

Francis Bennion's letters from Cyprus 1994-1996

Note Francis and Mary Bennion emigrated to Cyprus temporarily on 26 December 1993.

Moving to Cyprus

My wife Mary had a spinal operation two years ago, and has since had much trouble with her back. Because she found the English climate did not help matters, and a warmer climate was required, we moved out here last Christmas. So we have just about completed a year. I have retired from the Bar and am now working full time as a writer.

The house we have rented here is a fairly large one in the centre of Limassol away from the tourist area. It is really too big for us, but Mary fell in love with it when we were out here in the autumn of 1993 for the Commonwealth Law Conference. It is one of those dowry houses the Cypriots have, on land given to our landlord Niki (a single woman aged 37) by her family. She pulled down the house she was given and built a new one, of which we are the first occupants. It is beautifully fitted out, as Niki insisted on nothing but the best. However we have found the environs very noisy, and now think we will move to the capital Nicosia.¹

I am using one of the three bedrooms as a study, and have much more space than at Thames Street, Oxford. Niki's employer is a barrister who runs a large law firm. He has given me the run of his firm's excellent library, which is a great help. He has also kindly given me all the facilities of his office, so I use their fax machine as a reserve. We splashed out by buying one of the new BMW 325i convertibles. It is very nice to drive, but there are not many places to drive to! We cannot go north of the 'green line' that separates us from the so-called Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, so practically half the island is out of bounds. This is a very stupid situation, that has prevailed since 1974. Unfortunately Cyprus is caught up in what I call the Modern Crusades, the Christian-Muslim battle that has engulfed Algeria, Egypt, former Yugoslavia, Chechnya, former Palestine, and many other countries.

Getting acclimatized has not proved altogether easy. The winter climate here is humid, which does not help Mary's spinal condition. The house was carefully designed to be cool in summer, which means it is really rather chilly in winter. The floors throughout the main part are of granite, which is exceedingly chilly and hard. The house has a very good central heating system, but even so we feel the cold. (Of course it is absurd to complain of cold when the daytime temperature seldom fall below 18 degrees Celsius, but it is strange how soon one adapts and begins grumbling of winter chills like a seasoned Cypriot.) We are now in winter again, after a very warm summer which has rather spoilt us.

The main snag here is the noise, to which the Cypriots seem impervious. Mary is being driven demented by barking dogs, of which there are a huge quantity. Neither the dogs nor the Cypriots ever get any exercise, which doesn't help their tempers!

I have returned to England twice. I am still allowed to retain my room in the Bodleian Law Library at Oxford, and continue to have people there working for me. So far I have mainly been doing legal writing in my field of statute law. I find it perfectly possible, using the new technology, to operate from here as a full time author.²

¹ Instead we moved to the seaside village of Pissouri.

² From letter circulated to friends, Christmas 1994. It was the barking dogs that drove us to move to Pissouri.

Cannabis use in Cyprus

I notice that the lovers of cannabis (otherwise known as Indian hemp, bhang, ganja or hashish) are once again opening their mouths to urge its legalisation. As an Englishman who is a Cyprus resident, I hope our Government will stand firm against this pressure, particularly where it amounts to interference from outside Cyprus.

My belief that cannabis is a dangerous drug was formed twenty years ago. As a constitutional adviser to the Jamaica Government I was provided with a chauffeur-driven car while I was on the island. The driver, a wise old Jamaican, continually spoke to me of his experiences of the harmful effects of ganja (as they call cannabis in Jamaica). He felt very strongly about it.

He told me stories of his schooldays, when about a third of the boys in his class smoked ganja. He said it was well known to ruin any hope they had of learning anything in school, giving rise to their nickname of 'dopeheads'. They spent their lives in a constant drug-induced daze. When they left school they were unfit for work, and joined the ranks of the permanent unemployed. Some became violent.

