beliefs to exist; every non-believer is the enemy.

In the name of God and Christ, a huge army started from the Catholic west to free the east from the barbarians using us an excuse that they were occupying the Holy Land, the place where Christ was born, lived and died. Oddly enough, the Christians are not blaming the Romans for the crucifixion even though they are the ones who did it but the Jews and I think that the main reason is religion.

Even though Jewish and Christianity have the same roots, Jews never accepted Christ as the messiah and that made them worse enemies than the Romans; however, the Crusades had a huge impact on Christianity because on their way to the east, they weakened the east part of Christianity, so the Byzantine empire was an easier victim for the Turks who came from the far Asia, occupied and destroyed a whole civilization for four hundred years.

The church has been often involved in politics and the bishops and archbishops became advisers to kings, even rulers themselves. And there is still a mystery of the role the Vatican played during and just after WWII in Germany. In the name of the common enemy, communism.

In the name of God, thousands of people started from the Middle East with only one aim: to destroy the infidels. Oddly enough, even though all the religions teach love and understanding they don’t bother explaining the differences and find a common field to talk but they are planning death and destruction.

When India was freed and declared independence from the British, they nearly had a civil war which was a result of the deviation of two counties, India and Pakistan with one chance difference, religion. A strong enough reason to live till today when the two countries still threaten each other unfortunately using nuclear weapons.

And all that under the eyes of revengeful gods with severe behavior and rigid beliefs strong enough to believe in the beginning of the 21st century that you should believe without doubts, that the earth is the center of the universe that humans fall of hate for their fellow humans can be the emissaries of God.

One thing history has had is many wars in the name of religion. For the glory of Zeus or Jupiter to the name of God or Allah, whole countries have been destroyed and thousands of people have died. Even the most atheist and monarchic political systems like Hitler’s Nazism and Stalin’s communism have used religion or better the different churches for their own benefit.

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I am naïve when it comes to Islam. I don’t fully understand its history; I don’t fully comprehend the ideals of the faith; I can’t grasp the fact that many Muslims refuse to accept that the Qur’an could be flawed, which is something even Christians admit with the Bible. I am not alone; in fact, millions of people do not understand this religion and we are scared.

Fear of the unknown is a common reflex, but this fear is laced with latent hatred that is sporadically exploding across the world. Islam is the world’s second-largest religion, but I cannot recall it ever being mentioned before the events of September 11, 2001. Now, the whole planet hears words, such as jihad, and we suddenly realise this religion is the second largest on the planet.

Many of us fail to see past the fact that fundamentalists and extremists carry bombs in backpacks and detonate them during the London rush hour. Our immediate response is ‘why?’ and not ‘which faction of Islam?’ We are scared of the entire faith because we hear statements, such as, ‘If Western governments do not change their policies, Muslims will give them a 9/11, day after day after day’ and:

‘...it is time to take revenge against the British Zionist crusader government in retaliation for the massacres Britain is committing in Iraq and Afghanistan. The heroic Mujahideen have carried out a blessed raid in London. Britain is now burning with fear, terror and panic... Allah says: “If ye will aid (the cause of) Allah, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly.”’

Islam naivety

By Asa Butcher

Following the London Terror Bombings, this is part of the statement issued by ‘Nur al-Iman’, an Islamist paramilitary organisation based in the United Kingdom. I failed to see what was heroic about a surprise attack on innocent civilians of all faiths, ages and nationalities. I saw it as a cowardly massacre of human life and it scares me how a holy book is used to excuse actions such as these.

My research shows that the Qur’an is the culmination of God’s revelation to mankind, revealed to Muhammad, the final prophet of Islam, over a period of 23 years through the angel Jibril (Gabriel), but can a scholar explain where in the Qur’an it says you can legitimately kill a seven-year-old child and her mother on the London Underground. The possibility that somebody can answer that question is highly probable and that is what scares me.

For the glory of Zeus or Jupiter to the name of God or Allah, whole countries have been destroyed and thousands of people have died. Even the most atheist and monarchic political systems like Hitler’s Nazism and Stalin’s communism have used religion or better the different churches for their own benefit.
I was walking along when I saw a man standing on a bridge getting ready to jump. I tried to find a reason to dissuade him, and asked:


Episcopalian or Baptist? Baptist, he responded.

Baptist Church of God, or Baptist Church of the Lord? Baptist Church of God.

Are you Original Baptist Church of God or Reformed Baptist Church of God? Reformed Baptist Church of God. Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God? Reformed Baptist Church of God Reformation 1879 or Reformed Baptist Church of God Reformation 1915? Reformed Baptist Church of God Reformation 1915 was the answer. Die heretic scum, I said. And pushed him off.

This joke, voted the funniest religious joke by the Ship of Fools website (a magazine of Christian anarcho), is the reason I find religion so laughable. As a child, you think that religion is supposed to be so simple: believe in God and be good to others. How wrong I was.

As you grow up you encounter different levels of faith, from the once a year churchgoer to the “If you don’t believe that Jesus was the son of God, then you are going to hell!” Many interactions with the latter slowly eroded my respect of all religion because I always believed that Christians were supposed to be forgiving and considerate, but this clearly is not the case.

I found it hard to conceive that a God would send children to hell if they did not believe this one fundamental fact. Would I want to enter a heaven without forced this ideology? No matter how much of a good person you are, no matter how many little old ladies you help across the road, no matter how many times you program your parent’s VCR, you have a one-way ticket to the gates of hell if you don’t accept that fact. I began running towards agnosticism.

As the joke highlights, if part of the religion doesn’t quite fit your lifestyle then you can start your own. Write your own rules, create a new God, design a cool logo and go in search of fellow worshippers. How is anybody supposed to respect that? I guess my question is answered through the hundreds of sub-religions that are followed across the world, but I just do not understand it.

My early comprehension was that the individual should shape themselves around their beliefs, not the other way. No alcohol before marriage? We’ll see what we can do about that in version 2.1. Homosexuals are forbidden to dance barefoot? We can slightly change that in the WikiReligion open source code. Bored with God, but want to wear Nike trainers? Make the change from religion to cult.

Is there a religion that takes the best parts from all the major religions creating a Supergod that covers a believer in all possible scenarios upon reaching the afterlife? I remember ‘The Devil’ comedy sketch by Rowan Atkinson, in which he is welcoming the new arrivals to hell: Okay, and Christians! Christians! Ah yes, I’m sorry, I’m afraid the Jews were right.

Exactly, if you don’t worship anybody then you are not going to offend anybody the day you shuffle off this mortal coil, but on the other hand how can you second-guess a God that allows thousands of children to die of hunger, but saves a single old woman from the New Orleans hurricane? A God that won’t allow a grandma to live another 85 days to see her grandson get married. I’m supposed to want to head to this heavenly place?

Anyway, returning to the joke, it made me think how much intolerance religion creates, especially when you can seriously believe that a Reformed Baptist Church of God Reformation 1879 would push a Reformed Baptist Church of God Reformation 1915 from a bridge. I guess remaining agnostic is the only solution for me, but maybe the joke one day will be:

I was standing on a bridge getting ready to jump. A man appeared and tried to find a reason to dissuade me, he asked:

Are you religious? No, I replied.

Die heretic scum, he said. And pushed me off.

With a hundred and three years between them, two men faced the same end on a Roman cross. Their similarities don’t stop at their tragic end; both men established the beginning of a new era in the world’s social history. Both men brought change and awareness. Spartacus, the first, died on the cross in 70BC after leading the biggest rebellion of the slaves in history. A gladiator himself and a warrior put his sword in the service of the poor and outcast to lead a whole empire into a crisis.

One hundred and three years later another man using speech as his sword died on the cross after leading the east side of the Roman Empire to another social revolution with the same references; the poor and the outcasts.

Both men became references themselves in history. Both men’s memory influenced and created philosophies, ideologies, wars, followers and enemies. With a difference, Christianity became a religion and soon a state religion finding followers inside the emperors and kings’ palaces; it became a favorite and part of the state. Shared in western and eastern priesthoods and related with political and military authorities.

Christianity in its long route through human history has sunk into all kinds of sins, crusades, the Inquisition, collaboration and tolerance of dictators, with crimes against humanity to remember only some.

Spartacus and his ‘slaves’ rebellion inspired the other side of the same coin that even though it started as a people’s philosophy, it showed a lot of religion characteristics. Spartacus became a reference for Marx, Lenin and Mao, inspiring the revolution of the slaves in the Russian empire while Stalin used his story in speeches the same time he was sending thousands to certain death.

Both Jesus and Spartacus based all their fight and sacrificing on their anger of human using fellow human, and their need for peace and the communal use of goods and products, Most of all, both men became martyrs asking equality and this is what makes their message timeless. It is equality that we have been asking for over 2,000 years now.

In their base, both the followers of Spartacus, communists and socialists, and the Christians asking exactly the same thing, their differences stands on the method to get there. It is amazing noticing how many similarities there are and that if you keep it in the basis of their philosophy, putting aside the fundamentalists from the one side and the fanatics and priesthood from the other.

However, Christianity came on better terms with the contemporary problems and you can see that better when comparing it with Islam. Spartacus’ followers from the other side came closer to Christianity trying to forget a disastrous century that cost the life of thousands of people in Eastern Europe.

Finally, rebels or saints they both became religions with followers.
There is one issue we always mix when it comes to religion. It is the connection between religion and the church, or the role of the church inside religion. Using the word ‘church’ I identify all those who are involved and not the building only, from the priest and the choir to the Catholic Pope, the Orthodox Patriarch to the mullahs and religious leaders in Japan. Regarding the role of the church, I can have a better opinion only when it comes to Christianity, since I lived most of my life in Christian countries and grew up as a Christian myself. From its beginning, the church has been manipulative and a part of any kind of conservative and regressive ideas. In theory, it took twenty centuries for the church to admit that the Earth is a sphere and this has nothing to do with the Bible, the main book and reference of the Christianity, but this is the text written from the priest and the students and followers. In the case of Socrates, we have Plato, an equally high-educated philosopher, who wrote his extensively long conversations adding his opinions and the opposition, while in the case of Christ we have only four books written by four of his students, who according to legend were simple every day people.

It is part of human nature to become pretentious when it comes to strong beliefs and that’s exactly what Paul did with his letters. For example, in his letters to Corinthians when he actually gives guidelines on how the church should act and behave. So the original preaching of equality between men and women, as it has often become in Christ’s preaching, becomes discriminatory with Paul, where the women carry the sign of the exile from Paradise should enter the temple with their head covered.

While in one of the most beautiful parables of the Bible, Christ teaches that you can pray to God wherever you are and you don’t need a temple, the priests over the last centuries ask for bigger and higher churches, they demand from their faithful to follow every possible service and in the end they expect them to contribute financially in the construction of bigger, higher and more luxurious churches. Christ taught with words and made it a lifestyle, the need to help the poor and especially kids, while at the same time fat priests with drivers and security hide inside expensive Mercedes Benz and don’t seem to care for the 30,000 kids that die every day somewhere in this world.

