

## Leader

# THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND NEWSPAPER

## Irrational Christophobia

Words ending in 'phobia' (fear) have recently added 'homophobia' and 'islamophobia' to their number as debates about homosexuality and the nature of Islam have grown. The terms are generally thought to have arisen from the cultural left in its attempt to close down critical, honest discussion. Anyone now voicing disagreement with the gay agenda is labelled 'homophobic' as if suffering from a mental disease, a subtle put-down expressing doubts about the homophobe's 'real' motives — if you control words you control concepts and even invent identities. So what of 'Christophobia', a word now in use according to Google: does this describe the strange cultural attack on Christianity we see in play from British Airways to university campuses, banning tiny crosses and cracking down on Christian Unions? Local councils for years have been rooting out symbols of Christmas from civic places, preferring to celebrate 'evergreens' or ...anything else but Christmas. The Red Cross famously cast out the Holy Family from its charity shop windows, no room in the Red Cross inn for those refugees! The BBC has steadily removed church leaders from its panels and interviews. The Ruth Kelly Commission on social cohesion has cut out Christianity altogether from her consideration. The list goes on.

Why this pathological hatred of the Christian faith has taken root in the bureaucratic institutions of our nation is a mystery. It began in the 1960s and has grown. The churches have done very little to put records straight and stand up for the religious tradition claimed by over 70 per cent of the UK population at the last census. Any analysis of 'political correctness' will find deep roots in a basic hostility to Christianity, a faith blamed for colonialism, oppression of women, hatred of homosexuals, racism, sexism and most of the ills of history. In fact the truth is almost precisely the reverse. Ironically, this now should be illustrated as Tony Blair expresses regret at the slave trade, since it was of course William Wilberforce and his 'Clapham Sect' of very conservative evangelical Anglicans who worked tirelessly for decades to get the pernicious trade abolished by Parliament. This was a Christian movement entirely, but we hear nothing from the BBC about it — the trade may as well have come to an end by accident as far as they are concerned. And of course the British Navy then prevented the Arab slavers turning Africa into a vast slave continent — again, this is not in the politically correct writing of history and so is suppressed. Britain prevented slavery in the Sudan, and on its withdrawal the practice gradually reasserted itself as Arabs from the North captured and enslaved Black Africans from the South.

Christophobia is wholly irrational has few legitimate bases in historical fact, although of course no faith is without blemish. Our education provision, medical and nursing traditions, charity and welfare customs, even our political democratic practice, stem from the Christianisation of society, including of course the Nonconformists. Will this be celebrated? Don't bet on it!

### The Church of England Newspaper

with Celebrate magazine incorporating The Record and Christian Week

Published by Religious Intelligence Ltd.

Company Number: 3176742

Publisher: Keith Young

Publishing Director & Editor:	CM BLAKELY	020 7417 5800
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## Comment

# Mammon in the modern university



## Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok

When universities were created in the Middle Ages, they were religious foundations. Theology was the queen of the Sciences, and lectures were given by members of religious orders. Scholars at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and other European institutions engaged in the most rarified intellectual disputes. Through the centuries this religious tradition continued, and it was only in the last 150 years that universities underwent a secular revolution.

In recent years, however, another major shake-up has taken place on Britain's campuses. In the wake of the Thatcher era, it is money rather than learning which is all-important.

This shift in perspective is illustrated in a new comic novel, *A Campus Conspiracy* by an anonymous author published by Impress Books. Presumably, in view of the book's pointed criticisms of the University system, he is frightened to use his own name.

The hero, Professor Harry Gilbert, is an Anglican clergyman and professor of Christian ethics. Married to the daughter of a baronet, he is rich, eminent and successful. An old friend of the Archbishop of Canterbury (sic!), he was awarded an OBE in recognition of his contribution to learning. Yet, as he nears retirement, he is persecuted by his Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, and the Head of his Department who all want to get rid of him.

In the first chapter, Professor Gilbert is propositioned by a student who is hoping to be let off his course. Harry rejects her offer and spends the rest of the book paying for it. When she accuses

him of sexual harassment, he protests his innocence. But the Dean and his Head of Department seize their opportunity. It is clear that they want to force him to leave because he is expensive and they could hire a young research student for half the money.

It is not long before Harry gets into further trouble. When he asks the assistant librarian (the wife of the Registrar) to do her job and order some books for students, she immediately accuses him of over-pressurising her. Subsequently, the Registrar summons him again when he hears that he has asked the head of IT several times to mend his computer. This sorry catalogue is punctuated by hilarious episodes illustrating the University's pomposity and self-importance.

For example, in a scene which rivals Jim Dixon's lecture on Merrie England in Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Harry's friends send in a gorillagram to interrupt a ridiculous inaugural Professorial

**'The central message of *A Campus Conspiracy* is that the modern university has become dominated by financial concerns'**

lecture.

Meanwhile a rich benefactor, the father of the girl who had offered Harry sexual favours, proposes to give the university a substantial donation, if Harry is only removed.

The denouement comes after Harry mistakenly sends a rude e-mail about his experiences to all the members of his union rather than just to his union rep. Defending himself from the web of conspiracy that has entangled him, he accuses the university officers, including the Visitor (the ineffectual Provost of the local cathedral) of plotting against him. In the offending email he declares:

"I am very grateful indeed to the

union for its support, but unfortunately it demonstrates that very little can be done against the systematic corruption of the university. It is clear that the authorities have been united in trying to drive me out of my job. In my view, the Vice-Chancellor will do anything for money. The Registrar (and his wife) are idle and incompetent. My Head of Department cannot see beyond his own suburban prejudices... Even the Visitor, the Provost of St Sebastian's Cathedral, is weak and entirely devoid of principle..."

The central message of *A Campus Conspiracy* is that the modern university has become dominated by financial concerns. It has abandoned its traditional role of fostering teaching and learning as it is drawn into the market economy. As a consequence both staff and students suffer.

In a conversation with Professor Gilbert near the end of the book, the Regional officer of the union explains why this transformation has taken place. 'Your Vice-Chancellor is not as evil as you think,' he states: "He's entirely at the mercy of the Government who have starved universities of funds for years. He is forced to take more and more students, and he has to educate them on less and less money. So he puts his managers under pressure. All Vice-Chancellors do it. He can't afford to train anyone properly and, in any case, most academics are not natural managers. They're too much like prima donnas. So, it ends up a mess. It all comes down to money in the end."

*A Campus Conspiracy* is thus not simply a story about the way in which a distinguished professor is forced out of his job. It is a moral tale about the ways in which mammon has become the primary force in university life,

driving out civilised values, and corrupting those in power.

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*A Campus Conspiracy* by Anon is published by Impress Books at £7.99