It is of interest to note that the word *assassin* derives from the Arabic *hashishin*, or eater of hashish.³

A Cypriot view of animal rights

I am responding to the letter promoting animal rights from Patricia Radnor Kyriacou (19 February 1995). She says that the Biblical injunction 'Thou shalt not kill' applies to our treatment of animals. This is a mistake. The Old Testament tells us that the injunction 'Thou shalt not kill' was given by Moses, speaking the word of God (Exodus 20.13). The passage obviously relates only to the treatment of one human being by another.

The Old Testament makes clear that animals do not have rights, but are put on the earth solely for use and enjoyment by human beings. 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let mankind have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth' (Genesis 1.26). If that is not clear enough, consider Psalm 8: 'What is man? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air and the fish of the sea.' If you want more, read all 47 verses of the eleventh chapter of Leviticus. These explain how it was contemplated by God that human beings should live by eating meat, omitting only the kinds that for reasons of hygiene are 'unclean'.

So animal lovers should remember to put humans, not animals, first. They should be considerate of human needs, such as the need of the old for peace and quiet (barking dogs are an increasing nuisance in Cyprus). That's been the human way for thousands of years. It is an insult to the human race for Ms Kyriacou to talk of a 'community of equals' comprising both human beings and animals, and to say animals are our brothers and sisters. They are nothing of the sort.

These silly attitudes degrade the real struggle in which we should all be engaged. This is to stop the cruelty that humans continue to inflict on one another. It goes on all over the world, and millions of people suffer. It is these *people*, not animals, who should be our main concern. If every person who devotes their time and energy to promoting so-called animal rights turned instead to helping their fellow human beings, the world would be a very much better place. As I have tried to show, for animal rightists to cite scripture in support of their misguided aims is nothing but blasphemy.

³ *Cyprus Mail*, 16 October 1994.

Since a growing number of animal rightists have the impudence to think their cause justifies the carrying out of physical attacks on opponents and their property, I ask you not to publish my name and address.⁴

More on animal rights

As I expected, there has been a rush to criticise me for what I did *not* say, rather than for what I did say. I did not say I supported what is said in the Old Testament. What I did say was that the Old Testament injunction 'Thou shalt not kill' does not apply to the killing of animals. This corrected the false statement made by Patricia Radnor Kyriacou. I also corrected another false statement, commonly made. This is that animals have 'rights'. We can argue about the treatment of animals. To do so effectively, we need to use language properly.

Rights are either legal or moral. Legal rights are possessed only by human beings, because only human beings can put the law in motion. Whether a particular legal system protects animals is simply a question of fact. Whether it protects them adequately is a question of judgment. But the animals themselves cannot possess legal rights. Moral rights depend on which system of morality you support. The three main monotheistic religions say animals are for the use of human beings. There is no agreed system of humanist or agnostic morality. Animals have no moral sense, and cannot be held morally responsible. A creature who cannot be morally responsible cannot possess moral rights.

Nothing I said supports cruelty to animals. But I maintain it is not 'cruel' to use an animal in the way humans always have done, for food, clothing, transport and even sport. Finally I reject the miserable sneer by Mr Miles, who said I did not have the courage of my convictions because I asked that my name and address be withheld. I gave the reason for that request, which I will repeat. It was because 'a growing number of animal rightists have the impudence to think their cause justifies the carrying out of physical attacks on opponents and their property'. I carefully did not say, as C. H. Radford falsely implies, that this applies to *all* animal rightists. But it certainly applies to some. In various parts of the world, animal rightists have indiscriminately killed or hurt people and destroyed or damaged property. One method is by sending letter bombs. International post reaches Cyprus, so no animal rights opponent is safe here. I might risk my own skin, but I am not entitled to endanger my family. So again I ask you to withhold my name and address.⁵

Being cosmopolitan

Something seems to have gone very, very wrong with the education of Marina Hadjimanoli (age 15) and Stefanie Stephanou (age 13). Their letter last week complains that often they have to speak or read English rather than Greek. It is a shame, they say, that in Cyprus, a nation with 'a rich and important ancient civilisation', anyone should use a language other than Greek.