On the contrary, they are there ready to convict any theoretical opposition and demand the exchange of money for our forgiveness. The Catholic Church was the first to teach that with the remission papers signed from the Pope. The priests are the first to lead any prejudice from sexuality to rock music when the media is full of scandals that involve one of the most disgusting crimes in human history, pedophilia. Living in the period where the money buys everything and using the example of a known pop star and pedophilic they actually buy forgiveness with millions of dollars.

I could go through thousands of examples on how the Christian church has contradicted the very same preaching of its founder and how much they mislead the followers, but I’m sure that the same happens with the rest of the religions. Reading the Koran, one thing I didn’t find anywhere was that to kill thousands of innocent men in the name of God guarantees a place in paradise or however they want to call it.

One of the richest owners in land and wealth in every country around the world and every religion followed is the church. The power of the Vatican is nearly mythical, being able to manipulate markets and lead governments. The Orthodox Church has equal power in Russia and Greece where there is a huge amount of poor people, people who need help here and now to survive the next day.

One of the first things our society should do is separate the state from the church and put in control the church’s income and expenses. In most of the western countries, the state is contributing in the expenses of the priests, salaries, insurances, for example. The people who become priests and in extent bishops and popes, didn’t make a professional choice but the chosen way a life dedicated to the others. It is about time, after twenty centuries, to make that truth. The church should return to its real vision and objective.

However, there is only one who is the real enemy of religion and the only one who can make people refuse their beliefs and that’s only the church itself.

What exactly is Selfishness? The popular usage of selfishness is for a sinful adjective where one person behaves in total disregard to consequences of his/her actions on others. The selfish person will be ever ready to do anything just to satisfy his/her whims. But is there any positive aspect of Selfishness, is it justifiable to be selfish? The answer lies in how we define selfishness.

One of the first people to speak about the positive aspect of selfishness was Ayn Rand which was illustrated in her book “Fountainhead”. The virtuous aspect will be clear if we see the alternate (correct?) definition of Selfishness. Selfishness is related to one’s own self. A person will be selfish only when the person is true to his/her mind, thoughts, values and all the actions by such a person will be out of his/her convictions. Such a person will go through all kinds of difficulties and obstacles but will never compromise with his values and thus be selfish. The most distinguishing feature of that person will be ‘integrity’ i.e. such a person will ‘walk his/her talk’. Such a person will never sacrifice others for own needs or will indulge in any desire-satisfaction acts. Such a person will be ready to suffer all kinds of hardships to live for the ‘self – values’; and most importantly a selfish person will never hypocrite.

The popular usage of selfishness as sinful behavior implies acts which are done for whim-fulfillment, and not for ‘self’. Every person has some biological and psychological needs and these needs are ‘objective’. A person will always strive to fulfill these needs and hence selfish. Humans live in social world and to satisfy the objective needs there will be interactions and those interactions has to have the virtues of benevolence, rationality, rationality etc. Hence such persons will never act in disregard to others rather act in regard to oneself.

The concept of objective needs of a person can in some way explained by the theories given by Richard Dawkins in his book “The selfish Gene”, Dawkins answers questions such as why are people. What is man? Is there meaning to life? By saying that all this are there just to make the gene survive. Gene – the unit of heredity will do anything to survive, an animal is nothing but a machine made to survive the gene. Thus there is selfishness in any animal, there is this ‘objective need’. Gene is the basic and abstract unit of selfishness. This explains the reason for objective needs and hence selfishness.

In fact if one has to judge whether the feeling of love, friendship, respect or admiration is true or not then one should see if the person exhibiting such a feeling is selfish of not. If for that person love, friendship, respect etc are assuming to his needs then it is a true feeling and the person will always be committed. If they are for his whim-fulfillment then those feelings are shallow and there will be no commitment. Just for illustration, most of the time teenage love or friendships don’t last, why? Because at that time a person is not sure of his or her own self or objective needs so there is no way to find whether those needs are fulfilled by the present love or friendship. To understand ‘Self’ is the prerequisite to selfishness. A person is most true when he/she is selfish.

Love, friendship, respect is nothing but token of satisfaction of those objective needs.
Although religion has always had the capability to raise dis-
sension, there are times, such as the present, when the situation
seems more exacerbated than usual.

The range of emotion in three major religions covers a wide
spectrum. Orthodox believers in the Christian, the Jewish
and the Muslim religions tend toward radical reaction to criti-
cism and the presentation of doubts by secular questioners.
The reason for this strong reaction seems to betray something
of insecurity in the foundations for faith and in the possibility
that there is enough reasonable logic in these negative view-
points to shake the power of these traditional beliefs. Fa-
natics within religious fundamentalist groups have factions
which extol no bars to their expression of their hatred of
criticism and the intensity of this reaction has become a
threat to civilized society.

The survival of any organism depends upon the determina-
tion, mostly by trial and error, by that creature of those threats
which may destroy it and the evolu-
tion of reactions which will
preserve that organism. Over
time these reactions become a
basic set of rules that solidify
into confirmed social laws and
are not considered subject to
critical analysis which may
threaten the existence of the or-
ganism. But the universe is not
static. Over time those threats
which could be confronted by
standard solutions mutate and
evolve. And new threats appear
which lay outside the capabil-
ity of the standard social tool-
box. If the original mechanisms
which protected society by ac-
knowledging a new threat and
devising a protective solution
has decayed so that new rules
cannot be formulated to replace
those that no longer apply, then
the organism becomes vulner-
able if it persists in applying
the old rules and is in danger of
destruction.

Early human social groups
required two social mecha-
nisms to survive. The first was
a compilation of the nature of
the environment and its dan-
gers and opportunities and the
second was a system to apply
this knowledge to the benefit of
the group. In all probability the
first social groups were families
with either a male or a female
leader or perhaps a division of
power between the two. Before
agriculture the group survived
by hunting and gathering and
gradually domestication of ani-
mals and plants proved more
fruitful. The proponent of the
first mechanism evolved into a
wise person or a priest and the
second mechanism produced a
leader or king who was prob-
ably a successful hunter and
warrior.

Both religion and science were
intimately intertwined in the
priest function and one comple-
mented the other. Both religion
and science originally were
highly creative enterprises. The
survival of the group depended
upon correct appraisal of an
event and the formulation of
how to confront it. Good priests
invented what they thought lay
behind an event and devised
ways of dealing with it. When
they failed everybody suffered
and if they succeeded every-
body prospered. But, as in every
social situation, particular indi-
viduals became dominant with-
in their function and prevented
necessary revisions of the rules
which were necessary changes
for the survival and progress of
society. With the advent of the
written word the ideas which
had been successful in the past
became petrified into unshak-
able regulations with frequently
absurd constrictions.

Although rational thought has
always been present in hu-
manity it came to pronomerice
within very capable individuals
in several ancient societies, the
Greeks being one of the most
obvious. The lines of thought
from there to the present lead
toward several civilizations to
the development of precise
rational disciplines in modern
science. Almost all of the origi-
nal creativity embodied in the
original priest scientist has bur-
goned in science and withered
in religion leading to an unfor-
tunate modern conflict between
the two. There are many prob-
lems that may become acces-
sible to science in the future
that deal with consciousness
in the universe and the concept
that there may be some direc-
tion to the way the universe has
developed. In many of these
concepts science has wisely de-
clined to offer definite solutions
although speculation is open.

Religion, on the other hand, has
tended to proffer definite con-
cepts which it does not accept
as open to criticism. Some of
them are so widely at variance
with accepted scientific reality
as to appear totally irrational.
They make me, at minimum, ex-
ceedingly uncomfortable and
reflect on the capabilities of the
people making the claims.

Oscar Wilde once noted: It is
because humanity has never
known where it was going that
it has been able to find its way.
Islam has its mujahideen, even
though these people have to
do with Islam as much as the
holy inquisition had to do with
Christianity and its message.
All these writings about a war
between civilizations or reli-
gions has nothing to do with the
truth, Islam created a civiliza-
tion and tolerance occasionally
higher than the one Christianity
has to show.

But there’s not been a war be-
tween civilizations or extreme
religions’ disputation, what’s
going on in our world lately?
Perhaps it is the late forlorn of
the long colonialism or unfair
for many countries during the
Cold War. If you add to that
the Middle East open conflict
for the last forty years and the
sudden extreme enrichment of
Arabs, you will see that these
are enough to inspire all these
Islamist kammazes.

Fundamentalism, there it is in
both sides and that doesn’t ex-
plain all these acts of terrorism
with innocent families as vic-
tims. Following the theory that
the Christian acts of George W.
Bush and his coreligionism is
Al-Qaeda’s alibi even that Bin
Laden is Bush’s alter ego is at
least naïve and politically su-
perficial. Contradicting the two
sides, the militant followers
of globalization and the fun-
damentalists Arabs, we misun-
derstand the phenomenon and
justify the political juggling
both sides do.

Another common explanation
is that the Islamists defend
themselves from the aggressive
 globalization, while the west is
defending even with reducing
the hard earned human rights
to the aggressive and increas-
ing act of terrorism. This is an
other naïve explanation since it
stands on the same misunder-
standings.

The majority of these kamikaze
terrorists, even though they use
the misery of their brothers in
Palestine as an excuse, they are
not coming from the same
class, most of them have a mid-
dle class background, educa-
tion and their life has never met
the life of the Palestinians who
live in the camps. The vampires
of Islamic revenge have never
tasted the blood their Palestin-
ian brothers have to give every
day.

From the other side, the war on
terrorism is neither a war nor
against terrorists. The last act
in London proved that it can
come anywhere from people
who nobody ever suspected.
Nobody can see the enemy.

There are only two solutions
left. Either the leaders of this
world decide to leave aside
their egocentric ambitions sit
down and make some decisions
however difficult it will be for
both sides. They have done that
already at least once in the past
at the end of WWII, or we have
to create Christian mujahideen
who will take the war on terror
in the other side of the hill.
Interest rates were left on hold within the EU at present. Mr Greenspan’s 18-year reign is ending in January at the age of 79. He has masterfully guid-
ed the United States economy through the atrocities of the 9/11 attacks, the resulting stock market crash and corporate failures and decision-making have averted a much deeper recess-
ion in the US that would have had massive repercussions for the rest of the world.

Ben Bernanke was the choice of President George W. Bush and his advisors, and they will be hoping the US economy continues to move in the right direction. His appointment was by no means a surprise and he was the favourite among the preferred front-runners. The market reaction was one of indifference once the early indica-
tions were that he plans to continue the Federal Reserve’s current ‘measured approach’ policy of interest rate rises.

