

### 13. The Magisterium and the Authority

*His Dark Materials* made Philip Pullman the focus of a certain amount of controversy. For some time the three volumes sold strongly without attracting the hostility that was greeting J K Rowling's books in some circles. Pullman suspects that Harry Potter initially diverted the general public attention away from him:

I've been surprised by how little criticism I've got. Harry Potter's been taking all the flak . . . the people – mainly from America's Bible Belt – who complain that Harry Potter promotes Satanism or witchcraft obviously haven't got enough in their lives. Meanwhile, I've been flying under the radar, saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God.<sup>1</sup>

Pullman doesn't beat about the bush on this: he says, 'I'm trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief',<sup>2</sup> though elsewhere he claims that he's 'not making an argument, or preaching a sermon or setting out a political tract: I'm telling a story.'<sup>3</sup> He insists he didn't set out to offend Christians. However, 'before too long I realised I was telling a story which would serve as a vehicle for exploring things which I had been thinking about over the years. Lyra came to me at the right stage of my life.'<sup>4</sup>

Throughout *Northern Lights* it seems as though only the Church is in Pullman's sights, but early in *The Subtle Knife*, Lord Asriel's manservant Thorold tells Serafina Pekkala that Asriel is 'aiming a rebellion against the highest power of all.

He's gone a-searching for the dwelling place of the Authority Himself, and he's a-going to destroy him' (SK p.48).

## ***Secret history***

A key bone of contention for Pullman is the issue of authority, which is of course why Pullman gives God the title of 'The Authority'. There is a sense in which the Authority and the Magisterium are just manifestations of misused power. But given Pullman's comments quoted above, it seems clear that he does have religion – rather than authority generally – in his sights. The Authority's title distances him in the reader's mind from the Christian God; it doesn't feel like Pullman is talking about the same being. But in case we fail to make the connection, Balthamos spells it out:

The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty – those were all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are. (AS p.33)

How can 'God' be an angel? In Pullman's underlying 'creation myth', matter became conscious of itself and generated Dust. Some of it 'condensed' into the first angel – a being of pure Dust. This new being was fully conscious, and when he began to see other angels condensing out of the Dust he realised what an opportunity he had. Since he came first, he could tell the subsequent angels that he was God and had created them. The angels loved and obeyed him, but the Sophia (Wisdom), the youngest and most beautiful angel, discovered the truth

about the Authority who subsequently expelled her. There was an angelic rebellion, but the Authority defeated it and imprisoned the rebels in one of the many worlds. The Sophia told them about the Authority's lies to human beings (and conscious beings in other worlds), and the rebels escaped to bring enlightenment, wisdom and full consciousness to the poor creatures under the Authority's rule.

This myth draws heavily on second century Gnosticism, but also inverts it. Gnosticism is all about *gnosis* – knowledge, in particular secret, esoteric knowledge open only to a privileged few. For the early Gnostics, the secret knowledge about reality was that the world was not created by God, but by an evil Demiurge (a lesser or false god); the true God is unreachable and unknowable. The Gnostics believed that matter is essentially evil, but Sophia, one of the angelic beings, managed to put a spark of true spiritual nature (*pneuma*) into human beings. Pullman doesn't believe this but sees it as a good story with 'immense explanatory power: it offers to explain why we feel . . . *exiled* in this world, *alienated* from joy and meaningfulness and the true connection we feel we must have with the universe.'<sup>5</sup> Where Pullman turns this on its head is in the attitude towards the physical. Gnosticism sees it as evil; Pullman sees it as something to be enjoyed and celebrated.

Pullman's myth also draws on *Paradise Lost's* angelic war, Satan's escape from his prison, and his tempting of Adam and Eve. By recasting God as the demiurge impostor, Pullman transforms him into the bad guy, and casts the rebels (including the Sophia) as the good guys. On this view, the Fall is a good thing (see

chapters 10 and 11). This is an ideal scenario for Pullman: a materialist universe which has found its own wisdom fighting off the deceptions and impositions of a 'god' who is really nothing of the sort. Archbishop Rowan Williams points out that:

Someone [the demiurge or the Authority] is trying to pull the wool over your eyes . . . and wisdom is an unmasking . . . If you have a view of God which makes God internal to the universe, that's what happens.<sup>6</sup>

Williams is saying that if you see God merely as part of the physical universe, then you automatically see him as a deceiver. The historically orthodox Christian understanding of God and the universe only works if God is transcendent.

### ***The death of God***

Pullman says that 'the Authority . . . is an ancient *idea* of God, kept alive artificially by those who benefit from his continued existence.'<sup>7</sup> He believes that for sensible people, 'the old assumptions have withered away . . . the idea of God with which I was brought up is now perfectly incredible.'<sup>8</sup> So God should be eliminated. In the real world, Pullman thinks the *idea* of God should be abandoned; in his imagined worlds, where the Authority is merely an angel, he can kill him off. He makes much of the fact that the Authority is getting old – early on he walks in the Garden with Adam and Eve, but eventually he is the 'Ancient of Days.'<sup>9</sup> So Pullman portrays him as now 'demented and powerless,' fearful, miserable and light as paper ('in other words he has a reality which is only symbolic'<sup>10</sup>). Will cuts open his crashed crystal litter to help him out:

The aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery, and he shrank away from what seemed like yet another threat . . . in the open air there was nothing to stop the wind from damaging him, and to their dismay his form began to loosen and dissolve. Only a few moments later he had vanished completely, and their last impression was of those eyes, blinking in wonder, and a sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief. Then he was gone: a mystery dissolving in mystery. (AS p.431-432)

In interviews, Pullman stresses the 'profound and exhausted relief' – he wants this to be seen as an act of compassion for a being who has had enough. For the being in *His Dark Materials* this is perfectly reasonable. But that being is *not* the God of the Bible.

