

Write to: The Editor, The Cumberland News, Newspaper House, Dalston Road, Carlisle CA2 5UA. Email: letters@cumbrian-newspapers.co.uk

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## LETTERS

### Church against racism not insult to others

I WOULD like to respond to last week's letter written by a group of Cumbrian humanists (*The Cumberland News*, April 25).

While I wholeheartedly welcome the support of anybody in our attempt to stand up to racism in Carlisle, I cannot allow their obvious errors to stand.

It is incorrect to suggest that the majority of the UK population hold no religious beliefs.

When questioned in the 2001 census, 77 per cent of the population voluntarily described themselves as Christians and 85 per cent described themselves as belonging to a religion.

Unless somebody has invented some new and bizarre method of interpreting statistics it is the minority, 15 per cent of the population, who hold no religious belief.

All human beings must take responsibility for the evils of our history and learn from them. This applies particularly to religious and racial conflict.

However, I would like to point out that the great wars and massacres of the last century, some involving the ugliest face of racial discrimination, were caused

by Pol Pot, Mao, Stalin and Hitler, all of whom were militant atheists.

I, for one, have a far greater fear of the rise of atheism in our society than I do of the rise of the religion of love, tolerance and peace founded by Christ.

**BEN PHILLIPS**  
Vicar of Stanwix  
Carlisle

■ FURTHER to the letters regarding racism, I would like to express my dismay at the letter signed by members of the Cumbria Humanist Group.

If they read the letter from Christian leaders in Carlisle, they would not find any implication that they believed they were the only group in Carlisle or anywhere else, to be against racism.

The opening paragraph of the humanists' letter seems unnecessarily defensive when no-one was thinking about them, much less attacking them.

The main cause of my dismay, however, is in their statement that racial tension has been exacerbated by religious conflict.

This is simply untrue. While it cannot be denied that there has been and, unfortunately, still is religious tension, no religious group can be accused of being mixed up in racial tension.

Are they suggesting that the mindless thugs who attack, verbally and physically, their fellow men on the grounds of skin colour or country of birth are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or that they belong to any religious group at all?

I rather think that they belong to those who do not have any religious belief at all.

**BARBARA EDEN**  
Broad Street  
Carlisle

**Reply to letters overleaf – to be submitted for (we hope) publication in CN 9 May : -**

“In response to the Rev. Ben Phillips’ letter (“**Church against racism not insult to others.**” **The Cumberland News, May 2**), may we draw his attention to a Guardian/ICM poll published in December 2006. This was a detailed scientific analysis of current religious attitudes in Britain, unlike the 2001 census, where the single question on religious identity inspired almost 400,000 respondents to declare themselves Jedi, thus giving the Star Wars cult the status of a recognised religion. In the Guardian/ICM poll almost 70% of people described themselves as having no personal faith, and 80% saw religion as a cause of division and tension within society.

Stalin and Pol Pot were megalomaniac military dictators, and their militant secularism (not the same as atheism) had a strictly political base. Although they denied religion, unlike Humanists they did not replace it with an alternative moral and ethical code. Such psychopathic rulers, of many faiths and none, have existed throughout history.

We were not insulted: we merely sought to claim such social ethics and principles for the non-religious as well as for the established faiths. The doctrine of fellowship and peace taught by Jesus two millennia ago has been shared by a wide range of philosophies throughout the world and throughout the history of human beings. As humans, let us look for our common ground and not what divides us : where would CND have been without the collaboration of Bertrand Russell and Canon John Collins? As Humanists, we do not need supernatural beliefs to share our human values.”

(242 words)

(Dr) Christine Allen (Secretary, CHG)  
Iain Paterson (Chair, CHG)

(And 24 Members of Cumbria Group)

John Baines, Ian Breach, Sidney Clare, Jan Dunckley, Susan Falder, Terry Greenwood, Toby Jackson, (Dr) Jean Marston, Diana Martin, John Martin, Nona Murray, George O’Hara, Roy Pomfret, John Rimmer, (Dr) Brian Scroggie, Marjorie Smith, Richard Speirs , Tim Strevens, Deirdre Tyson, John Upson, Norman Walker, George Weston, Irene Whitfield, Pat Williams.

*(This was **not** published in the Cumberland News on 9 May 2008)*