He is respected for his infla-
tion targeting approach and his unique methods for containing price rises. The Fed raised their interest rates by another quar-
ter point for the 12th month in a row, although by the time he takes his position at the end of January the current cycle of rate increases may be nearing an end.

These second round effects are more damaging to the Global Economies and include wage pressures, rises in the costs of manufacturing. Head of the ECB, Jean Claude Tri-
elch, did not give a clear signal to the markets that such a hike was likely before Christmas but simply stated they were ready to act when necessary.

UK rates are also due to be left unchanged as the Bank of Eng-
land awaits further Economic data. The more antici-
matic news of the month was the an-
nouncement of Ben Bernanke as the successor to Federal Re-
serve Governor Chairman Alan Greenspan.

Outsourcing is the latest buzz-
word and also the bone of con-
etion in many economies across the globe. For some countries it matters or concern and others it is something which can catapult them to levels of developed country. Outsourcing which is part of the general agreement on trade and services under the World Trade Organization (WTO) is becoming more popular in po-
litical circles because the emo-
tional chord it strikes with the masses.

Why does a company outsource any of its activities? Do they outsource because it is the lat-
est buzzword in the economy? Do they outsource just because HBR mentioned it, and if they don’t do it then people will think their CEOs are not read-
ing HBR. Do they outsource just because everyone is doing it? Well, the sole purpose of any business is to "maximize the shareholder’s equity" i.e. to earn money. Do you think the community service aspect of corporations don’t have this objective? Think again.

A company will outsource only if they foresee a business benefit, something which cuts back on their operating cost, or increases the revenue thereby leading to profit increase. Take for example a company XYZ Inc doing business in USA out-
sourcing few of its activities to Poland. This outsourcing will increase the profit; assume it to be a modest 20 million USD. Where this 20 million USD goes? Does it go as well to Po-
land? No, it remains in the US economy, the money will not be sucked, for no economy is a quicksand (even quicksand does not sucks as shown in some movies). The additional 20 mn USD is going to have a cascading effect, the economy of US got richer by 20 mn USD. For a country like USA which has got a deficit eco-
omy (spending is more than earning in USA) it holds more meaning than say for economy of Japan (it has highest saving rate in world). The additional money will spawn more econ-
omy, more jobs, so on and so forth.

Outsourcing or no outsourcing jobs were lost and will continue to be lost, turnover is as natural as creation of jobs. The same IT jobs which are being said to be ‘lost’ due to outsourcing were in the eye of storm couple of decades back when it was said that automation will steal all the jobs. We can judge for ourselves how that threat came out to be and similarly how credible the present out-
sourcing threat is? Protection-
ism is going to do no good for any economy as it happened in the case of USA steel industry.

They had to lift away the pro-
tectionist regime on steel indi-
ustry as it increased the price and cost jobs. Is outsourcing a recent con-
cept? Or does outsourcing really mean?

Outsourcing was always there, the thing that has changed is the direct effect of it, people were happy when they were getting more jobs due to out-
sourcing and now they perceive that there would be job cuts. The opposition that we see is because people go by hearsay and not by analysis. People see on ground level that they have lost jobs, so outsourcing is bad. Well you may have lost the job which you were doing, but now you got to do something else, new jobs are created due to ‘additional’ money which got pumped in your economy. Your old job was shifted because now it is being done in much ‘economically efficient man-
ner’.

No economy is static or can survive if they try to be static. The dynamics of an economy will always be making this sort of change and if one has to sur-
vive one has to align with this
dynamics. The balance will al-
ways be shifting. When industri-
trial revolution started in 1750s in Europe and North America manufacturing was done there, now it is in China and next it could be in Nepal or Bangla-
desh. Did all those who were in manufacturing lost their means of earning? Well some might have who didn’t re-skill them-
selves for the new jobs which were created.

Globalisation does not mean a one way route, if you are able to sell your products in other countries then they will have access to your market as well, either for products or for serv-
ices. Outsourcing is not an an-
cient concept but basic tenet of Economics which says, "soci-
ity must use its resources effi-
ciently". All the angst against outsourcing is nothing facts skewed to suit propaganda.
The True Meaning

By F.A. Hutchinson

Isn’t it interesting how questions go unanswered for years if answered at all? But, it seems to me that questions are always more important than answers anyway!

Take for example one question which was asked of me at the Hindu Vidapeeth School, Kathmandu, Nepal in 1998. It took until 2004, and a return trip to Nepal, for the question to be factually addressed.

I remember the day so vividly, the first time I’d ever been to the Hindu Vidapeeth School—a homecoming of course, the memory of my first visit still vivid!

During one of my discussions with my dear friend, now Dr. Yogi, the subject came up as I reminded him of that day when I first visited HVNP School, the question asked of me, and how the answer has plagued me ever since. Of course, this time his answer and explanation had meaning to me (sometimes answers, like good wine, take time)!

He said, ‘The Bhagavad Gita has been mis-interpreted by most!'

The next day, I returned to Pilgrim’s Book Store in Thamel, and purchased the, Yatharth Geeta, a commentary by Paramahans Swami Adgadanand. Later I purchased The Bhagavadgita, translated by K.T. Telang.

Still having read both and understanding Dr. Yogi’s interpretation, I think I’m finally able to respond to the young man’s question (some six years later)—as it was asked more for my benefit than his own. Bless him wherever he is!

First, however, my own history with the Bhagavad Gita. I first saw the book in New York City in 1967, passed to me on the street by Hare Krishna devotees. I remember I had the hardbound copy for years, but never read it. No doubt I wasn’t ready!

Then in 1998, the question posed by the young man at HVNP School…but, my first reading of the text unsatisfactory as I, no doubt, was still not ready to comprehend.

Just recently I returned to Nepal after five years, staying in the guest room at HVNP School—a homecoming of course, the memory of my first visit still vivid!

During one of my discussions with my dear friend, now Dr. Yogi, the subject came up as I reminded him of that day when I first visited HVNP School, the question asked of me, and how the answer has plagued me ever since. Of course, this time his answer and explanation had meaning to me (sometimes answers, like good wine, take time)!

He said, ‘The Bhagavad Gita has been mis-interpreted by most!' 

So, what is the Bhagavad Gita all about, this simple myth, that’s spawned, hundreds of commentaries, over fifty at least in Sanskrit and a book that has bedeviled me for years? Why is my attempt to answer boy’s question even relevant?

‘It is said that one who has known the truth of the Geeta is a knower of the Ved, which literally means the ‘knowledge of God!’ Thus the Gita, unlike its ‘parent’ is not concerned with the historical battle, or ‘sustenance of physical life, the propagation of social or religious conventions, rites or customs.[3] As Dr. Yogi says, ‘it is not grounded in time or place, nor refers to any dogma, it is for any and all of any religion.’ Thus, it is a true myth (a story to live by) in my opinion!

Certainly, the Bhagavad Gita, is one of the most important myths[4] in history, an episode of the great Hindu epic entitled, ‘Mahabharat,’ the following context described in The Bhagavadgita (translated by K.T. Telang):

‘It appears, then, that the royal family of Hasinapura was divided into two branches: the one called the Kaushavas, and the other the Pandavas. The former wished to keep the latter out of the share of the kingdom claimed by them, and so after many attempts at an amicable arrangement, it was determined to decide their differences by arms. Each party accordingly collected its adherents, and the hostile armies met on the ‘holy field of Kurukshetra.’ At this juncture, Krishna Dvapiyana alias Vyasa, a relative of both parties and endowed with more than human powers, presents himself before Dhitarrashtra, the blind father of the Kauravas. Vyasa asks Dhitarrashtra whether it is his wish to look with his own eyes on the course of the battle? Dhitarrashtra, expressing his reluctance, Vyasa deputizes Sangaya to relate to Dhitarrashtra all the events of the battle.

‘Then the battle begins, and after ten days, the first great general of the Kuravas, namely Bhishma falls. At this point Sangaya comes up to Dhitarrashtra and asks him the result, which is of course a great blow to his side. Dhitarrashtra then makes numerous enquiries of Sangaya regarding the course of the conflict, all of which Sangaya duly answers. And among his earliest answers is the account of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna at the commencement of the battle. This ‘conversation’ constitutes the Bhagavad Gita.

Arguna, woefully lost, has no ‘stomach’ for the war he must wage, in his mind between relatives (family traditions), but in Krishna’s ‘mind,’ a war of a totally different kind! Arguna (archer/student) most humbly entreats Krishna (teacher/God) to enlighten him on what might mitigate this ‘battle,’ his fear to fight such a ‘battle,’ and ultimately what will bring him happiness.

The following ‘conversation’ between Arjuna and Krishna (excerpted from K.T. Telang’s translation) is by no means the complete ‘Gita,’ but my synopses of such. I recommend, if interested, you study the ‘Gita’ in as many versions as possible. I have also omitted indicating if it’s Arjuna or Krishna speaking, as Arjuna (disciple) asks, and Krishna (Guru) answers:

‘Tell me what is assuredly good for me! I am your disciple; instruct me, who has thrown myself on your mercy. For I do not perceive what is to dispel the grief after I shall have obtained a prosperous kingdom on earth without a foe[5], or even the sovereignty of the gods.

‘You have grieved for those who deserve no grief, and you speak words of wisdom. Learned men grieve not for the living nor the dead. Never did I not exist, nor you, nor these rulers of men, nor will any one of us ever hereafter cease to be. As in this body, infancy and youth and old age come to the embodied Self. So does the acquisition of another body[6]. A sensible man is not deceived about that. The senses, O son of Kunti, which produce cold and heat, pleasure and pain, are not permanent, they are for action, in his mind between relatives (family traditions), but in Krishna’s ‘mind,’ a war of a totally different kind! Arguna (archer/student) most humbly entreats Krishna (teacher/God) to enlighten him on what might mitigate this ‘battle,’ his fear to fight such a ‘battle,’ and ultimately what will bring him happiness.

The states of minds of those who have no firm understanding are manifold and endless!’

‘What are the characteristics, O Kesava, of one whose mind is steady, and who is intent on contemplation?

When a man, O son of Pritha, abandons all the desires of his heart, and is pleased in his self only, then he is called of a steady mind. He whose heart is not agitated in midst of calamities, who has no longing for pleasures, and from whom the feelings of affection, fear and wrath, departed, has called a sage of a steady mind. For his mind is steady whose senses are under control!

‘If, O Gandaranva devotion is deemed by you to be superior to action, then why, O Kesava do you prompt me to fearful action (to ‘fight’ the indwelling ‘battle’)?