Has no one taught them anything about the history of Cyprus? Do they not know that until recently it was run by the British? Are they not aware that for several centuries before that it was run by the Turks as part of the Ottoman Empire? Has no one told them that many of the present inhabitants of the island are Turkish Cypriots, speaking that language? Are they ignorant of the dominant role played in Cyprus by the Venetians, some time back? Have they never heard of the Lusignans?

Until a very few years ago Cyprus was never run by Greeks. So what people gave these young ladies the idea that the island is in some mysterious way wholly Greek? Perhaps they are the same people as those who hinder a solution of the Cyprus problem by insisting that Greece and the Greeks must be in control of all inhabitants whatever their ethnic origin, that the Greek Orthodox church must be the spiritual master, that Greek flags must always fly alongside the Cyprus flag, and that the Greek language must be the only one officially used.

⁴ *Cyprus Mail*, 26 February 1995.

⁵ *Cyprus Mail*, 12 March 1995.

Do Marina and Stefanie not understand that English is now the world language? There is one little word I would whisper in their ears a word of (as it happens) Greek origin: cosmopolitan. Today in Cyprus we all need to be cosmopolitans. Young people (of all people) had better learn that and not forget it if they want to get on and lead successful lives.⁶

Paul Theodoulou and Kingsley Amis

Paul Theodoulou shows his usual acuity and brilliance over the late Kingsley Amis (29 October 1995). Yet he is wrong to deny Harry Ritchie's assessment of KA as a great prose stylist. KA was out in front in the possession of an authorial voice. That is extra-difficult in this age of American-inspired 'editors', those denizens of the dark who rush to mangle and mush up the timbre of any MS they can get their tiny, grimy hands on. The resisting author must possess not only a strong will to fight them off but a truly original character, which KA did. Then he must be able to clothe the latter in words adequate to render it identifiable by the reader. KA's voice was instantly knowable, and that is true of very few twentieth century novelists writing in English.

KA's style or 'voice' enables the reader to entertain the illusion of reclining in some leather-lined study listening to him alcoholically ramble on, or clinically analyse, or both. You may not like the way KA is rambling or analysing. You may itch to disagree with him, perhaps violently. But KA is there in the room with you, and that's what I mean by style. Paul Theodoulou might say that, thank you very much, he doesn't want to be in the leather-lined room with this blokeish old fart KA. That's his privilege, and I can understand the sentiments. OK, so KA was limited. Not every ballerina or New Labour candidate would find him a soul mate. But is not that true of any writer with a tale to tell, or an ideology to communicate, or a self to set forth? Come on, be fair. KA's writing was distinctive in a way that not much writing is. When you read it, you know who is talking. That's genius, believe me.⁷

Paul Theodoulou and gay men

I thought Paul Theodoulou was rather going through the motions when writing last Sunday about gay men. Rarely for him, none of the points was original. Some were very old hat (e. g., let's have more gays so as to reduce overpopulation of the planet). In contrast I would like to try some novel thinking. It is prompted by Donald Prater's new life of Thomas Mann, who is described by John Carey (*Sunday Times* books, 12 November 1995) as a supremely great European novelist. Mann, says Carey, is so close to godlike that his books imprint themselves on the memory like segments of life. Fancy that!

The relevant thing about Mann is described by Carey as follows. Throughout his life he fell in love with a series of beautiful boys, starting at school and continuing until he was 75, when a young Bavarian hotel-waiter stirred his waning spirits (or was it his waning lust?). How little, Mann is said to have sighed, does world fame weigh against one smile from him. A smile, as we shall see, was all Mann required. Yes, the crucial thing about Mann's homosexuality was that the idea of sexual congress with a male disgusted him, and he would never engage in it. His urges were exactly blocked by his inhibitions. What a recipe for a lifetime of frustration! Is not this sort of attitude the clue to Paul's main target, homophobia? Indeed I would hazard a guess that it is the clue to sex-negativism generally. Gay sex, with its guilty use of faecal passages, really does bring us up against the clash of flesh with spirit. The latter is what the religious crave for, hence I would guess the suppurating springs of sex-hate generally, and of homophobia in particular.

