

From the Editor's postbag

Comments on items received from readers

Tony Benson

It has been some time since this feature has appeared, but sufficient items to have now accumulated for it to appear again.

Social problems today

THERE CAN BE no doubt that recent years have seen a growth in social problems in Britain, problems that no doubt occur also in other countries of the developed world. Articles published in the *Daily Mail* and received from a reader highlight two of these problems.

One, by Virginia Ironside, an agony aunt who herself lives on her own, concerns the increasing number of people living on their own. She says that it is forecast that within a year or two it will be forty per cent of the adult population. There will, of course, always be those who have to live on their own due to circumstances, such as not finding a partner, or widowhood. The growth in divorce, and of people living together then breaking up, is of course a major factor in this increase, but apparently there are more also choosing to live alone by preference. Here are some extracts from her article:

"I've received enough fantastically unhappy letters from people living alone—particularly young men—to know that lack of social contact can breed the most destructive self-obsession and, often, depression, one of the symptoms of which can be paranoia, a real feeling that

the rest of the world is not only different, but also 'out to get you'";

"If you live on your own it's terribly easy, unless you make a real effort to have a full and rich social life, to spend a lot of time simply watching television and getting a very distorted view of the real world around you—and to get very set in your views";

"If you rarely talk to other people, or have to get along with them in your daily life, how can you ever change or accommodate, how can you compromise or shift your position? You are in danger of becoming inflexible";

"Discussion and listening to other people's points of view and making allowances and being kind—and hopefully receiving the same treatment back—is the grist to our mills, what keeps us chuntering on from day to day, what gives us our ideas and our energy";

"The more people who live alone in society, the weaker, eventually, it will become".

There is food for thought here. God created us to be involved with other people, primarily in families. One of the evils of modern society is the way so many people now live in large cities rather than small communities, which makes it that much more difficult for the single to have social contact with others. We cannot imagine that it will be like that in the Kingdom. In the meantime we brethren and sisters (most of

us) have our communities—our ecclesias—where those who live on their own can find fellowship. However, if our ecclesias are to fulfil this role then it requires effort, both on the part of those who live on their own, to associate with the ecclesia whenever they can, and those who do not live alone, to try to include in their lives those who do.

The other article concerns the increasing number of girls ringing the ChildLine helpline to say they have suicidal feelings. The article comments:

"Girls as young as five feel there is 'no way out' of crises ranging from bullying and eating disorders to family troubles and exam stress . . . Binge-drinking, family breakdown, stick-thin images of models projected by magazines and mounting exam pressure have all been blamed for an increase in mental illness among girls. Studies have already suggested that more than a million youngsters now have a mental health disorder such as depression".

Four out of five callers to ChildLine with suicidal feelings are girls, though more boys than girls actually commit suicide. Males are far more inclined to bottle up their feelings than females, and girls are more likely to self-harm rather than actually kill themselves. The article goes on to say that one expert has referred to self-harming reaching "epidemic proportions", and to an "alarming decline" in the mental health of young people,

especially girls. This problem especially applies to Britain; recently the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that British youngsters are the unhappiest and unhealthiest in the industrialised world.

ChildLine's response is to call for the provision of more mental health specialists. This is all very well, but it does not deal with the root causes of the problem: the breakdown in families, the pressures of our materialistic society and the evil pervading the media, all of course stemming from the departure from Biblical principles of living. There is a big responsibility upon our families, and the larger ecclesial family, to be aware of the problem and to do as much as possible to create the right environment in the home and the ecclesia.

An insight into Russia today

RUSSIA has been on a roller-coaster ride over the last twenty years, losing its empire with the break up of the Soviet Union, suffering virtual economic collapse under Boris Yeltsin and then experiencing a revival under Vladimir Putin. An article, author Martin Wolf, published about a year ago in the *Financial Times* and passed to me by a reader, analyses the new Russia. It begins, "The Russian bear is awake and growling. But this is not a Russia restored to past greatness. It is caught in a failed transition. As long as this continues, Russia will disturb its neighbours and disappoint its citizens. Is there a chance of something better? Yes, but it is a small one".

The article is based on an academic paper about the interpretation of history, and the concepts are somewhat obscure.

The gist of it is that Russia has always been a country where a small group of insiders holds power, with the rest excluded from having any influence. In the days of the Soviet Union it was the leaders of the Communist party, backed up by the secret police. In the days of Boris Yeltsin the ruling élite became the so-called oligarchs, very rich businessmen, with the secret police excluded. Under Mr Putin, a former secret policeman, the oligarchs have lost power to Mr Putin and his cronies and the secret police are back in power. Effectively Russia is where it was in the days of the Soviet Union, with the élite able to do what they like.