‘I have already declared, that in this world there is a twofold path, that of the Sankhyas devotion in the shape of true knowledge, and that of the Yogins in the shape of action (yoga to ‘yoke’ to the supreme). A man does not attain freedom from action merely by not engaging in action, nor does he attain perfec—

Continues in the next page
saking all attachment to the fruit of action, always contented, devoted, always possessed of devotion, without ever disputing or performing anything some action. Since the qualities of nature constrain everyone as if there is no free-will[7]. But he, O Arguna who restraining his senses of his mind, and being free from attachments, enganges in devotion which is far superior.

But by whom, O descendant of Pandu, is man impelled, even though unwillingly, to commit sin?

It is desire, it is wrath, born from the quality of passion, it is very ravenous, this sin[8]. Know that this sin is the foe in this world! As fire is enveloped by smoke, a mirror by dust, the fetus by the womb, so is this envoloped by desire. Knowledge, O son of Kunti, is enveloped by this constant foe of the man, in the shape of desire, which is insatiable. Therefore, O chief of the descendants of Bharata, first restrain your senses, then cast off this sinful thing which destroys knowledge and experience (personal perception). It has been said, great are the senses, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than the mind is understanding! What is greater than the understanding is that which I teach. Thus, knowing that which is higher than the understanding, is restraining yourself, by yourself. O you of mighty arms! Destroy this unmanageable enemy in the shape of desire[9]!

He is wise among men, he is possessed of devotion, and performs all actions by seeing inaction in action and inaction[10]. The wise call him learned, whose thoughts are all free from desires and fancies, and whose actions are burnt down in the fire of knowledge[11]. For the actions of all who are devoted to meditation and mental abstraction, who abandons egoism, stubbornness, arrogance, desire, anger, he, who is transcendental, becomes fit for assimilation with me. For the mind is a foe which is never conquered, and the instruments of this foe are the senses. I am consciousness in the senses. I am the mind among the senses. I am the discernment in the discrimination. I am the eternal seed of all beings. I am the all-pervading, unthinkable, indescribable, incomparable, immovable, constant… They, intent on the good in all beings, attain me.

As to those, however, O son of Pritha, who dedicate all their actions for me and holding me as their highest goal, worship me, meditating on me with a devotion towards none besides me, I come forward as their deliverer from the ocean of this world of death.

Concentration is better than continuous meditation. Knowledge of the Bhagavad Gita, the quality higher than concentration, and abandon- ment of the fruits of action, will acquire the tranquility desired!

That devotee of mine, who hates no being, who is friendly and compassionate, who is free from egoism and possessive- ness, to whom happiness and misery are alien, who is for- giving, contented, constantly devoted, self-restrained, and firm in his determinantions, and whose mind and understanding are devoted to me, he is dear to me.

O you of mighty arms, O Hrishikesh, O destroyer of Kesin! I wish to know the truth about renunciation and aban- donment!

O you of mighty arms, O Krishna, I come forward as their deliverer! I come forward as their deliverer from the ocean of this world of death. As fire is enveloped by smoke, a mirror by dust, the fetus by the womb, so is this envoloped by desire. Knowledge, O son of Kunti, is enveloped by this constant foe of the man, in the shape of desire, which is insatiable. Therefore, O chief of the descendants of Bharata, first restrain your senses, then cast off this sinful thing which destroys knowledge and experience (personal perception). It has been said, great are the senses, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than the mind is understanding! What is greater than the understanding is that which I teach. Thus, knowing that which is higher than the understanding, is restraining yourself, by yourself. O you of mighty arms! Destroy this unmanageable enemy in the shape of desire[9]!

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"I cannot see, O destroyer of Kesin! I wish to know the truth about renunciation and abandon- ment!"

"By renunciation the sages mean rejection of actions done with results, not the actual renunciation of the fruit of all ac- tions done with desire."

In Christian terms it’s symbol- ized in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection: ‘You must die of the body (ego consciousness) to be reborn of the spirit’ (God consciousness) and without making this possible? God’s grace (unconditional love)!

Yet, man, the undeserved and deluded, perverts somehow into violence against others— as the solution to their own lives. Unconscious man projects even outward and onto others, rather than doing ‘battle’ with himself— much easier to put the blame on others of course!

It seems to me in the year 2000, or ‘Nepal calendar’, what we need is less fundamental- istic religion (be it Hindu, Moslem, or Christian) and more love! Let us answer the question to all the questions! We stop the violence (against others)! Let us stop hating innocent people and creatures.

What needs to be ‘killed’, according to the Bhagavad Gita, and the battleground is the personal body, the mind the enemy, and where the ‘demons’ must be slain! The goal to be attained, is consciousness, or direct percep- tion of this unmanifested ‘thing’ we call God. This always being possible by grace (uncondi- tional love)!

All we have to do is seek it[15].

‘Salvation,’ he says, is found in all the religions of the world, and is discussed in some form in all the great holy books. The common theme: that salva- tion is possible in this life time, but that you must accomplish it first. The oral tradition is open and prepared! Hindu- ism purports it takes many life times, as we work our way ‘up a ladder,’ so to speak.

This, my dear young questioner, is the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita, to me! But, the meaning for you; the ‘true’ meaning, you must answer for yourself!

[1] Song of our Lord
[2] An article I wrote about my visit.
[4] From a talk given at the Institute for Neuro- science and a program called ‘Beyond!’. It was just one of my intellectual mentors (David Carter ), many years ago, who brought me the great stories of how to live. We can- not live without these stories to guide us.
[5] Arguna here is referring to the literal foe in the literal battle (the fears to fight). He is yet to learn of the real foe!’
[6] On the other, the idea of rein- carnation.
[7] On the subject of ‘Free Will.’ As a philosopher, this is one of the great questions left for me… Do we have ‘Free Will?’ After studying B. Spinoza In The Netherlands, I believe we don’t (my life as an example).
[8] When the word ‘sin’ is used, I am bound to quote C.G. Jung: ‘Sin is only sin uncon- sciousness!’
[10] This is a very Taoist thought.
[11] Of course, the idea of rein-
[12] This I take to mean giving up ego pursuits versus the pur- suit of God.
[14] This is a very Taoist thought.
[15] Of course, the idea of rein-
[16] The Hindus (via the ‘BG’) believe you must have a embod- ied Guru to become enlightened. A rather twisted concept! One has to be the only ‘true’ Sage of me and does not have the manifested being my Master, Lord, and God— The Divine Lover!
God made me do it

Religion for centuries has been used by tyrants, lunatics, and politicians as a baton to keep the masses subdued, a quote from old says, “Religion is the heroin of the masses.”

George W. Bush has been in the papers recently because apparently he told certain world leaders that he entered the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq because ‘GOD’ told him too.

If committed a crime tomorrow and your defence in court was “GOD TOLD ME TO DO IT” - no matter what your faith is you will be sent to see a psychiatrist and eventually prison.

What is the defining line between having religion and being a religious nutcase?

The papers say, “He was a devout Christian” and the papers say, “He was a religious fanatic” - what’s the difference?

Most countries spend more on the military than on education, when are we going to learn?

“Your imagination is a preview of life’s coming attractions.” - Albert Einstein

“I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism.” - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King

“An eye for an eye only ends up making the world blind.” - Mahatma Gandhi

Shouldn’t a whole nation cry when a child of the world is orphaned by a religious war or dies of a curable disease? While the rest of us are fighting over religious texts passed down over the years 

20,000 CHILDREN DIE EVERY DAY FROM CURABLE DISEASES

3 BILLION PEOPLE LIVE ON LESS THAN TWO DOLLARS A DAY

120 MILLION CHILDREN DIE EACH YEAR FROM LACK OF SAFE ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND ADEQUATE SANITATION

Shouldn’t a whole nation cry when a child of the world is orphaned by a religious war or dies of a curable disease? While the rest of us are fighting over religious texts passed down over the years imprinted, bastardised, manipulated, and twisted in front of our eyes. Nations spend billions of euros and dollars on the military annually, but the next time you see a religious or political leader on TV calling people to arms check this out:

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120 MILLION CHILDREN DIE EACH YEAR FROM LACK OF SAFE ACCESS TO DRINKING WATER AND ADEQUATE SANITATION

Come to Finland I had to face something very new to me. I’m coming from a country where religion is a big issue in people’s lives and it is a part of the history. The Greek Church held the nation united during Turkey’s occupation for four hundred years and, even though the Orthodox Church and the Greek schools were forbidden, the priests and the monks sometimes sacrificed their lives to continue teaching the Greek language and history in secret schools.

So, I did grow in this country, where back in ’60s, you had to pray every morning before school started, had to go to church on Sunday morning and follow Sunday school. Greece was, and I’m afraid to a certain level still is, one of these European countries where religion was part of the State and the Church had a say even in political decisions, not to forget their involvement during the civil war and the seven years of dictatorship where, in the name of anti-communism, they made thousands suffer and they are responsible for hundreds of deaths.

The Greek Orthodox Church, as the name says is orthodox, directly follows the preaching of the apostles and especially Paul, and they are very conservative. After realizing myself and my need to start getting answers to thousands of questions I had about religion - I have to remind you that the ’60s and ’70s was the rebellion period in Europe - I started questioning why the Orthodox Church was so unfair to women. I mean even though the mother of Christ and the most holy person in the Bible after Christ is his mother, even though his biggest believer and follower was Maria Magdalena, women have to suffer in their anonymity and pay for something the myth says that the first woman did.

More questions came to me, like why the first creature God made had to be Man and then from his rib, how humiliating, he made Woman; why did the woman do something so stupid that it would cost us eternity in paradise, and many more to end up with why we are so sure that the man is, according to all the icons, a man and not a woman? To add to that because of this sign, the women have to enter the churches with their head covered!

And then I came to Finland. The church of Finland has women priests and one day instead of seeing the dry old face of a bearded priest all in black I watched a woman with light make-up, mascara, lipstick and quite attractive I have to admit, wearing the white clerical collar and conducting the Sunday service in one of the biggest churches in Helsinki.

Please don’t misunderstand me, I found her very refreshing and somehow I started listening to her. There was nothing of the dry, cynical faces that promised me a good place in hell in the past. Her face had a hope and light, and most of all she looked like one of us, not somebody who looks at us from the high blessing of God.

Priest with lipstick

Still, what happened with what Paul wrote in his letter to the Athenians? Here was a woman not only uncovered inside the church, not only preaching but being a priest herself. Wasn’t that against all the things the church had taught us?

In a conversation I had later with a member of the Finnish church, I found out that it all happens because the church needed to upgrade and modernize. That had me totally in agreement. Here I’m not judging the beliefs of the people, on the contrary, every body has the right to believe something as long it doesn’t harm anybody. But then new questions arrived.

The Scottish church has made it part of their belief that Maria was not a virgin, which is another thing I find logical and acceptable. Then why not go a bit further? Accept that the whole thing in Genesis is nothing other than a parable to explain something the scientists have explained today? Why not accept gay marriage? Since it is accepted by the State, why not go from the church in the name of modernization?