Another problem of gay love, also illustrated by Thomas Mann, is that it centres on youthful beauty and attractiveness. Usually one partner is young and the other not so young. The attraction is one way only, and that is a recipe for nothing but unhappiness.⁸

⁶ Not sent to *Cyprus Mail*, 21 April 1995.

⁷ *Cyprus Mail*, 5 November 1995.

⁸ *Cyprus Mail*, 19 November 1995.

Fifty years of the *Cyprus Mail*

Your excellent colour supplement *50 Years of the Cyprus Mail* was so substantial and moving that it took me several weeks to digest. Having at last done this I offer warm congratulations, not just on the supplement but also on your first half-century of publication. As an Englishman, I mainly wish to single out features in your supplement which are redolent of the widely regretted colonial past. But before I start on that nostalgic exercise let me first note from your pages that in 1945, the year when I was demobbed as a World War II RAF pilot, the current President of Cyprus was himself an RAF airman. *Per ardua* (as they say) *ad astra*.

In 1944 I did a captain's course at Megiddo in Palestine. This included being blown up by the Stern Gang while I was staying at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. My first visit to Cyprus, which took place at this time, was involuntary. It occurred when I was forced to land a Wellington bomber which was suffering from engine trouble. I do not now know whereabouts in Cyprus the airfield would have been. Perhaps one of your readers can enlighten me on that.⁹

So I was interested to read of the Cyprus camps where blockade-running Jews heading for Palestine were detained. I remember that the Palestine Jews (apart from the Stern Gang) were very kind indeed to British servicemen. The reason, they said, was that they wished us to support their cause after the war.

I would have enjoyed the colonial days in Nicosia when ladies left their front doors open to signify they were 'at home' to calls made by horse-drawn carriage, domestic help was plentiful, cinema seats were numbered and reserved, and the performances ended with God Save the King. How right and suitable that a Cypriot youth should get three weeks' imprisonment for his unmannerly, indeed disloyal, whistling during this habitual, reverent gesture to the reigning monarch.

What a good thing too that Greek and Turkish Cypriots then mixed socially at parties hosted by the colonial government. How sensible and enlightened that it was the custom for the two communities to exchange invitations for weddings and other special occasions. Sofronis Sofroniou notes that in those days Greeks and Turks dwelt amicably 'because we all lived together under the rather invisible dominion of the British colonial administration'. What a pity such civilised inter-communal behaviour scarcely survived the end of British rule. How understandable that Vanthoulla Mangli should say that those were good years, when people were more carefree. It was, says Agni Vermeiren (and I can believe her), a golden age.

As an Oxford graduate myself, I noted with interest the comment by Sofronis Sofroniou that the Nicosia of those days was said to be the second town in the world, after Oxford, for the number of bicycles on its roads. Here I have sadly to record that my wife recently decided that cycling in Limassol is unsafe, and gave it up. I myself never thought it was safe, and so proceed as always on foot. Sofronis is right to say that lack of a telephone was no hardship. I thought of this only today, as I stood waiting in a shop for the assistant to cease her interesting conversation with a lifelong friend with whom she was to spend the next weekend in some very exciting fashion.

It was good of Sofronis to remind us of those dear departed days when walking the circuit of a village was a daily routine, 'a form of exercise and entertainment totally alien to the sedentary habits of today'. As he says, 'you met and talked to everybody'. So much the worse for today.

I close with a salute: long may you supply us with news in English of fascinating affairs Cypriotic!¹⁰

Paul Theodoulou on Damien Hirst

⁹ None of them did.

¹⁰ *Cyprus Mail*, 3 December 1995.

