

Northern

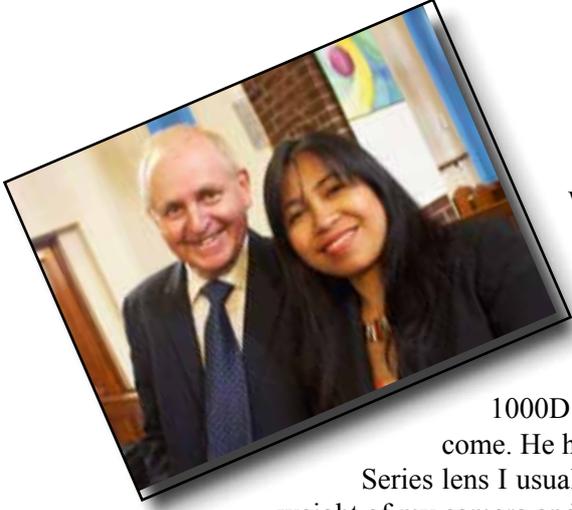
BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NEWS
FROM OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS
AROUND THE WORLD

MAY 2010

news



Editorial Ramblings



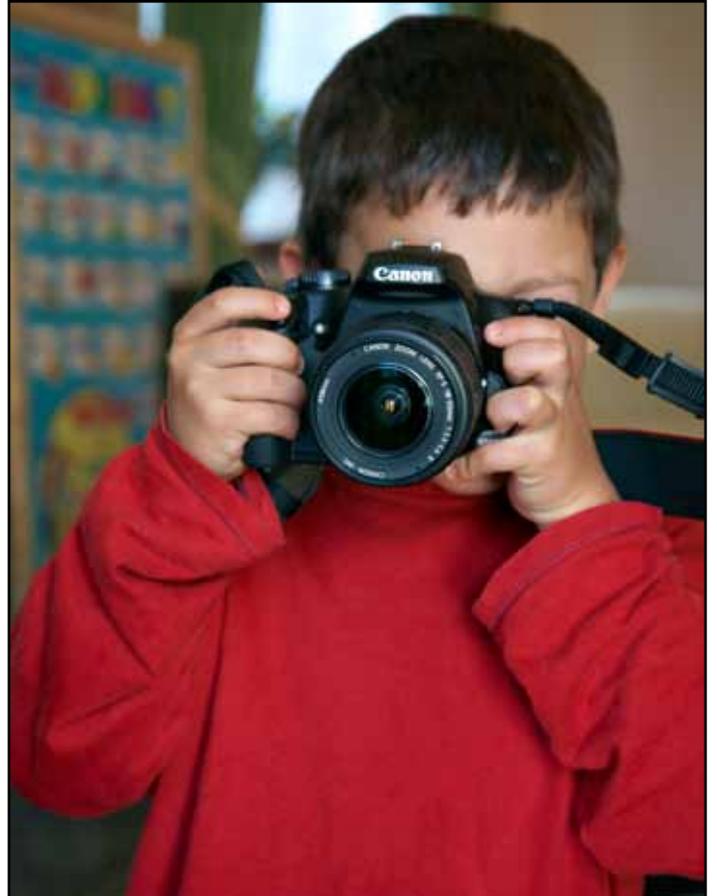
We've had some quite revolutionary technological events in the household this month. Little Lad has now reached the great age of FIVE years (on May 10). So, now he has started to use the computer - and he received a digital SLR camera for his birthday. This means that I can now have my camera back and it also means we need to get another computer (or I'll never get sufficient computer time to compile this magazine!). I bought him a Canon EOS 1000D camera which will give him a fine camera to use for (hopefully) some years to come. He has been finding my Canon EOS 5D rather heavy to lift - especially with the 'L' Series lens I usually have attached to it. The Canon EOS 1000D is not much more than half the

weight of my camera and has a much lighter lens attached - although he also has the option of using my camera lenses too. All this means, of course, that we have another contributor to this little magazine of ours, as shown by the photograph of Grace and I (*above left*) - I hope he soon learns to write and type!