For a much lesser reason, Luther, who has inspired among others the Church of Finland, was exiled from the Catholic Church and many others were called heretics from the church and even died for their acts. Is this modernization of the Finnish church a heresy or a step forward to a new style of church? And if they are ready to modernize the church how far will they go or is having a woman priest enough?
Paragraph 58

Fascism’s on the wall

§ 58 of the USSR criminal code stands for the crimes against the nation and government. It applied to every citizen in the USSR.

1917 - The revolution and the end of the Tsardom of Russia. The working mass takes over.

1924 - Lenin dies and Stalin gets a free hand.

1929 - The USSR establishes a new law, which states that the church as a religious and national institution has to be liquidated and Christianity, as an opposite phenomenon to the official atheist ideology, has to be out rooted. In pre-Sec-Ond World War, the first church servants start to disappear.

1940 - An organization called the Alliance of Fighting Against the Believers is established. Atheism doesn’t mean ‘not to believe in a God’, but in the USSR, it means the propaganda against the church. During this year, most of the University faculties of religion are closed down and Christianity lessons in schools come to a full stop. All kinds of religious literature are banned. The new regime is forced upon other Soviet countries by first attacking the institution of church.

1945 - All church activity is restricted. In pre-Sec-Ond World War, the first church servants start to disappear.

1953 - Stalin dies. The obvious repressions against the church servants end after his death. Stalin is followed by Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and finally Gorbachev.

1955 - Khrushchev gives amnesty to the Siberia-deportees. Church activity, though, is only allowed in the countryside, not in towns or cities. Most of the real estate of churches is nationalised (taken over by government). Religious activity is controlled by attorneys assigned by the KGB. The black coat men (the diminishing name for clerics) are recruited by the KGB to become its agents. Those who don’t live up to their new role are sent to Siberia. While a “normal” citizen pays equalized tax (11% of his income), the church servant pays progressive tax (on average 33% of his income).

Beginning of the 1960s - Teachers, doctors and nursery personnel are instructed how to influence religious people by secondary methods – through their children. Most of the magazines and newspapers start their own atheism section. The Bible is always written between quotation marks and with a small first letter.

1963 - Publication of the Atheist Manual. Amongst other things, it declares: “Religious people’s sense of reality is defected.” Religious people are:

a) having a medical condition (they typically turn into apathy and finally they will be dangerous to themselves or others)

b) they are criminals (the local church people are systematically mentally raping other people)

End of 1980s - People in the Soviet Union are demanding to have the right for religion. By the end of the decade, the USSR starts to crumble. People between the ages of 0 and 80 will be baptized; they are joining the church at a speed at which clerics can’t keep up.

Nowadays we are living the discussion about the relationship between Christianity and Islam. To be honest, I could be a Christian, Muslim, Judaist, or any other name you can think of. While growing up, I’ve seen how religion could be the tool of protest against the rulers, even if there was no means to terrorise or to kill in the name of God. At the same time, I’m not sure, if religion has anything to do with freedom to believe.

Anyway, a picture is worth a thousand words so below are two of Mosley’s posters from the 1930s. The first has the familiar “peace” motif that Leftists always use and the second will sound very familiar to Americans today. American Leftists are always claiming that it is the children of the poor who are dying in the American army in Iraq. Mosley said much the same in his time about military service in the British army.
Five people were killed in Hadera, a town between Tel Aviv and Haifa, while at the same time the irresponsible president of Iran, Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, threatened to wipe Israel from the map.

When Iran elected Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in ‘democratic’ elections, I was one of the first to write about the servant of the mullahs with civilian clothes. The man has proved worst than anything anybody could ever imagine and his stupidity is a threat to world peace. Perhaps he’s not aware that whatever he says has an effect on the fanatics between the Arabs who live to hear things like that.

We are used to hearing this sort of announcements from Iran and their allies but when the timing is the same with a terror attack that kills five people and injures a few more, even though you know it is just a coincidence it still makes you wonder.

The Palestinian suicide bomber was waiting, queuing with many Israelis in front of a falafel kiosk on a central street. Jihad took the responsibility of the bombing and it came as reprisal for the death of an important member of the organization. Israel was too ready to show all around the world using the best communication way, the international media, what happened and threatened the Palestinian authorities once more that they were doing nothing to help the peace process and bring peace. The Palestinian authorities and Mr. Mahmut Abbas, in shock and anger, tried to say to every side that things like that harm the Palestinian interests. Imagine how difficult Mr. Mahmut Abbas’ position becomes when a supposed ally of the cause for free Palestine comes with something like that.

“Whoever recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the anger of the Islam,” obviously Tony Blair works better in separating Islam and terrorism because the Iranian president brings them back together.

Naturally, Israel reacted to all this saying through Foreign Minister Mr. Silvan Shalom that Iran is a real and visual threat for international peace. It is a wonder how the rest of the international community hasn’t said the same. He adds that this kind of regime can turn into a nightmare if they come to hold nuclear power and in extent nuclear weapons.

I think there is nothing more to say, Mr. Shalom said everything.
Hovering above

By Riku Pyhala

Internet search engine company Google released a new product last June: Google Earth. This free program will allow you to see everywhere on the globe, through satellite pictures. It lets you do smooth sailing flybys of the entire Earth, and by entering any associated data, like street addresses or place names, you can fly right there on the spot, in only a few clicks.

Different layer possibilities, like roads, international boundaries, 3D buildings, crime statistics, schools or stadiums make the environment frighteningly living and breathing. Although the pictures aren’t updated in real time, there is a strange feeling of spying when hovering above cities.

Many people, from governments to media representatives, have already showed their worry on how the program might help terrorists and be a giant vulnerability. The God-view-like pictures that hover somewhere around 300 metres above ground show that hover somewhere around 300 metres above ground show sharply even your own house.

But is this really a problem? It is somehow contradictory how people get truly afraid when they see satellite pictures of their own home, while they themselves are watching reality-TV in their living room. It is a typically human contradiction: tendency towards voyeurism and want to be seen, but at the same time grabbing tightly on to the basic need to maintain privacy.

So let’s not forget the plus sides: educational possibilities, a chance for people to explore and visualize parts of the world they will probably never be able to visit. Sound familiar? These are the same phrases used when internet first came. Therefore, it should be quite natural to also meet the same fears, the same conflicts.

One thing also worth remembering: it all comes down to pictures. Already people are disappointed with the programs tiling possibilities, everything goes flat and buildings disappear, only a few are in 3D. So no-one will fly in to my home and explore the dishes on my kitchen table, after all. What a shame!

I had heard of culture shock before, but when I visited Finland between June and July this year, I had an opportunity of experiencing it firsthand.

One of the things that I found very, very different was the concept of space, interpersonal space. In my country, for example, someone will very easily pass you and brush shoulders/arms with you. Here in Finland, I found that people like having at least a meter between them and the next person. I almost interpreted it to mean that people were being snobbish or racist, but then having learnt about different forms of space from campus, I understood.

Finnish people speak good English, and I was surprised, though not all of them, but for those who have been to school. I also found out that even people with Masters Degrees here could end up doing menial jobs, just to get a pay check. In my country, if you had a Masters Degree, you would be very marketable and you would get a very plum job with a good salary. However, being in the EU bubble means that citizens of Finland can go to other countries to look for jobs. The Euro is a strong currency.

I was excited because I arrived at a time when Finland was playing against Denmark - or was it Holland - for qualification to the World Cup. Unfortunately Finland lost 4-1 and Sami Hyppia was the captain. I went to the stadium and saw the entire match, which was quite an experience. Finns are not known for their soccer prowess though. I think.

As for the clubs and all, I think this world needs more integration to reduce culture shock. In Kenya, if anyone knew you were gay, you would be ostracized from society, IMMEDIATELY. Here in Finland, I couldn’t bring myself to accept that there are gay and lesbian bars. I don’t want to be labeled intolerant or anything, but it’s just the way I was brought up.

In fact, I was shocked when a Finnish friend told me that she has friends who are gay/lesbian and she doesn’t mind them! In my country, such kind of silence is only permitted when people are going to a funeral; otherwise people talk and laugh on the public transport systems.

Another issue that I found pleasantly strange is the fact that dust was/is nonexistent in Helsinki. I had never imagined a city without dust. In Nairobi, you take a shower everyday because of the dust. I met a couple of Africans while here, and most of them were rather friendly, which is something I can say of all Africans. We have this brotherhood thing. Finns are a bit personal and conservative, which makes them unique anyway.

I could go on and on, but then I know someone might get bored and ask me to start my own blog, so let me stop here. I wouldn’t mind getting a pen friend either, someone who would be interested in learning more about my country.

Helsinki ain’t Nairobi

By Michael Mugweru

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It's ongoing

By Asa Butcher

Many internet users have fallen in love with the excellent Wikipedia and I am one of them. There is very little this encyclopedia cannot tell you and the cross-referencing is a wonder. However, I was using its ‘Current Events’ section when I noticed on the right-hand side two other sections: ‘On-going events’ and ‘On-going armed conflicts’.

These two lists highlight the old adage: out of sight, out of mind. Once the media’s interest is focused elsewhere, it rarely returns to old stories despite the fact that many have not reached a conclusion. As I glanced down the ongoing armed conflicts list, I was shocked by how many there are and how many I had never heard of.

The list begins with the Colombian Armed Conflict (a.k.a. Colombian Civil War and Colombian Conflict) that is described as a low intensity conflict in Colombia that has been in existence since approximately 1964 or 1966, involving guerrilla insurgency campaigns against successive Colombian government administrations. On whose side should I be?

I have never heard of this conflict and it is not surprising when it doesn’t receive regular coverage on the BBC. The list has 14 conflicts across the globe, which is a startling number when I knew of three...maybe two. The Somali Civil War has been raging on since 1997, the War in Aceh may be ending due to Abhisarai’s efforts, there is the Zapatista Rebellion in Mexico, the Nepalese Civil War and the Second Congo War, described as the bloodiest ongoing war, with an estimated 3.8 million dead.

The ongoing events list can’t fail to open your eyes to the ecological problems humanity is facing on this planet. Currently, it is the hurricane season in both the Atlantic and Pacific. The Katrina earthquake is still claiming lives and the threat of an avian influenza (H5N1) outbreak is very real. There are 46,000 severely malnourished children in Malawi and 2.4 million of 3.6 million people are considered highly vulnerable to food insecurity in Niger.

If it isn’t enough that Mother Nature is showing her anger, humanity is piling on the problems with ongoing investigations into the Bali and London bombings, Iran and North Korea’s nuclear programme are making many world citizens nervous and, as I write, the Paris suburb riots have reached their eighth consecutive night.