What Paul Theodoulou wrote last Sunday about Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child Divided* was, as always, full of meat. No one can argue with his attack on the 'institutional theory', the notion that anything at all can become art once someone has decided to display it in a gallery. One gallery director's decision can never be conclusive. Nor is the consensus of the 'art world' reliable. Paul denies that what Hirst is doing is art, but at least Hirst has us talking about art. Paul speaks of the 'passionate contempt' modern art arouses, but something is achieved if the contempt is passionate rather than lukewarm. To care is to live. To engage the passions is to live more strongly.

The people who awarded Hirst the Turner prize thought animal carcasses, when split down the middle, might qualify as works of art in J. M. W. Turner's august class. Like most of us, Paul thinks they were wrong. The difficulty in judging arises from the indeterminate significance of the term 'art'. In the Oxford English Dictionary it is given no less than eighteen meanings. So how can we sensibly debate the issue?

Let us try. The key OED definition speaks of the application of *skill* to subjects of taste. Without skill there cannot be art. What skill has Hirst displayed? Precious little we think. Yet doubt creeps in. An unskilled original might show some crude blinding insight, as with a few of the Sunday painters. Perhaps, I don't know, that is Hirst's contribution. As Paul admits, there cannot be a 'no entry' sign over the aesthetic doorway.

Mill called art the endeavour after perfection in execution. But execution cannot be everything, or even very much. What of soul, spirit - even genius? All the same, skill must have a place. The Bible (Acts xvii 29) speaks of 'stone graven by art'. What is left to us of early art, such as the temples of the Acropolis and Baalbek, owes much to the wondrous skill of the stonemasons. Credit must also be given to the unknown geniuses who guided their hands. Nor let us forget the sheer toil.

Matthew Arnold meant by art, not merely an aim to please but also a law of pure and flawless workmanship. Shakespeare said: use power with power and slay me not by art. He meant that in situations of power art is irrelevant. So ultimately the artist is a bystander.

Paul is right to challenge the egregious Mr Hirst, who has the impudence and bravery to proclaim himself an artist while apparently possessing little if any title to that prestigious badge. *Ars longa vita brevis*. Art is long, life is short. Posterity will judge, and we must leave it to them.¹¹

What Cyprus owes the British

A well-known, but negative, characteristic of the British genius is manifested in recent British regard for our late great Empire. It is self-depreciation. An aspect of Britons today (it was not always so) is that among foreigners many of us are diffident, insecure, and ashamed of the glories of our past. Ms Judith Gooding is like that. She said last week that Britons who dislike anything about Cyprus should not complain. Instead they should 'go home'.

But suppose, as with many Britons (including me), that Cyprus is their home? Or suppose they are here on holiday and not unreasonably want their money's worth? Let's turn this around. Would Ms Gooding dismissively tell a Cypriot living in England who complained about something there (as many do) that he should 'go home'? If not why not? What's the difference? If yes, is she ready to answer the charge of racism that would justly follow?

Millions today live in countries not of their birth. Like British residents in Cyprus, most pay their way and are welcome for that. They are not to be gagged over local conditions, though criticism should always be courteously expressed. Freedom of speech is a human right.

Citizens of the UK, Ms Gooding goes on, are not owed any favours by Cypriots. She adds 'quite the reverse'. What does she mean by that? Is there any sense to it, or is it one more example of unthinking British self-depreciation? Britons who have formed the habit of

¹¹ *Cyprus Mail*, 10 December 1995.

running down their own country are a growing pain. Ms Gooding must know that over the years the British have done a lot for Cypriots. I acknowledge that Cypriots have done a lot for Britain too. For example our distinguished President, Mr Clerides, fought in the RAF during World War II.