Towards the end of last month I had a consultation with a Cardiologist. He suggested that it might be a good idea for me to get some exercise now I have a sedentary job and way of life. I also need to lose some (rather a lot actually) weight so a low carbohydrate diet is the order of the day - as well as de-caffeinated tea. On 11 May, I attended the hospital once more for an Echocardiogram, then a test on the treadmill. I was then fitted with a heart monitor which I had to wear for a whole week. This month is the anniversary of my leaving school - 45 years ago - in 1965 - I was still only 15 years old. I left one form of torture only for the next to take its place; first my 5 year apprenticeship (grim), followed by 40 years on the treadmill. What a waste of life when there are so many other, more enjoyable, things to do. And still the treadmill continues to rotate..... How miserable it is to have to climb out of bed in the morning with only the daily grind to look forward too. By the time the weekend eventually comes along I'm too tired to really enjoy it and get the most out of it before its back on the treadmill again for another week of torture. No wonder I despise those who are too lazy to work and who live like parasites, either claiming welfare payments or scrounging from others in their family.

I'm very pleased to report that I've now got the Adobe CS5 Design Premium suite of programs up and running on my computer and it's got some really exciting new features that I looking forward to using.

Alan



Photographs above:

Little Lad just starting to use the computer and his new camera.

Cover photograph:

Paul in action driving this Zapcat RIB in his first season of racing - *photographer unknown*.

Photograph overleaf:

Little Lad with his first camera - a Canon EOS 1000D digital SLR.



Photographs from Paul and Julie



Powis Castle







News from Joseph in Thailand

A friend and I spent Easter Sunday afternoon distributing snacks to the orphans of the orphanage founded by the Fr. Ray Foundation. We frequently go there to help with the little ones who love to be picked up and hugged. I have a particular care for a little blind boy who I think may also be mentally impaired. He lives in a world of darkness and loneliness. Because he does not respond to people easily he tends to get the minimum of attention for the very busy carers and the visitors. So I try to give him a little stimulation by picking him up (he is a bit heavy for me and I cannot hold him for long). My pal Joey says he saw the little fellow smile for the first time when I tried to get him to dance to the music in the playroom. So lets hope I am getting through a little.

I remember you asked me to send you photos of the orphanage. The best thing to do is log on to the web page: <http://www.thepattayaorphanage.org> and then browse through: on 4th April (ed. See links below). Page three there is a photo of my pal Joey Buckley with his favourite child, 'Do-Nut' who he is helping to sponsor. The text on this photo refers to me as well. They have got it a bit wrong. Both Joey and I contributed the snacks that we distributed, but as Joey delivered them, they seemed to think that I was only helping. But no matter we don't do this to get a slap on the back.

Text from orphanage page (4 April 2010): http://www.thepattayaorphanage.org/updatenews/20100404_2/index.php?swf=20100404_2&co=e

Having been blessed with recovered health, Mr. Joey Buckley from USA is traveling around Asia to share his blessings with the underprivileged children. In Pattaya, he has been visiting the orphans at the Pattaya Orphanage. Apart from wishing to sponsor a baby, he shares some goodies with the older kids this afternoon. Thanks to Khun Joey and may your deep joy continue to be grow. It's very kind of Mr. Joseph McCluskey, one of our regular visitors, to join this loving activity. Thank you kha/khrap!

On 11th March Items 1/5 to 5/5 (http://www.thepattayaorphanage.org/updatenews/20100311_2/index.php?swf=20100311_2&co=e#) there are photos of myself and other friends, Eddie O'Brien, and a young friend Danny. The baby I am holding who has a plaster on his brow is the little blind boy I mentioned. I will help with sponsoring him. I cost \$2,000 a year to fully sponsor a child, but we can share sponsorship by contributing a proportion of the cost according to our means and desire.