In the face of all this, how important do you think the other ongoing events featured on the list are, such as the UK Conservative Party leadership election, the US CIA leak investigation, the 2005 Summit of the Americas protests and fuel prices? No matter how important they are, once something far more newsworthy arrives they’ll be forgotten, except by those unfortunate souls involved.

The best medicine for a good and long life is a good diet, announced another doctors’ meeting in another news flash we have heard too often over the last few years. However and more often lately, I keep reading about the Mediterranean diet and especially the Cretan diet.

Cretans have a beautiful island, actually my favorite Greek island and it has been the favorite holiday destination for thousands of tourists from all around the world. You must remember that Crete is one of the biggest islands in the Mediterranean Sea and that one of the reasons the locals’ attitude is like living on a mainland and not an island.

Crete covers an area of 8,336 sq. kms. The length of the island is 260 km, but the shore length is 1,046 km. The biggest is 60 km from the Dion cape to the Lithinon cape, while the smallest is 12 km and it is called “Isthmus of Ierapetra”. A high mountain range crosses the island from west to east, formed by three different groups of mountains.

The island has never had any snakes, which proves that it was always an island and has a long history since ancient times, with its own myths and memories that proves it has been an independent place with an independent civilization. The locals often had to defend their freedom against a number of invaders, with last ones being the Nazis.

Their enemies found the Cretans and the certain soil as one of the most difficult and they had to admit in the end that it was impossible to control the whole island. The Turks who occupied the island were the best witnesses, since they often had to face local rebellion. One of the worst parts their enemies had to face is the unapproachable mountains and canyons.

This brief historical background is necessary if you want to understand the Cretan diet. There is a lack of water so whatever they plant has to be without much hydration. That’s why the olive trees and the big production of olive oil is a huge part of the Cretan diet. Next is that there is only one valley in the middle of the island where there is a production of fruits, such as apples, oranges and grapes, which are more products that don’t have a huge need of water. Grapes mean raisins and of course wine.

The mountains and the good weather mean one more thing: bees and honey, plus many pharmaceutical and aromatic plants and herbs, like oregano, dictamus, mint, thyme, laudanum. Another thing is that you could never have big animals like cows on the mountains, so the Cretans focused on goats, which again means goat milk, feta and a big variety of cheeses all made with goat milk. Beautiful cheese pies and all kind of pies with vegetables and herbs can be added here.

Last, but this is common in most of Greece, is legumes, like beans, green beans, lentils and garbanzo, and poultry, mainly chickens and turkeys. Here I have to emphasize something which has to do with what I mentioned before, for the Cretan’s attitude that they live on a mainland and not on an island.

Cretan people are not good swimmers and fishermen, so fish is not something you will find often on their table, which is something that has fascinated me all the times I’ve been there, but it is true.

Now you have a picture of what the Cretans eat and what’s the famous Cretan diet. From what I’ve seen all the times I’ve been in Crete, the most important thing I’ve seen about the Cretan diet has no to do with the food but with the attitude of the Cretan people towards food. All the years I’ve been there and sometimes it was not for only a few days, I have very rarely seen a fat Cretan. By fat I mean overweight, like the people you meet in the rest of Europe. I’ve seen them eating and drinking and when it comes to Cretans, drinking means wine or the local raki and drinking doesn’t mean let’s have a small glass.

Still I think that obesity, something western civilization suffers a great deal over the last few decades, and a high number of cardiac problems have nothing to do with the type of food we eat, but with the bulimic people exercise over everythiing material including food. I have seen equal numbers of vegetarians and vegans suffer from obesity.

So, for now... ‘stin igia sax’, which is similar to ‘cheers’ and it means ‘to your health’ in Greek.
Bilingual Illiterate: “Do you believe in God?”

By Phil Schwarzmann

S#&T HAPPENS

I hate when people ask this, as if it were a “yes” or “no” question. If you say “yes”, that means you’re a Christian. If you say “no”, you’re an atheist. And if you have darker skin and say “yes”, you belong to some other whacky religion. Like there’s no grey area in the issue. Personally, I think the Christians are just as whacky as the atheists, who are just as whacky as the Muslims, who are just as whacky as the Jews, who are just as whacky as the Christians.

As a recovering Catholic myself, I completely understand why people wholeheartedly believe in the Christian faith. They 1) realize there’s something else out there. 2) They believe in an afterlife. 3) They believe others are watching us, believe in the Christian faith. 1) realize there’s some reason for people to worship me or else I’ll banish them to hell for all eternity – so why would the “real” God do that when a mere mortal wouldn’t???.

And if you don’t do well, you go somewhere else which ain’t quite as cool as heaven.

What’s the point? Where’s the logic? On this earth, everything is logical – why does the logic cease as soon as we talk about the afterlife? Everything we know is logical except the afterlife, which is some fantasy story, a bad fantasy…like “Lord of the Rings” bad. Ask a Christian to defend his/her beliefs and they’ll simply say, “You need to have faith.” For everything else in this world, we use facts, logic, deduction etc. – but when it comes to one of the most important things in our lives, we just need to have “faith”. Fuck faith.

I want to see the look on a devout Christian’s face as they enter the afterlife. They’re gonna be pretty disappointed when they discover their entire life’s belief system was a huge sham. The look on their face will be similar to all the Jews entering the afterlife, to all the Muslims entering the afterlife, and every other religious person entering the afterlife. Oh, unless you believe that there is one true religion, and you were fortunate enough to be born into a family that believed it. Or there’s multiple “Gods” and “Heavens” out there, a notion which is equally retarded.

Of course you atheists out there are saying to yourselves, “Well there IS no afterlife.” Right, like life is just some big joke, we all die and that’s it. Where’s the fucking point in that? Where’s the logic? Life is just a cruel joke by some higher being (you don’t believe that humans are the “highest” being out there, do you?), we make our little blip in this universe then that’s it. As if we’re just numbers in a giant computer, or just cogs in a wheel called the universe – No wonder why so many atheists are left-wingers, they believe the same thing about an individual’s role in society.

I believe the “fundamentals” about the afterlife and the “purpose of it all” can be figured out if you think about things logically… What’s the point of it all? Why are we here? What’s the meaning of life? Well there isn’t one answer to this – we all have our own reasons. Some want love, some want money, some want happiness, some want all three – the list could be endless.

Think about this: How would your life change if you knew for 100% fact that life goes on forever – there is no hell – that’ll you’ll have many chances to do life again and again and again? You’d probably act pretty different. People take their lives so seriously, because even the Pope has this little glimmer in the back of his mind that says, “Hey, maybe my beliefs aren’t exactly spot-on.” (If anyone should know this it’s the Pope, he’s spent his entire life’s belief system was a huge sham. The look on their face will be similar to all the Jews entering the afterlife, to all the Muslims entering the afterlife, to all the religious people entering the afterlife, and every other religious person entering the afterlife. Oh, unless you believe that there is one true religion, and you were fortunate enough to be born into a family that believed it. Or there’s multiple “Gods” and “Heavens” out there, a notion which is equally retarded.

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Don’t you think it’s kinda weird how we were just born out of nothing? Like before 1979, I ceased to exist. Seems kinda hard to believe – that’s because it’s not true. You and I are very special people, we’ve always been around. We’re just suffering from a temporary amnesia, there’s a 100% chance we’ll be coming back. And you know for damn sure there’s a lot those poor Africans learn, that we’ll never understand unless we experience it for ourselves.

And maybe on our journey onto the next life our new mommy decides to abort us, no problem, we’ll just come back and try it again. Or maybe the soul doesn’t enter the body until after we’re born. Who knows, who cares - the point is, we’ll always come back and soon we’ll want to go back - and my guess is that nothing will force us – there are things we can’t experience in the afterlife that we can here, things in which we’ll want to experience again and again.

Okay, so I might have had some of you at the beginning but I’m sure I’ve lost all of you by now. Yeah, maybe my beliefs are just as whacky as the Christians. But the truth is, we’re all wrong, and it doesn’t do much good trying to make sense of it all - we won’t fully know until we die, and maybe not even then.
“Alison Lapper pregnant”

By Thanos Kalamidas

What do you think when you see a painting by Sagat? Deformed men and women doing deforming jobs? How did people react the first time they saw Francis Bacon’s ‘The three studies for figures at the base of a crucifixion’? If you are still wondering, then just take a walk in Trafalgar Square and see what’s keeping Lord Nelson company these days and just listen to what the passers-by say.

Mr. Marc Quinn, the person responsible, was inspired by a woman named Alison Lapper, an artist herself with a unique difference - she is handicapped with missing hands and legs, but enjoys one of the most sacred moments in a woman’s life, pregnancy! And that’s what the artist Mr. Quinn gave shape and a place in eternity: a naked and pregnant handicapped woman. Where hope meets hope, where the determination to live meets life despite all the difficulties.

The sculpture is carved in a single piece of Italian marble and it is 3.5 meters tall and weighs around 12 metric tonnes. It is a naked woman with her legs shrunken and twisted, she has no arms and she is eight months pregnant; she really glows, glows of health and happiness.

The ones who think this is the place for Lord Nelson and King George IV got seriously upset. This was the place for heroes they said, but this woman is a hero. It’s a symbol and waiting for the London Olympic Games, what could have been a better monument of human strength and power to overcome any physical handicap?

Lord Nelson is for the ones who need unreachables heroes, who can stand high up there and look down at us, “Alison Lapper pregnant” is a real hero, she is the hero from next door who can inspire. There is nothing mythic about her, just plain reality and that’s what art does. Art is inspired and inspires.

The critic Matthew Collins, known for his rigid critics covered under his good knowledge on art, said: “Purely empty, deeply bland and silly,” obviously Mr. Collins prefers pompous faces covered in birds’ droppings, but Trafalgar Square is the heart of the city, it is the place where Londoners meet to date and debate, it is the place they meet to celebrate and mourn. It was the same place Londoners celebrated with the announcement that they were going to host the 2012 Olympics and the same place they gathered to demonstrate against the London bombs. Trafalgar Square was the only place this monument to human braveness could be.

The choice of the white Italian marble was another very good choice by the artist. The very same marble the Romans used to carve Julius Caesar and Augustus. The same place they carved Juno, mother and sister of gods and protector to the defenseless and handicapped.

Whatever controversy this sculpture brings, I hope it will die soon because this is a real piece of art, and art is something you see very rarely nowadays. A piece of art that inspires is much more valuable and Mr. Marc Quinn definitely won his place in the eternity of great artists.

“In da Bginnin God cre8d da heavens & da earth,” so begins the latest version of the Bible translated into text messag speak. The Bible Society in Australia is offering the entire 31,173 verses free via mobile phone taking the English language down another notch.

The use of the English language is becoming worser every year and now it is beginning to be accepted. I regularly chat with my younger cousins via Instant Messenger and they are always using ‘txt splk’ and ‘emoticons’. To my horror and disbelief, one of them had managed the near impossible by shortening ‘ok’ to ‘k’, which opened my eyes like a punch to the gut.