Let me give just one small example of what Cyprus owes the British. It was recently provided for me by a Cypriot gentleman, Mr Taveloudis. We were sitting together on a seat in the beautiful city park in Limassol, where Ms Gooding and I live. This park, you will remember, is the place where the annual wine festival is held. What Mr Taveloudis told me, as we were sitting together gazing fondly at the exotic trees and chatting of this and that, was that this beautiful park would never have existed had it not been for a British major. He held some colonial post in Limassol about seventy years ago (around the time I was born). The park, in which I delight to stroll and sit, was his very own idea. He planned and supervised the original work. But for him, Limassol would lack this amenity. Mr Taveloudis, I might add, grumbled on about the fact that his own people had not possessed the foresight to lay out similar parks when the population of Limassol soared after independence. 'People', he said 'need a park'.

Mr Taveloudis is one Cypriot who is grateful to the British. I know many more, and take satisfaction from it. Ms Gooding should not be ashamed to do the same.¹²

Cyprus and political correctness

Charlie Charalambous regrets that what PC stands for in Cyprus is 'personal computer'. I on the other hand am glad of it. We don't want political correctness here. However in the rest of this letter I shall please Charlie by using PC indeed to mean that.

As a writer, PC has cost me. In 1992 my literary agent Jeffrey Simmons (formerly head of a large publishing combine) put to the Oxford University Press, after a lot of work on it by me, a proposal for a Dictionary of Political Correctness. It was enthusiastically received by the senior staff member concerned. However he could not get it past the dons who form the Delegates of the Press, and have the final say. First, they objected to the title, being worried about the effect on sales in the United States of any mention of PC. Then they objected to the fact that I was striving to present the matter neutrally, rather than in a way favouring the PC movement. I was told that Sir Anthony Kenny, former head of my old college Balliol, disliked the idea of the Press publishing a work expressed to be about PC. On the left it is not PC even to acknowledge the existence of PC. It is regarded as a scare worked up by the right.

Then I had trouble with a novel. Only yesterday I received a fax from Jeffrey saying Orion *were* interested. He goes on:

'One reader thought the book 'incredibly interesting and intelligent' and another 'marvellously written and very cogent'. Unfortunately it fell down for them because someone else thought you were using your characters as cyphers for views of a politically incorrect nature. Ouch! This is where I came in.'

Only today I received from an old friend, a former Conservative MP, a Christmas letter telling how at Manchester University his daughter 'faces the full force of PC but has found that as long as you write left-wing essays you can be assured of good marks'.

Do we really want that sort of thing in Cyprus? To help readers judge, I offer the following thoughts.

PC hit Britain from the United States in 1991, and is rapidly growing in impact. It brings under *collective* attack hitherto separate value systems, such as racism, sexism, speciesism and homophobia, which have been criticised by sections of society for a long time. To these it adds newer targets like ablebodiedism, ageism, classism, elitism, fattism, heterosexism, and weightism, together with smoking and other ecological 'misbehaviour'.

¹² *Cyprus Weekly*, 22-28 December 1995.

The result is a movement that in Britain is making a difference to everyone's life. People lose their jobs over it. There is dissension on campus. School pupils are withdrawn from class, and there is strife over such things as the staging of Hindu school plays at Christmas. Cherished sayings, nursery rhymes and trade marks are banished. The English language is turned upside down by the introduction of phrases like 'differently abled' for the handicapped or 'vertically challenged' for short people. Familiar locutions, such as use of the generic masculine to embrace both sexes, become unacceptable. Long-established derogatory generalisations such as those relating to the characteristics of women ('the weaker sex') or particular races (e.g. suggesting the Welsh are dishonest, Scots and Jews mean, Afro-Caribbeans lazy or Irishmen drunkards or stupid) become totally unacceptable as injurious stereotyping. The monoculture (disliked by Charlie) that prevailed in Britain has given way to the tenets and practices of 'multiculturalism'.

All this involves deeper changes. Traditional male dominance is undermined. Qualities previously valued in women, such as femininity and beauty, are criticised as 'sexist' or 'lookist'. Striving for the highest standards is dismissed as 'elitism'. Treasures of the old culture are downgraded by the anxiety of teachers and the media not to be seen as 'Eurocentric'. Every religion and every way of life, even those formerly dismissed as 'heathen' or 'savage', is regarded as worthy of equal respect.