Text from orphanage page (11 March 2010):

Laughter and joy was received by Mr. Edward O'Brien when he came after so many years back to visit the Pattaya Orphanage. Together with Mr. Joseph McCluskey, one of Pattaya's residents and our regular visitor, our guests have reminisced their time when they were able to meet Father Ray Brennan and had said that he was a very wonderful loving man. Mr. O'Brien was awed by the fantastic changes that the Orphanage has had through the years. After coming back from Ireland, he would like to help sponsor the children. Thank you for your kind deed. We most appreciate it and are very grateful. Have a wonderful safe trip. Khop Khun kha.

Ed.: The photographs shown on the website at the links above are not really suitable for putting in this magazine as they are part of an Adobe Flash movie (.swf). However, they are well worth seeing and I hope you will go to the web site of the orphanage and see them for yourself. I also hope you enjoy reading the two editions of the Pattaya Gazette I've included in this magazine.

The Pattaya Orphanage in Thailand

In 1972, Rev. Fr. Raymond Allyn Brennan, a Redemptorist priest, was requested to go to help work at St. Nikolaus Church, Pattaya, temporarily, and one morning when he opened the church door he saw a newborn child left at the stairway front. Not knowing what to do, he took care of the child, asking his friends about “how to give milk and how to change the diaper”. News about the fostering of the child spread, resulting in more children being brought to give to him, most of whom were fruits of the presence of the U.S. military base at Sattahip.

During the Vietnam War, Pattaya became a favorite place of the American servicemen who came for recreations, so there were a large number of abandoned children. A military officer and Father Ray consulted each other on how to find ways and means of aid. Eventually, both of them went to see Bishop Thienchai Samanchit, the Bishop of the Chanthaburi Diocese at the Bishop’s House, Siracha, informing him that the American veterans intended to build a home for orphans at Pattaya and present it to the Diocese, of which Father Ray Brennan volunteered to be the manager, since it was found that many orphans were born of American servicemen in the days of their presence at U-Tapao U.S. base during the Vietnam War.

Bishop Thienchai answered the American military officer, saying, “It is not difficult for you to build a home for orphans and then wash your hand and go home, while it is not known where the Diocese will get money from to feed those orphans”. So he asked for an initial capital of Baht 500,000 (Baht Five Hundred Thousand Only). The American military officer nodded approval but asked for 5 years’ time.

Thereafter, Bishop Thienchai took counsel with his advisors as to whether or not to accept the Pattaya Orphanage. Some of the advisors raised an objection, saying that the orphanage should not be constructed, because it was like supporting the easy existence of a growing number of orphans. Some of them said that even if the orphanage did not exist, there were already a large number of orphans. Eventually, the Diocese passed a resolution accepting the Pattaya Orphanage to belong to the Diocese. Father Ray and the American servicemen constructed the orphanage on a land (of approximately 7.6 acres) of the Diocese, of which the Diocese prescribed 2 acres on the rear side for use as the compound of the orphanage. Brother Connie of the Redemptorist Order was the construction drawing maker, while the Diocese reserved 5.6 acres of the land on the road front side.

In the initial period Father Ray contacted the Sisters (Soeurs) of the Order of St. Paul de Chartre to come to be housekeepers looking after the children.

Currently the Pattaya Orphanage takes care of approximately 160 orphans, ranging from newborn to studying at the university level.

Objectives

- 1.To provide help to orphans by accepting to bring up poor orphans and providing lodging, food and education services without limitation in race and religion;
- 2.To provide families with readiness who want to adopt orphans under the child adoption law;
- 3.To provide education to orphans according the their intelligence in as much as their ability to learn and to provide them with employment when they finish their education;
- 4.To cooperate with other charity organizations that work about children for public interest.

Courtesy of URL: <http://www.thepattayaorphanage.org/>



PATTAYA GAZETTE

Pattaya Orphanage & School for the Deaf

Issue 6 : November 2009 – February 2010



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TO:

PRINTED MATTER

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36th Anniversary
PATTAYA ORPHANAGE
 1974 - 2010

“36 years of life-giving and future-building... for orphans”



Family Day



2010 Annual Family Day of the Pattaya Orphanage is planned for Sunday, 18th April 2010, starting from 17:00 hours onward.