The misuse and creativity of the English language became more apparent when I returned to England after six months away. You do not realise how many new words are coined by television shows, newspapers and school kids in such a short space of time. Chelsea Tractors, Twixter and Shoegazing were all used quite casually during space of time. Chelsea Tractors, Twixter and Shoegazing were used under his good knowledge of gods and protector to the defenseless and handicapped.

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OV H8S TXT

By Asa Butcher

“What?”

Everybody seemed to be saying, “Have I not?” or “Have you not?” instead of “Haven’t I got?” and it was “getting on my tits!” You find yourself agreeing that just because everybody uses it, does not make it a valid word, but then you feel a bit of an anal nerd.

I read a newspaper article, entitled ‘Children could learn texting in English lessons’, which revealed that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority believes that pupils will need ‘new literacy skills’ to cope with the latest technology, and is considering proposals for children to develop their writing and speaking skills using mobile phones.

The suggestion naturally received a hostile response and it raises the question of whether any of this txt generation will be following Harold Pinter and receive a Nobel Prize for Literature in the future, or in ten years will that be Nbl Prz 4 Lit?
Apocalypse then

Book of Revelation (The Apocalypse of John)

By John

Since the lingua franca of Christ’s period was Greek, the four evangelists and the other contributors to the Bible all wrote in Greek and since I am Greek and spent at least eight years of my life learning Ancient Greek I am one of those very lucky people who can read the Bible in its original language.

I know that the way I’m approaching a text like the Bible is unorthodox and might raise some objections from the religious readers, but the truth is that I am an agnostic myself. Still, I always thought that the Bible and especially the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, is a book that anyone who body’s in history and literature should read and by ‘read it’ I mean a few times till you start understanding the beauty of the language and the pictures the authors gives you.

John wrote the Apocalypse in the last part of his life while he had withdrawn from the cosmic life and he lived in a small cave on the Greek island of Patmos; the book is not easy to understand due to its extravagant symbolism. Symbolic language, however, is one of the chief characteristics of apocalyptic literature, of which this book is an outstanding example. Such literature enjoyed wide popularity in both Jewish and Christian circles from ca. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200.

The book contains an account of visions in symbolic and allegorical language borrowed extensively from the Old Testament, especially Ezekiel, Zechariah and Daniel. Whether or not these visions were real experiences of the author or simply literary conventions employed by him is an open question to be answered and, of course, the church doesn’t help with any kind of research.

This much, however, is certain: symbolic descriptions are not to be taken as literal descriptions, nor is the symbolism meant to be pictured realistically. One would find it difficult and repulsive to visualize a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes; yet Jesus Christ is described in precisely such words. John used these images to suggest Christ’s universal (seven) power (horns) and knowledge (eyes). A significant feature of apocalyptic writing is the use of symbolic colors, metals, garments and numbers (‘four’ signifies the world, ‘six’ imperfection, ‘seven’ totality or perfection, ‘twelve’ Israel’s tribes or the apostles, ‘one thousand’ immensity).

The language of the book is also to be taken symbolically and not literally. The case for vengeance on the lips of Christian martyrs that sound so harsh are in fact literary devices the author employed to evoke in the reader and hearer a feeling of horror for apostasy and rebellion that will be severely punished by God.

The lurid descriptions of the punishment of Jezebel and of the destruction of the great harlot, Babylon, are likewise literary devices. The metaphor of Babylon as harlot would be wrongly construed if interpreted literally. On the other hand, the stylized figure of the woman clothed with the sun, depicting the New Israel, may seem to be a negative stereotype. It is necessary to look beyond the literal meaning to see that these images mean to convey a sense of God’s wrath at sin in the former case and trust in God’s providential care over the church in the latter.

The Book of Revelation cannot be adequately understood except against the historical background that occasioned its writing. Like Daniel and other apocalypses, it was composed as resistance literature to meet a crisis. The book itself suggests that the crisis was a ruthless persecution of the early church by the Roman authorities; the harlot Babylon symbolizes pagan Rome, the city on the seven hills.

The book is, then, an exhortation and admonition to Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom; they are to await patiently the fulfillment of God’s mighty promises. The triumph of God in the world of men and women remains a mystery, to be accepted in faith and longed for in hope. It is a triumph that unfolds in the history of Jesus of Nazareth and continues to unfold in the history of the individual Christian who follows the way of the cross, even, if necessary, to a martyr’s death.

Though the perspective is eschatological - ultimate salvation and victory are said to take place at the end of the present age when Christ will come in glory at the parousia - the book presents the decisive struggle of Christ and his followers against Satan and his cohorts as already over.

It is remarkable that even though the entire book describes is the end of the world as we know it with thousands to die is still a book full of hope for the believers or the ones who will reform even at the very last moment.

Returning to what I emphasized at the beginning of the book, another remarkable contribution of the book for modern scholars is the use of the Greek language. John was not the poor fisherman who followed Jesus but a well-educated youth who was comfortable in Greek and Latin. Comparing him with the other evangelists you can see the easy use of the Greek language even to the most difficult syntax of the language giving the most complicated meanings.

Studying his language and examining closely the words we can notice how much semantics have changed the words in Modern Greek or comparing them with the text of the Ancient Greek classics. I have and I am a great supporter of the introduction of John’s text into the schools not from its theological angle but as a linguistic study.

Historically now, the author of the book calls himself John, who, because of his Christian faith, has been exiled to the rocky island of Patmos, a Roman penal colony. Although he never claims to be John the Apostle, whose name is attached to the fourth gospel, he was so identified by several of the early church Fathers, including Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian and Hippolytus. This identification, however, was denied by other Fathers, including Denis of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. Indeed, vocabulary, grammar and style make it doubtful that the book could have been put into its present form by the same person(s) responsible for the fourth gospel. Nevertheless, there are definite linguistic and theological affinities between the two books. The tone of the letters to the seven churches is indicative of the great authority the author enjoyed over the Christian communities in Asia. It is possible, therefore, that he was a disciple of John the Apostle, who is traditionally associated with that part of the world. The date of the book in its present form is probably near the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), a fierce persecutor of the Christians.

Finally, John’s Apocalypse is full of futuristic pictures. I’m sure the book has often inspired science fiction authors and these pictures are playing constant games with the reader’s imagination. There are a lot of books analyzing and explaining the book and equally a lot of translations even from Greek to Modern Greek. For the readers who can read in Greek, one of the best translation or as it author calls it, “paraphrase” is the one the Greek contemporary philosopher Mr. Elias Petropoulos has done.

You see, even an agnostic like me when separated from the theological side, can appreciate the Bible. And not only, for me, is John’s Apocalypse a book everybody should read, it also belongs at the top of my all-time favorite book list.
Los Diablos de Yare

By Ricardo Báez-Duarte

These photos are from my work based on Los Diablos de Yare: Detras de la Mascara (The Devils of Yare: Behind the Mask) a folk religious festivity of Corpus Christi held in Yare, a town one-hour from Caracas, Venezuela. It dates back to the origins of the colonial Venezuela and far back to the Middle Ages in Europe.
One Hundred Years of Solitude (Cien años de soledad), 1967
By Gabriel José García Márquez

English translation by Gregory Rabassa, 1970

Where to begin? The cover was dull and uninspiring, the title carried an air of depression and overall I was not tempted to begin a journey of 100 years. It was then that the little cliché pirate, which writers should keep securely gagged and bound, wriggled free, removed the sock from his mouth and yelled, “Never judge a book by its cover!”

Curse you, little cliché pirate! For he was right, One Hundred Years of Solitude proved to be one of the most engaging novels that I have read this year. My expectations were nil, since I have never read any South American literature, let alone American literature, let alone American literature. My expectations were nil, since I had never read any South American literature, let alone American literature. My expectations were nil, since I had never read any South American literature, let alone American literature.

Ignoring the extensive family tree printed on the first page, I dived straight into the novel and began to follow the life of the Buendía family, the women aren’t as interesting as the men, and began to follow the life of the Buendía family, the women aren’t as interesting as the men, and began to follow the life of the Buendía family, the women aren’t as interesting as the men, and began to follow the life of the Buendía family, the women aren’t as interesting as the men, and began to follow the life of the Buendía family, the women aren’t as interesting as the men.

I am not stupid and I can just follow the most intricate of storylines, except the difficulty here was that all the characters are christened with the same names. José Arcadio Buendía, Aureliano Segundo, and another one of the same names. José Arcadio, Aureliano Buendía, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Aureliano Buendía, José Arcadio, Aureliano Segundo, and another one of the same names. José Arcadio, Aureliano Buendía, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, Aureliano Buendía, José Arcadio, Aureliano Segundo.

Because I do not understand Spanish, I read the English translation by Gregory Rabassa and found it incredible. The translation of a novel is comparable to writing a novel because it is not enough for a story, but as a historical figure as well. In 1154, the man became Archbishop of Canterbury and as a reader you find yourself accepting the increasingly bizarre events that take place, right up until the last page, when you are ready to believe the fantastical ending.

The village of Macondo is visited by gypsies, suffers from a banana plantation and endures heavy rains for four years, plus numerous other events that intertwine into the story of the inhabitants of Macondo. The story is simply told and never loses its gentle pace; I never found myself speeding through chapters, but I felt the story’s village’s history for the few weeks I read the novel.

One other aspect of the novel that requires extra concentration is García Márquez’s use, or misuse, of time. Attempting to determine how much time has passed is difficult because some characters, such as Ursula, live until they are over 130-years-old. Another interesting part of the book is that nobody ever learns from the past, the same mistakes are made repeatedly, which seems to leave the Buendía family in a vicious circle.

A component of García Márquez’s writing is called ‘magic realism’. For example, one night Remedios the Beauty ascends into the sky and nobody ever sees her again, there is no explanation for this surreal moment and you find yourself accepting it as easily as the inhabitants of Macondo. The strange and magic are routine in Macondo and as a reader you find yourself accepting the increasingly bizarre events that take place, right up until the last page, when you are ready to believe the fantastical ending.

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One Hundred Years of Solitude does have an apathetic title, the cover looks dreary, but I owe that little cliché pirate a drink.

Murder in the Cathedral (1935)
By Thomas Stearns Eliot

“All my life they have been coming, these feet. All my life I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy. And if I am worthy, there is no danger. I have therefore only to make perfect my will.”

In a special about religion, I could not resist writing something about one of T.S. Eliot’s masterworks Murder in the Cathedral.

T.S. Eliot’s short play was originally written for the Canterbury Festival and is all about the story of the murder of Archbishop Thomas Beckett by Henry II’s henchmen. The whole play is a lyrical consideration of the proper spiritual power, the obligations and the ties between Church and State, and the human side of superior priests of any church, in this case the Anglican Church.