Many in the UK support these drastic changes, seeing them as at last redressing wrongs that have subordinated women, blacks, disabled people, gays, lesbians and other disadvantaged groups for centuries. Opponents see PC as threatening high standards, destroying superior cultures, and confronting the young with a bewildering variety of educational materials and no sure guide between them. The conflict can only deepen over time.

There are some good things in PC. For Cyprus, I would pick these out and resist the rest. Certainly we don't want to encourage it as a blanket ideology, stifling and restricting the true culture of the country.¹³

Paul Theodoulou on the internal combustion engine

Paul Theodoulou's thoughtful piece on the internal combustion engine, 'Motor in the cathedral', brings in many fascinating points which arise from the Bishop of Coventry's cathedral service commemorating this example of man's ingenuity. One notes the punning reference to Eliot's 'Murder in the Cathedral', written of an age which lacked the 'blessing' of the motor vehicle. The car-conscious Coventry bishop, Dr Simon Barrington-Ward, is a former chaplain to the frequently car-borne Queen Elizabeth. Does that tell us anything about his motive for holding this controversial service? Clearly he is a worthy successor to Dr Spacely-Trellis, the go-ahead Bishop of Bevington created for the *Daily Telegraph* by Michael Wharton (Peter Simple). There are also echoes of Wharton's other notable character J. Bonnington Jagworth, the demon motorist whose favourite tippie was engine oil quaffed from a machine-turned aluminium hubcap.

Yet there are serious points to be made about all this. Dr Barrington-Ward said the car has 'liberated and mobilised our whole society', rejoicing in the fact that now we are all carriage folk. Paul argues that this is untrue, since there are still a few people without a car. Yet he is not asserting that we would be better off with universal car ownership. On the contrary he seems to be suggesting (without actually saying so) that environmentally things would be improved if *no one* had a car. There's some muddled thinking here. One is tempted to say he can't have it both ways.

Then Paul complains that Dr Barrington-Ward allowed an 1897 Daimler and a modern electric car to be driven up the aisle of the cathedral. Paul says: 'even if the car were a wholly benign invention, it would be inappropriate to have it drive through what is a house of God. A car is a man-made product, a piece of machinery.' This again is inconsistent. If, as the Bible

¹³ *Cyprus Mail*, 7 January 1996.

tells us, man is God-made how can He object to anything man-made? It is, after all, God-made at one remove. Paul goes on to say that the car is 'as unholy as an object can be' because it is secular. Driving two vehicles up the cathedral aisle 'profaned the aura of sanctity and awe, of mystery and the numinous proper to a cathedral'. This is getting very near the heart of the matter. We know what Paul means here. The sense of holiness and the spiritual seems central to religion, a profound mystery whatever one's creed. Yet it cannot be right to make our religion so other-worldly that it denies and rejects the doings and creations of human beings. We need to find the holy in things of every day. A saint might be described as a person who lives entirely in the world of mankind without ever departing from the holy ambience of God.

Finally let me pick up what is perhaps the key word in Paul's piece. He says it could have been foretold that the motor car religious service in Coventry cathedral would be inappropriately *divisive* in a place of worship. I believe we need to recognise that such divisiveness is what true worship is about. God has chosen to give us many knotty problems to confront, not least about Himself. They do not have easy, obvious answers, and that must be His intention. There are pros and cons, which we must wrestle with. There are pluses and minuses: we are called on to resolve them if we can. There is good and bad in most things human, including the motor car. As human beings we must confront them, and seek reconciliation.¹⁴

A question of plumbing

I seek information on a somewhat delicate question of plumbing.

As a frequent visitor to Cyprus I have often seen in hotel lavatories and elsewhere notices of a rather intimate nature. They ask people not to put used toilet paper in the usual place, that is the w. c. pan, but in the separate bin provided.