Children will attend the blessing ceremony and enjoy a special dinner together with the elders and staff members.



Fr. Michael Weera Phangrak welcomed the party from Thai Children's Trust, U.K. led by Mr. Andrew Scadding, Director of the Trust, and Mr. Crispian Collins, Chair of Trustees. Our VIP guests have greatly appreciated being with our deaf children as well, observing how they responded to the teachers in sign language and how sharp and retentive they were. They have much enjoyed cuddling, playing and rocking the babies in their arms. We thank you so much as always for supporting the orphaned and deaf children over the past 28 years since the inauguration of the Trust, leaving us with the assurance that the little ones are always in your hearts. ▼



▲ French Consul, Mrs. Sophie Renaud and her delegation headed by Mrs. Beatrice Biondi, High Judicial Officer/Managing Director of the French Adoption Agency, Mr. Emmanuel Poccein, the correspondent for the AFA in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Mr. Yamm Leochowski, pay a warm visit to the Pattaya Orphanage and School for the Deaf by meeting the children who performed a song for them. The party also further discusses about the French-Thai adoption relationship. They were served a special lunch after visiting the different sections of the foundation. May we thank each and every one of our guests for their invaluable concern in the development of a better mutual adoption relationship.



Merry Christmas 2009

Happy New Year 2010



Annual Christmas & New Year Celebration for the orphaned and deaf children is scheduled for Friday, 25th December 2009 between 16:00 and 22:00 hours at the Pattaya Orphanage. Do join the children in their fun-filled afternoon with presents, lucky draws, inflatable kingdom, food and beverages, stage performances, and reunion of former residents. All is free of charge.

Please mark your calendar and let us know if you wish to be part of the children's special day.



Every year the deaf and the orphaned children at the Pattaya Orphanage feel the warmth and concern of Khun Panga Vathanakul, Managing Director of the Royal Cliff Beach Resort and her management team. Once again, accompanied by Mr. Joachim Grill, General Manager, as well as her Management Team, Khun Panga generously made donation of 980 kilograms of rice grains, 400 packs of instant noodles and 100 kilograms of biscuits. Apart from spending time with the children, our kind visitors made cash contribution of 200,000 Baht in support to the foundation. Your constant support and sincere concern for us are very meaningful. Wishing you all happiness and progress in life. Thank you very much indeed!



Once again, the deaf and orphaned children as well as the management of the Pattaya Orphanage welcomed Khun Somsak Photpatinya, Director of Customs Office, Laemchabang International Port and his staff members, during their annual visit on the occasion of Khun Somsak's birthday anniversary (August 26). Apart from making donations of necessities, including sport equipment, and 10,000 Baht cash in support to the children, the party kindly hosted a wonderful lunch for all the residents of the Orphanage. With great appreciation for your generosity and for being with us, we wish you all happiness, good health, and fulfillment. "Happy Birthday" kha/khrap, Khun Somsak..

In-house Tuition: While on semester break, the school-age children who study in over 20 institutions around the country return home to the Pattaya Orphanage and enjoy their vacation. Apart from having a few weeks of relaxation with group outings, sports, and games, the children also have in-house tuition which is scheduled for several children who need to brush up their skills in English and Computer. With the help of five dedicated expatriate volunteers, children by age group enjoy their morning English sessions. They also learn and practice typing and necessary computer program applications with the help of their supervising teachers. While Khun Suwanna becomes a stand-by tutor for a few sessions, Blue and Faay also introduce basic Chinese language to their juniors.

Message from the Director

PRAISE THE BRIDGE THAT CARRIED YOU OVER

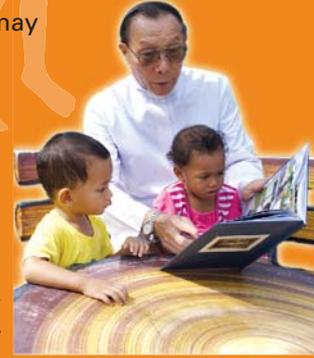
During the month of October the orphanage is noisy and lively because it's the half academic year's break. Children stay home even those studying in the various universities come back and join our big family. I take this opportunity to talk to them especially before they go to bed. The topic varies from basic human needs to intellectual and ethical formation necessary for every matured person to know and be formed in life.