Archbishop Thomas Beckett is the most interesting character of the play, not only as a role but as a historical figure as well. In 1154, the man became Archbishop of Canterbury and also King Henry’s friend and chancellor. King Henry was trying to extend his influence and control over the church, but found his own friend as his worst opposition. Quite oddly, their friendship was exactly the reason the king had chosen him for the position.

After dividing on many minor issues, matters became worse when Henry tried exerting the authority of Crown Courts to punish clerics who had been convicted by ecclesiastical courts. Henry was determined to rein him in by putting Beckett on trial for misappropriating funds while serving as Chancellor, and Beckett was forced to flee to France.

And that’s how the play starts, with Beckett returning to Canterbury in December of 1170, after seven years in exile. Four Templars approach him, separately, and offer him reasons to flee to France. Beckett answers: “Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain: Temptation shall not come in this kind again. The last temptation is the greatest reason To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

Marvelous! Murder in the Cathedral is one of these poems I have always found my self using parts or sentences of it when I want to emphasize something in a conversation about politics or religion. To read a poem is not an easy thing, I know, and somehow I have always been cautious of people who told me that they read poetry but if you want to start then this poem is your best choice.

T.S. Eliot is a master of the English language. I have read that he took him a long time to finalize the poem/play and reading it I can sense why; every verse is full of meanings and pictures. The fourth Tempter cannily tempts Thomas Beckett with his own dream, the desire for martyrdom:

“What can compare with glory of Saints? Dwelling forever in presence of God? What earthly glory, of king or emperor, what earthly pride, that is not poverty Compared with richness of heavenly grandeur? Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest On earth, to be high in heaven. And see far below you, where the gulf is fixed, Your persecutors, in timeless torment, Parched passion, beyond expiation.”

And the Archbishop Thomas Beckett answers:

“No is my way clear, now is the meaning plain: Temptation shall not come in this kind again. The last temptation is the greatest reason To do the right deed for the wrong reason.”

By Thanos Kalamidas

By Asa Butcher

Solitary freedom

An Eliot masterpiece
The best of all there was Oliver Reed, a well-known actor at the time and part of the Hollywood mainstream. I actually persuaded my father to join me at the second time I went to watch it. I watched it seven times that season.

Since then, I have watched the film many times and I have enjoyed it every single time. Ann-Margret is fantastic as the mother and Paul Nicholas is Cousin Kevin, but the highlight of the whole film was and still is the members of the band. Roger Daltrey is Tommy, the mute and deaf boy who becomes the messiah of a pinball cult. His major miracle is that he rediscovers his hearing and voice during one of his mother’s guilt emotional explosions. Then he follows the destiny of the real messiah from the glory to the cross.

Another member of the band, Keith Moon is magnificent playing the dirty Uncle Ernie and, if you thought that that was enough, more music stars follow. Eric Clapton is the priest of another cult that worships Marilyn Monroe, Elton John is the former champion of pinball with his gigantic glasses and bright red boots, plus Tina Turner as ‘The Acid Queen’ who leads young Tommy into the world of acid and sensation.

I love Tommy the film and the music probably because it was my initiation into a more musical adult me and partly because The Who were my generation and did all the things I wanted them to do exactly the way I wanted them to do, they were my generation.

Welcome to Mooseport (2004)
Directed by Donald Petrie

I had never heard of Welcome to Mooseport, but, as a fan of Ray Romano in the TV series Everybody Loves Raymond and the voice of Manfred in Ice Age, I felt obliged to watch him in this feature film along side the great Gene Hackman. The DVD cover featured both of these actors and the tagline: This town isn’t small enough for the both of them. I had a feeling what to expect.

The story begins when the divorced former President Monroe ‘Eagle’ Cole (Gene Hackman) moves Mooseport, a small town in Maine. The local council invite him to become their next mayor and he accepts, but Handy Harrison (Ray Romano), an unpretentious, honest local citizen, had already accepted. Handy backs out to avoid any embarrassment, but he changes his mind when Salty, his girlfriend (Maura Tierney), is asked out by Monroe. The campaign soon becomes a war.

Well, that is what the synopsis reckoned, but it was certainly one-sided war. Handy never really shows his teeth, remaining consistently nice and honest, which leaves Monroe looking even more egotistical and power hungry. The character of Handy is Ray Barone from Everybody Loves Raymond, even down to the clothes he wears and the jokes he makes, but he is still thoroughly likeable.

I guess that was part of the problem, I kept expecting both characters to show their teeth and enter into the mean-spirited political battle, but it never happens. Once I accepted that Handy was never going to give in to Eagle’s underhand tactics you enjoy the movie more. The best moment is when they decide to play a round of golf to decide who gets to date Sally and the ex-president is hit with a stinging revelation about his golfing life.

The film was never going to win any awards, but it wasn’t the worst way to spend a couple of hours on a Friday night. Gene Hackman is his usual fantastic self, as he tries to come to terms with the fact he is no longer the most powerful man in the world and his ex-wife is taking half of everything, including his book deal and speech-making money. A fan sub-plot is his Presidential Library that slowly diminishes in size as the money slowly runs out.

The remainder of the main characters do enough to keep the film moving, especially the town council members who are as eccentric as you would come to expect in a small town. My only problem was with NewsRadio and E.R.’s Maura Tierney who never smiles or looks as though she is having any fun, and she seems to be the same in whatever she stars.

In films such as these, it is always the minor characters that get the most laughs are the most enjoyable. Marcia Gay Harden, an actress who you can never remember where you have seen her before, is loveable as Monroe’s assistant, Fred Savage from The Wonder Years has suddenly become a man and the cracking Rip Torn steals every scene he appears in.

Welcome to Mooseport has its moments and isn’t too bad to bore any popcorn-munchers, or as Hackman’s character regularly says, “You have the Eagle’s word!”
The doorbell rings. “Hello, we are Jehovah Witnesses and we would like to talk to you about our beliefs.” Despite my workday being interrupted, I am not angry. I pause, pretending to consider their generous offer, and reply, “No thanks, I have my own religion.” They look shocked and one of them asks for further information. “My religion is Newcastle United Football Club and my Gods wear black and white; would you like to hear about my beliefs?”

Unfortunately, they disappeared before I could detail our need for a replacement for the saviour of the Toon, Alan Shearer who is retiring at the end of this season, and whom should Graeme Souness purchase during the January transfer window. Not to worry because I am in good company when it comes to the world religion of football.

Hundreds of teams across the world carry the faith and dedication of their worshippers every season. They offer their own version of heaven and hell over the course of 90-minutes and if they are in good company when it comes to the world religion of football.

The Church of England has 16,000 buildings, in 13,000 parishes covering the whole of England, as well as 43 cathedrals, averaging a monthly attendance of 1.2 million. The Barclays Premierships has 20 teams and averages a monthly attendance of 670,000, which statistically crushes the official religion of the United Kingdom. In addition, on average every ground is always over half-full, with thirteen grounds only ten percent empty.

I have been hundreds of times to the ‘temple’. I have used phrases like ‘he is the god’, ‘he is the best’, ‘the eleven gods’ and I have fought the evil enemy with all my power. If you think that I talk about a religion, you are right. I’m talking about a religion with green and white stripes.

I’m talking about a religion that has a clover as a symbol and there is one only one temple for this religion, which is called Leoforos, meaning ‘avenue’, and it is Panathinaikos’ football stadium. The religion is Panathinaikos or PAO to make it shorter.

I’ve been a fan of this Greek football team from the moment my father bought me a green jersey with the name of captain on the back, pretending to recreate Sunday’s blessing. Do you see Adidas producing the latest Climacool clerical collar, with anatomically placed ventilation? Are church shops packed full of parishioners wanting to buy bed sheets, pillowcases and wallpaper with the face of J.C. looking out from beneath his thorny crown?

It seems the Jehovah Witnesses escaped my preaching, but I am sure they will be back and then I will tell them about the time I witnessed Newcastle beat Arsenal at Highbury 1-3…now that was a religious experience.

I’ve spent most of my school years showing my artistic talent by decorating all my school books with small green clovers and cartoon-style scenes from football games with my favorite team always scoring. These were my first steps in drawing and constant practice did help with what I could do later in my life.

Ironic, one of my favorite books to draw over was a religion book. I think the reason was because the book was full of inspiring pictures with many empty spaces around them, so I could fill them in with small or bigger drawings not to the delight of my teachers. They called my father a couple of times to ask him to stop my painting mania, but my father was pretty liberal and he preferred his son to be a painter than a priest.

Footballs matches in Greece were usually on Sunday, so even if there was a chance for me to be in the Sunday service I was in the football stadium or next to my little radio if my team was playing away.

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When you arrive at a football ground, there is never anybody passing around a collection plate asking for donations to help repair the roof, although alcohol is forbidden and somebody wearing black officiates, so there are some similarities. The words ‘God’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ are heard, albeit in a different context to a church, and thousands are in silent prayer as extra time approaches.

You never see kids at the local park wearing a cassock, with their local vicar’s name on the back, pretending to recreate Sunday’s blessing. Do you see Adidas producing the latest Climacool clerical collar, with anatomically placed ventilation? Are church shops packed full of parishioners wanting to buy bedsheets, pillowcases and wallpaper with the face of J.C. looking out from beneath his thorny crown?

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The Iranian minister of foreign affairs has demanded that France treat its minorities with respect and protect their human rights.

Or else what? France is the next to be wiped off the map?

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A record number announced by Amnesty International came to remind me of an extended article I wrote for issue four of Ovi magazine with the title “Underage crimes”. According to Amnesty International and human rights groups in the USA, there are 2,225 underage prisoners… for life!

When you are 16, what does it means convicted for life? What life?

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A former White House speechwriter said that Harriet Miers, the Supreme Court nominee, told him that George W. Bush was the most brilliant man she’d ever met.

Makes you wonder how many men she has met all her life!

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The Argentinian football player Diego Maradona gives Fidel Castro his full support!

Is he using his hand? Like he did scoring against England in the 1986 World Cup?

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In the last issue of Ovi magazine I wrote an article about Shanghai Cooperation Organization and their role in the other side of the ocean, I was glad that the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov answered similar reports and questions last week that nothing is further than the truth - there is no anti-NATO alliance with the Chinese.

OK, it is not anti-NATO, but what else are you going to call it? Anti-USA? Anti-George?

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Now we know what was wrong with Jack Nicholson in the film One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest

Bird flu!!!

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Why do hurricanes have women’s names?

You must be married to understand!

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“It is good for religion to be criticized and be challenged because we have done a lot of damage in the past,” announced Lord Carey, the former head of the Anglican Church, while the British Government draft a new law banning incitement of religious hatred.

“You said it,” Jesus Christ!