No reason is ever given for this odd request, which I have never experienced in any other country. It seems on the face of it preposterous. To obey it requires carrying out a practice which is dirty and unhygienic, even presenting a health hazard.

Can anyone please tell me what the reason is for this request? If it is due to some inadequacy in the Cyprus plumbing systems why on earth is that not rectified?

Do people obey the request? Or is it, as I suspect, simply ignored? If so, what are the consequences?¹⁵

Asil Nadir et al.

I write as a British expatriate. This personal description of myself does not, as some might mistakenly assume (including an egregious social club owner on Limassol seafront, close to the old port), amount to the same thing, or anything remotely resembling the same thing, as a British ex-patriot. Though now an expatriate, I remain forever a true present British patriot of full blood, though uneasily in the face of what follows (in addition to much else, including Miss Jensen¹⁶).

An item published in the William Hickey column of the English *Daily Express* of 18 April 1996 gave us, under the heading 'A regal Parker Bowles banishes Nadir', some news of the English former military gentleman Mr Andrew Parker Bowles, also former husband of Camilla. She, it will be remembered, is the far from former, indeed still current, inamorata of England's heir apparent the Prince of Wales.

The item told us that Mr Andrew Parker Bowles, with his new wife Rosemary, booked in for a week's holiday at the Bellapais Gardens Hotel in Northern Cyprus. It went on to say that Mr

¹⁴ *Cyprus Mail*, 28 January 1996.

¹⁵ *Cyprus Mail*, 24 March 1996. Published anonymously. No response was published.

¹⁶ Murdered by a British soldier stationed in Cyprus.

Andrew Parker Bowles had banned from the cocktail party held at the hotel in honour of himself and his new lady wife certain notables of the region including Mr Rauf Denktash and Mr Asil Nadir. These two gentlemen, it seemed, accepted the ban and meekly stayed away.

The key man in all this seems to have been Lord Patrick Beresford, curiously described as the 'tour leader'. This man has honourable connections, being the son of the seventh Marquis of Waterford. So what was he doing in that *galère*?

The final curiosity in the report is that, for the duration of the visit, the hotel took down its portrait of the Prince of Wales.

So what is going on? Do these important British people know anything about the situation in Cyprus? Do they think it matters not at all if they take their sybaritic self-indulgent holidays in a territory not recognised by any country but Turkey? Idle questions I fear, but interesting all the same.¹⁷

Asil Nadir again

Under a banner headline on the front page (3 May 1996) you gave publicity to the ill-founded boasts of Mr Asil Nadir. I suggest you ought to have deployed an editor's basic right to exclude from publication statements that plainly are mischievous, calculating, self-serving and wrong.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *nadir* as the lowest point of anything. Do you really wish to publicise the misconceived aims of one who is the lowest point of whatever he is involved in?

As you report him, Mr Nadir says that, after having previously absconded, he would 'love' to return to Britain to face trial on the criminal charges outstanding against him if there is a change of government there. But he must know that a change of government would make not the slightest difference to the way he would be tried and sentenced in Britain.

As is well known, British courts are not merely totally independent of the government; they frequently rule against government actions as being illegal. There are very few other countries where that happens.¹⁸

Note Francis and Mary Bennion left Cyprus and resumed residence in England on 25 November 1996, although they did not become officially resident in England again until 8 April 1997. Their main reason for returning to live in England was that Mary became nervous following the earthquake that struck Cyprus on 9 October 1996. The *Cyprus Mail* for 10 October 1996 reported: 'An earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale with its epicentre 40km south-west of Paphos rocked the island for over a minute yesterday'. In their two rented houses in Pissouri Francis and Mary felt a violent shock around tea time which sent objects to the floor and the Bennions into the street.

¹⁷ *Cyprus Mail*, 28 April 1996.

¹⁸ To *Cyprus Mail*, 4 May 1996 (not published).