One of the topics I like to stress very often is the gratitude that every child should have. Normally we hardly thank the bridge that helps us to be transferred from one side of the river to the other. We usually take it for granted. But here in our big family we can not do like that. There are many generous people who help us in one way or another to carry us over the life channel. Many sponsors and volunteers give up their

comfortable lives and time helping each child to grow from babyhood to adulthood year after year. The staff, sisters, nurses, teachers, nannies and people of good will who take care of the children day and night are all worthy of praise and love.

Every child should learn that his or her life depends so much on the love and care from many loving people. Being a good child and trying hard in daily study is a way of rendering gratitude to those who help carry us over the bridge of life. I do hope after talking to them patiently most of the nights, many of my children may still remember at least the morning after. I hope they will gradually understand the importance of the bridge

Fr. Michael Weera Phangrak
Director



While on vacation in Thailand, Mr. Yves Brown, a professional British football coach, together with his loving family, visited the children at the Pattaya Orphanage. He decided, after having a short discussion with our children's regular German coach, Mr. Heiko Klimanschewsky, that his 3 sons would play in a friendship match with the Orphanage team. The match on Sunday, 2nd August 2009 went very well and our children have learned several new techniques from our visiting coach.



Weekend activity for Saturday 5th September 2009 was conducted in the small kitchen of the Pattaya Orphanage. Nine little chefs learned how to prepare "Hoy Tod" or Fried Sea Mussels, one of the Thai famous dishes for Thai people. They took part in all the process, going through the recipe, cleaning vegetables and mussels, preparing mixture, frying the mixture in vegetable oil, adding vegetables, and cooking until the portion became crispy and smelling great. Apart from learning the how-to, our proud cooks had fun working on individual assignment and as a team.



A small market was set up at Sotpattana School for the Deaf for the children to learn to use cash in exchange of goods. As part of their learning, the deaf preschool children are given toy bank notes and taught how to exchange them with daily necessities. Their teachers took the role of traders, stationed at their booths to sell snacks, fruit juice, shakes, ice-cream, toys, and clothes. The little customers much enjoy shopping and the goods. Also benefited from this activity are the preschool children from the Pattaya Orphanage. Thanks to the teachers for making the market a great place to visit.



On the Thai Science Day, children at our School for the Deaf and Pattaya Orphanage attended the Science Week Programme at Burapha University in Chonburi where they found several interesting exhibitions and presentations on development of human baby in the womb, anatomy, microorganism, etc. Our young scientists marveled as they viewed enlarged picture of bacteria through microscopes. The underwater world at the Marine Aquarium in Bangsae was also quite inspiring. Thanks to all who further encourage the little explorers who are very keen to learn Science and for this wonderful experience.

Collections from School Bus



Episode 4: Semester Break at the Orphanage

Greetings to our dear readers.. After five months of transporting the children to and from their schools, the School Bus of the Pattaya Orphanage is resting for a few weeks during the semester break in October. Let's see what are the happenings and atmosphere during this vacation.

The Orphanage is exceptionally vibrant when all the children are at home. Seniors, who study in boarding schools and live in dormitories, come home and join their juniors for a couple of weeks.

Apart from having a lot of relaxed time with recreational activities, sports, outings, and computer games, the children have extra English and Computer tutoring sessions in the morning. Several expatriates volunteer as tutors and make English learning full of fun.

One of the special activities includes caroling practice. Our preschool children are energetic to join in. School-age children also went on a study tour to Phrabat Nampu Temple where HIV/AIDS patients are cared for. They learned about the causes and harm of the diseases, provided moral support to the patients and made a resolution to adapt what they have learned into use. Some children, together with their peer group, go to a nearby beach or department store with their visiting sponsors.