When it judges that the time is ripe Russia will thus be able to invade the Middle East without any concern as to what its people think. In the meantime, it is seeking to counteract the move to more democratic societies in the countries that made up the Soviet Union. Since the Soviet Union broke up, most of the world has experienced unprecedented economic growth, whereas Russia has only just got back to what it was economically twenty years ago due to the catastrophic decline under Yeltsin. But this does not matter. Russia has enormous natural resources and its leaders can do what they like regardless of what its citizens want.

Creation Museum in Kentucky

YOUNGSTERS are fascinated by dinosaurs. This presents a problem to Bible believers like ourselves; dinosaurs in museums are usually presented in the context of evolution. But not everywhere. According to a cutting from the *Economist*

news magazine, sent to me by a reader, a museum opened last May in Petersburg, Kentucky, in the USA, devoted to supporting creation. Kentucky is part of what is called the Bible Belt, a block of states in the southern USA where there are many Protestant fundamentalists who believe in creation, and the museum was established by Ken Ham, an active supporter of a literal six-day creation, with money raised from thousands of supporters.

The museum presents creation science in a very attractive way, using modern display techniques. As for the dinosaurs, they are prominently presented, with the explanation that they were a part of the original creation which has died out. Given that the two creatures described in Job 40 and 41, behemoth and leviathan, seem to fit descriptions of dinosaurs rather than creatures living today, this has something to be said for it.

The *Economist* report mocks the museum using sarcasm, of which the following is a sample: "The debate about the origins of everything is presented evenhandedly. Some people trust God, accept that the universe is 6,000 years old, and will go to heaven. Others trust human reason, think the Big Bang happened 14 billion years ago and, having abandoned God, are quite likely to start browsing the internet for pornography or commit genocide". Whilst none of us has any time for evolution, of course, opinions vary amongst us about creation science as put forward by fundamentalists like Ham, and if the above quotation accurately represents what the museum says, we would certainly dissent from its extreme polarisation of alternative views on the matter, as well as the reference to going to heaven.

The report highlights the difference between Britain and the USA; it is surely inconceivable that such a museum would be set up here.*

Ready for the rapture

ALTHOUGH belief in the creation of the entire universe in six days 6,000 years ago is not universally accepted by us, belief in creation rather than evolution is, of course, something which we have in common with American fundamentalists. The same cannot be said of another of the beliefs that characterises them, the Rapture. This is the belief, based on a misinterpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4, that true believers will be whisked off to heaven prior to the world being subject to a satanic dictatorship and ultimate destruction.

Reference to the fact that this belief has spread even to some in high office in the USA has been made previously in these pages, and I return to it on account of being sent a newspaper review of a book called *Have a Nice Doomsday*, by Nicholas Guyatt (Ebury, £10.99). American fundamentalists are thought to have been decisive in bringing George W. Bush to the American presidency, and the 11 September attacks have only served to convince them that the world is moving into terrible times from which the Rapture

will save them. An immensely popular series of novels, the *Left Behind* series, depicting the post-Rapture world, has fuelled these beliefs.

A characteristic of the belief in the Rapture is that it will take place instantaneously and without warning. This leads to graphic descriptions of cars suddenly bereft of their drivers careering out of control and unpiloted planes crashing to the ground. Guyatt visited the Bible Belt in his researches and describes seeing stickers on cars warning other drivers of the potential hazard! He refers also to people not being bothered about global warming on the basis that the world is soon going to be destroyed anyway. Since fundamentalists have been heavily involved in the Bush Administration, with Bush himself exhibiting these tendencies, this may partly explain America's failure to take global warming seriously.

Since such fundamentalists expect the Rapture to take place at a time of war and chaos, concern has been expressed about whether such beliefs will drive America to war, especially as President Ahmadinejad of Iran holds similar views from a Muslim point of view.

Such fears are declining as George Bush's presidency nears its end, with a Democrat president looking likely to succeed him. However, at the time

of writing, one of the Republican contenders for the presidency, Mike Huckabee, has just won the election primary for the Republican Party in Iowa, the first state to declare its preferences. He is a fundamentalist Baptist minister from Arkansas. By the time these words are read it will be apparent whether he is likely to be the Republican nominee. In my January editorial I expressed the view that America must retreat from its readiness to get involved in the Middle East before any power would dare to invade Israel, but this could be as a result of further disaster brought about by a president with fundamentalist leanings.

Our own views, of course, bear some resemblance to the doctrine of the Rapture, for we too expect a time of worsening trouble and a calling away. However, for us it is a calling away to the Judgement and a future on the earth, not in heaven. Also it is not generally thought amongst us that we shall be whisked away without knowing anything about it; rather we expect a visit from an angel to take us away.

* Our Reviews Editor, Brother John Nicholls, comments that in 2000 he visited an exhibition called "The Genesis Expo", located at The Hard, Portsmouth. This presents scientific evidence for creation. He reviewed it in December 2000 ([p. 468](#)).—T.B.