



Pastor disaster

THE CITY OF LONDON, a centre of the world financial crisis, is well stocked with ancient churches and ancient vicars to go with them. One such is Peter Mullen, Chaplain of the Stock Exchange and rector of St Michael's Cornhill and St Sepulchre without Newgate. Mullen, a leading churchman, busy saving souls among the acolytes of Mammon, recently tried to take their minds off their troubles by focusing upon lower things: sodomy, to be precise. He told his parishioners that he thought gay men should have the words "Sodomy can seriously damage your health" tattooed on their buttocks and "Fellatio kills" on their chins. He was joking, of course, but he's entirely serious when he calls for gay pride carnivals to be banned "as a health risk".

Alternatively, the Bishop of Fulham is a more serious chap. He sternly rejects short-term popularity, specious relevance, and the *satirical* mood. This is why on Friday October 10, when share prices began to disintegrate, he denounced the General Synod of the Church of England. It is, he thundered, guilty of "sinful presumption" in voting to allow women to become bishops: the "sooner it is trimmed, culled, sorted or even destroyed, the better." Bishoprics, like *Yorkie Bars*, are not for girls!

This hostility to women is entirely consistent with the view of another traditionalist: Archbishop Akinola. According to him Britain is *going to the dogs*. Our "spiritual degradation" well illustrated by same sex

marriage and the case of a man “arrested for having sex with sheep in Dulwich”. Of course it wasn’t Dulwich. (Akinola was wrong about that.) It was Chislehurst in Kent, where there are many more opportunities for copulating with sheep than there are in Dulwich. But the place is, I suppose, *immaterial*; it is after all *the sin what counts*, not where it’s committed.

Although you should not have sex with sheep, you can symbolically transfer your sins to a chicken in the ritual of *Kaparot* on the eve of *Yom Kippur*. You grasp the live bird by the shoulder blades and pass it around you head three times. That does the trick – your sins are taken by the hen or rooster; you should then kill the bird and give it to the poor. However, the suspicion that eating the sin-filled fowl pollutes the poor is entirely unfounded because the sins evaporate when the chicken expires.

Perhaps we should leave these matters to those skilled in plumbing the unfathomable depths - those gifted enough to *know the unknowable*. Knowing what God wants is a serious business, not a barrel of laughs. This is why knowing what God wants must be left to grave old men rather than skittish women and *nancy boys* dominated by their sensuous natures. All this malarkey with chickens, sheep, banished women and tattooed homosexuals merely deepens the mystery of religion.

Mysteries abound, like the mystery of Pope Pius XII’s silence between 1941 and 1945 while the Wermacht, the Reichsbahn, the Order Police, and the SS, murdered six million Jews. But this is a mystery that has been solved by Pope Benedict XVI who as a very young lad in 1944 helped the Austrian Legion round up Jews in Hungary. He, with his so to speak, *hands on experience*, has now established that the reason for the absence of any public opposition from the Vatican to the Holocaust was that Pius XII was working “secret and silently” to “avoid the worst.” It is a relief to know this because it helps Pope Benedict clear the way for the beatification of Pius. But, before Pius reaches sainthood his “heroic virtue” and his

“Divine supernatural gifts” have to be established beyond doubt. He will not, of course, warrant the honour awarded to the Blessed Virgin Mary for her “greater excellence”, but he will, by his miracles, have earned eternal life and will “reign with God in the heavenly fatherland”. Once his specific miracles have been authenticated before the Pope and the Cardinals assembled in the Congregation of Sacred Rites he will infallibly become a saint.

Therefore, I have little doubt that one of his miracles will be found to have been “secretly” saving the Jews by his “silence”. Senator John McCain must wish that he could resort to some similar procedure to *finesse* the life and doings of his own pastor, Reverend John Hagee of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas. Hagee, who endorsed McCain’s candidacy for the Presidency, describes the Catholic Church as the “Great Whore” and thinks that Hitler’s *pogrom to end all pogroms* was part of God’s plan because it resulted in the survivors turning up in Israel in fulfilment of the Book of Jeremiah (Ch.16 verse 16) and its meditation upon the Babylonian Captivity.

McCain has put distance between himself and the Reverend Hagee, but has, by embracing Sarah Palin as his running mate, acquired a new connection with Sarah’s pastor, Ed Kalnins of the Wasilla Assembly of God, and the charismatic Pastor Thomas Muthee, famous for praying over Sarah and calling in “The name of Jesus” for the defeat of “every sort of witchcraft”. There is, of course, nothing peculiar or sinister about Pentecostal preachers in America or anywhere else battling witchcraft or associating contemporary events and living politicians with Biblical prophecy. These highly charged, emotional believers in the Lord Jesus and in the literal truth of the Bible pore over it, chapter and verse, to see if they can divine some truth or other which appears to be eluding the rest of us.

Their mysterious powers of seeing are no more and no less miraculous than the baked wafers routinely turned by parish priests into the body of Christ – *the*

virtual presence of Our Lord – at mass several times a week. Taken in this company, it is clear that Obama's old pastor, Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ on Chicago's south side, is a voice of impassioned reason attacking the racism and double standards that have framed America's actions at home and abroad. His rhetoric is, to be sure, *unhelpful* for anybody running for the Presidency, but it does not come close to the miraculous *hocus pocus* of Catholicism, the Koranic certainties of Islam, the arcane rituals of Jewish orthodoxy, or the speaking in tongues and witch-hunting of Wright's co-religionists in America.

This said, it is clear that Jeremiah Wright and all the other experts in the unknowable, all those who know with certainty the mind of God, all those versed in the sacred mysteries, should be kept as far away from politics and government as possible. This is not because of their capacity to embarrass Presidential candidates, it is because we have troubles enough without allowing those with "prophetic", "heroic" or "supernatural gifts" anywhere near the levers of power. Civil equality, freedom of speech and freedom of conscience, require nothing less than a secular state committed to ensuring that none of these *eternal truths, sacred mysteries or revelations* are allowed to trump each other or the rational thought and discussion upon which we all depend.