In the afternoons, older children play soccer or ride bicycles. The little ones can be found near a wall where some cats of the neighbors stroll. In the office of Father Michael, there are individual meetings to follow up on the studies and conducts of older children. Bright smiles and loving atmosphere between a father and his child can be witnessed in most cases, while occasional frowns appear on our director's caring face as he sees some of the young adults - probably demonstrating a deep reflection on certain teenage problems. Ha! Ha!

And after having necessary maintenance, the School Bus is ready to serve the children again for the coming semester. We hope for your continued moral support, so that the children would one day become proud graduates and happily learn from their life-time education.

with warmest regards,
Editor



Cherishing Fr. Ray's Vision

In loving memory of the late Father Ray Brennan CSSR, who constantly dwells in the hearts of his children, the Pattaya Orphanage and Sotpattana School for the Deaf organized a special event on the occasion of his 6th Memorial Day. The programme titled "Cherishing Fr. Ray's Vision", held on the Orphanage ground on Saturday, 1st August 2009, with about 630 Thai and non-Thai attendants, including underprivileged children and young adults from different charity organizations around Pattaya City. It was a special day for the children with lots of food, games, and entertainment. The objectives of the programme, being 1) to promote the uplift of morale and inspiration of the children and staff personnel of charity organizations, as well as the participants of the children's fair, as we cherish the vision of Fr. Ray Brennan; 2) to express deep gratitude towards Fr. Ray Brennan on the occasion of the 6th anniversary of his departure; and 3) to strengthen good relationship and collaboration among charity organizations, have well been achieved.



Kindness Towards Residents of Phrabat Nampu Temple: Children from the Pattaya Orphanage visited and learned from HIV/AIDS patients at Wat Phrabat Nampu, Lopburi province. After the experiential sharing from the staff and residents of the Temple, reflecting the causes and harm of AIDS, the children extended their moral support to some patients on dying beds who showed their great strength to cope with the diseases. Our young orphans have learned to be open to the less fortunate people, conscious of the reality of the society, and promised to adapt this better understanding for use in their daily lives.



On 26th September 2009, staff members of the Pattaya Orphanage and School for the Deaf had a fire drill with theoretical and practical training. Each personnel had gained knowledge and skills that would be put in effective use in emergency. The drill and simulation involved all the orphaned and deaf children residing in the five-storey building. Using the recently installed fire escapes, they either made their own way or were carried by their carers to the ground - all safe and excited. All concerned have become aware of the importance of consciousness at all times.

Photographs from Michelle in Qatar



The British boot stamping on the face of Christian belief

by **Melanie Phillips**
Daily Mail, 3 May 2010

Terrifying as this may seem, the attempt to stamp out Christianity in Britain appears to be gathering pace.

Dale McAlpine was preaching to shoppers in Workington, Cumbria, that homosexuality is a sin when he found himself carted off by the police, locked up in a cell for seven hours and charged with using abusive or insulting words or behaviour.

It appears that two police community support officers — at least one of whom was gay — claimed he had caused distress to themselves and members of the public.

Under our anti-discrimination laws, such distress is not to be permitted. And so we have the oppressive and sinister situation where a gentle, unaggressive Christian is arrested and charged simply for preaching Christian principles.

It would appear that Christianity, the normative faith of this country on which its morality, values and civilisation are based, is effectively being turned into a crime.

Surreally, this intolerant denial of freedom is being perpetrated under the rubric of promoting tolerance and equality — but only towards approved groups.

Never has George Orwell's famous satirical observation, that some people are more equal than others, appeared more true.

The Cumbrian arrest comes hard on the heels of last week's ruling by Lord Justice Laws in the case of Gary McFarlane, who was dismissed as a Relate counsellor because he refused to give advice to same-sex couples on sexual relationships.

The judge not only upheld Relate's case against McFarlane but went even further, saying in terms that the law could provide no legal protection for Christians who wish to live according to their religious principles.

And how did he arrive at this remarkable conclusion that deprives Christians of their rights? By cherry-picking human rights law.

The judge said merely that this conferred upon believers the right to 'hold or express' religious views. In fact, the European Convention on Human Rights goes much further, giving people the right to manifest 'freedom of thought, conscience and religion' through 'worship, teaching, practice and observance'.

Yet the judge chose not to mention this right to put religious

beliefs into practice. Instead, he stated that giving legal protection to Christian beliefs was 'deeply unprincipled' and 'on the way to a theocracy'.

You really do have to scratch your head at this. The protection of religious conscience is a fundamental principle of a liberal and free society.

To equate this protection with theocracy — or the imposition of religious law upon a society — displays a remarkable intellectual and moral confusion, and has resulted in a ruling that is frighteningly illiberal and intolerant.

Of course, you could say that this is merely the result of human rights law for which Parliament rather than the judges is responsible.

But the courts could interpret that same human rights law very differently. The problem is that the judges are refusing to strike a proper balance.

Instead of arbitrating fairly between competing rights by granting exemptions for religious believers from anti-religious laws, they are choosing to impose secular values and thus destroy the right to live and work Christian principles.

What seems to have particularly offended Lord Justice Laws was the idea of protecting certain beliefs specifically because they were religious.

This was wrong, he said, because religious ideas were not applicable to the whole of society, since they existed only in the hearts of religious believers.

He thus appeared, totally, to miss the point — that freedom of conscience is supposedly a right for all, including minorities. It would seem that either a tin ear or, worse, an animosity towards religion drives all before it.

This was what caused the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, to protest in a statement to the court that judges were effectively damning Christianity itself as discriminatory and, therefore, bigoted.

He was so alarmed by the apparent secular prejudice of the judiciary that he suggested the establishment of a special court to deal with cases of religious discrimination composed of judges with some understanding of religious issues.

As if to prove his point, Lord Justice Laws dismissed all his arguments out of hand with the patronising observation that Lord Carey had not understood the law.

On the contrary, it is surely Lord Justice Laws who does not understand that he and his fellow judges are mistaking

secularism for neutrality — confusing the secular onslaught upon religion with the need to hold the ring between competing beliefs.

There is a long and growing list of British Christians who have been harassed by the police, sacked or otherwise fallen foul of authority simply for upholding their religious beliefs.

Pensioners have found the police on their doorstep accusing them of ‘hate crime’ for objecting to their council about a gay pride march or merely asking if they could distribute Christian leaflets alongside the gay rights literature.

A preacher who went around with a placard denouncing homosexuality was prosecuted even though he was the victim of an assault by onlookers who threw soil and water over him.

In the field of employment, Christians have been suspended or sacked for refusing to officiate at civil partnership ceremonies or place children for adoption with gay couples and for wearing a cross or praying with patients for their recovery.

Many of these cases involve the issue of homosexuality since this is the principal area where orthodox Christian beliefs cannot co-exist with the law.

This is in contrast to other contentious issues such as abortion, where the law specifically provides exemptions for conscience.

This is because unlike the specific and limited issue of abortion, the militant gay rights agenda represents an attack on the entire value system of our society by destroying the very idea that any sexual behaviour is normal.

Anyone who says homosexuality is not normal is, therefore, thrown to the wolves as a bigot.

This is what recently happened to the then Conservative parliamentary candidate Philip Lardner.

He said churches should not be forced to have practising homosexual clergy and Christians should not be penalised for politely saying that homosexuality is ‘wrong’.

He also said that he would always support the rights of homosexuals to be treated fairly and to live as they wanted in private, but he would not accept that their behaviour was ‘normal’ or encourage children to indulge in it.

For this expression of traditional Christian — and, indeed, liberal — values, he was not only deselected as a Tory candidate at the speed of light on the grounds that his remarks were ‘deeply offensive and unacceptable’, but suspended from his job as a primary school teacher.

As Lardner has angrily observed, it appears that Christian views are no longer acceptable within the Conservative party.

Far from their historic role in defending the bedrock values of this society, the Tories have thus put themselves on the side of the illiberal onslaught on freedom of conscience.

Of course, true prejudice and bigotry are wrong, whether towards homosexuals or anyone else.

But the decent impulse to protect the rights of gay people is very different from trying to destroy the bedrock values of our society.

Yet, that is precisely what it has become. As a result, Britain is turning from a liberal Christian country — whose liberalism is rooted in its religious tradition — into an illiberal, oppressive secular state with no room for religious conscience.

Under the camouflage of human rights, this is the way freedom dies.

Courtesy of URL: <http://www.melaniephillips.com/articles-new/?p=735>



Sleazy Bliar visits NESL

The company where I work had the misfortune to receive a visit from ace sleaze, chief liar, and destroyer of my country (and others, notably, and in cahoots with that other thug, Bomber Bush; Iraq), ex-Prime Minister, Tony Blair on 4 May. Fortunately, I managed to make my escape from the office before Mr. Sleazy arrived after first refusing to be the official company photographer for the occasion. The visit cost the company a huge number of man-hours in painting and cleaning costs and the whole place now stinks of fresh paint. Anyway, just for the record, here is the account and photograph published in the local newspaper, the Express and Star:



Tony Blair visits Nuclear Engineering Services in Ettingshall

Whatever anyone might think of Tony Blair, it's clear to see how he won three elections.

All smiles from the moment his black BMW dropped him off at Nuclear Engineering Services in Ettingshall, he was the epitome of charm.

The former Prime Minister was given a tour of the Spring Lane offices and factory and took in all the complicated details.

It may have been almost three years since he stepped aside for Gordon Brown but it would be easy to believe he was still living at Number 10.

He was still flanked by a press officer and several aides. There were still at least two plain clothes police officers, talking into their lapels and their wrists about the current security situation. There were still three vehicles for his entourage ready to whisk them off to Pat McFadden's constituency office in Bilston where he met 40 supporters. And he was still mindful of his appearance, whipping out a comb to make himself presentable for the cameras once his hard hat came off at the end of the tour.

Despite a few years out in the sunshine and on the private speaking circuit he has lost none of that tactile quality that swept him to power in 1997. Every worker in the office was greeted with a handshake and every member of staff who took time to explain the operation was rewarded with a question.

"So you are already thinking about decommissioning nuclear facilities when you design them?" he said.

"If it shows up red that means you have to take specific measures?"

"How do you know how accurate this is?"

There was great enthusiasm for how the company has grown from 70 people to employ 220 workers over the past six years.

And there was plenty of good humour, too. As boss Brett Cooper praised Mr McFadden for his support, Mr Blair remarked: "Really? I worked with him for 10 years he never did anything."

Of course, Mr McFadden has been a vital ally to the Government, both as a policy adviser for Tony Blair and

later, after being given the safe Wolverhampton South East seat, as business minister for Gordon Brown.

As company head of engineering Andrea Basso, who moved from Verona in Italy 11 years ago, introduced himself Mr Blair said: "That's a great accent, you should be managing a football team." Ray Cresswell, aged 65, retires in September. The mechanical technician has worked for the firm for 50 years, ever since it was John Thompson Nuclear Components (*ed. it was NEVER named that! It was originally John Thompson Engineering*).

Asked if the visit had swayed his opinion on who to vote for, Mr Cresswell held up the red tie he had picked out especially that morning.

There was a demonstration of the Titan 4 robot hand and at the end of the visit Mr Blair was presented with a miniature working replica. "Leo's going to love that", he said.

The company makes fuel model removal containers for submarines, heat exchangers and other complicated equipment for use in decommissioning nuclear power stations, as well as designing components for new ones.

As Mr Blair chatted with workers he said: "It's an industry that may have been on its way out at some point but it's come back."

Speaking to the Express & Star he said he did not believe Gordon Brown's gaffe last week, in which he called a voter "bigoted" for expressing concerns on immigration, would hurt Labour's chances in tomorrow's vote.

He said: "It is the economy and public services that are important to people."

He warned against a hung Parliament, which he claimed would lead to horse trading among the parties.

Text and Photograph Courtesy of URL: <http://www.expressandstar.com/election/2010/05/05/blair-has-magic-touch-during-factory-visit/>