The Bible is clear that God exists eternally and is unique. He is the creator of everything, and made human beings in his image. That means we are fully conscious not because we have rebelled against an angelic upstart, but because we reflect our creator. That much comes from the first chapter of the Bible. It's clear from elsewhere in the Bible that God is not simply different in *degree* from the angels – he's not just older and more powerful – but that he is radically different in his very *nature*.<sup>11</sup> It's also clear that he is not remote from his creation, threatened by it, or vindictive towards it; rather he is intimately involved in it moment by moment,<sup>12</sup> compassionate towards it,<sup>13</sup> and longing for both humans and the whole creation to find redemption.<sup>14</sup>

## ***Repellent religion***

Rowan Williams writes:

What the story makes you see is that if you believe in a mortal God, who can win and lose his power, your religion will be saturated with anxiety – and so with violence. In a sense, you could say that a mortal God needs to be killed . . . And if you see religious societies in which anxiety and violence predominate, you could do worse than ask what God it is that they believe in. The chances are that they secretly or unconsciously believe in a God who is just another inhabitant of the universe, only more powerful than anyone else. And if he is another inhabitant of the universe, then at the end of the day he just might be subject to change and chance like everything else.<sup>15</sup>

The Church in Lyra's world – and especially its ruling body, the Magisterium – is indeed 'saturated with anxiety and so with violence.' It is a singularly repellent institution. The Church's 'power over every aspect of life' was 'absolute' (NL p.31) and had been since the time of Calvin, who Pullman rather mischievously makes the last Pope in Lyra's world. In reality, John Calvin did live in Geneva but far from being Pope, he was one of the most significant figures in the Reformation. To have him as the end of the papal line signals clearly that in Lyra's world there was no Reformation. This makes it easy for Pullman to portray the Church as authoritarian, with a history of Inquisitions and the kinds of theological manoeuvring which provoked the Reformation in our world. Early in *Northern Lights* we learn about the Magisterium's interference in 'experimental theology',

and later of its interrogation of Rusakov 'under the rules of the Inquisition' (NL p.371). John Faa also tells Lyra about rumours that the Office of Inquisition is to be reinstated (NL p.128). These references to the Inquisition carry connotations of ruthlessness and violence.

The Church is responsible for the atrocity of Bolvangar by tacitly accepting the General Oblation Board's Experimental Station. The fact that Mrs Coulter can insist on the torturing of a captured witch (in the presence of various clerics including a Cardinal, and Fra Pavel, the Consistorial Court of Discipline's alethiometrist) suggests that the Magisterium is fully supportive of her. But the Board and its activities are sufficiently removed from the Magisterium to be denounced if necessary. The feeling evoked by the scenes on the boat is of unmitigated cruelty. Later in *The Subtle Knife*, the troubled times bring Ruta Skadi to meet with Serafina Pekkala and her clan. When Serafina invites her to address their council that evening, the visitor says:

Sisters . . . let me tell you . . . who it is that we must fight . . . It is the Magisterium, the church. For all its history . . . it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. And when it can't control them, it cuts them out. Some of you have seen what they did at Bolvangar. And that was horrible, but it is not the only such place, not the only such practice.

Sisters, you know only the north: I have travelled in the south lands. There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did – not in the same way, but just as horribly – they cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls – they cut them with knives so that

they shan't feel<sup>16</sup>. That is what the church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling. So if a war comes, and the church is on one side of it, we must be on the other, no matter what strange allies we find ourselves bound to. (SK p.52)

In *The Amber Spyglass*, we meet Semyon Borisovitch, the disgusting, drunk, witch-hating, and possibly paedophilic priest (AS pp. 102–107), and, in an outrageous slur on a real historical figure, we are told that John Calvin was responsible for ordering the deaths of children (AS p.217).<sup>17</sup> The Magisterium also shows callous cruelty with its solution to the problem of Lyra once it learns that she is a second Eve. The President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, Father Hugh MacPhail, proposes to have her hunted down and killed. The 'blazing-eyed' fanatic, Father Luis Gomez is quick to volunteer having already done sufficient masochistic penance in advance to offset the guilt of killing someone (AS p.75).<sup>18</sup> He is to stop at nothing to achieve his goal – but he's on his own; the Magisterium will disown him if he is ever discovered.

### ***Blurring fact and fiction***

Now, all this is so strongly anti-church as to be offensive to many people within the real-world Church. But *His Dark Materials* is *fantasy* literature. The Church Pullman describes is in another world; it is not the Church in our world. And yet something about the passion with which Pullman denounces it, and the fact that the Magisterium has not one single redeeming feature, leaves one feeling that the contempt is still directed at the real-world Church, even if the specific criticism is only within the realm of fiction. Pullman confirms this impression when he says

very similar things about the real-world Church in interviews. In a discussion on Readerville.com he was asked why all the Magisterium characters are bad. He replied:

That was due to a flaw in my artistry, no doubt. But I was trying to hit a target that deserved hitting, and there's no merit in pulling punches when important issues are at stake. Anyway, every time I thought I was overdoing it, up came another scandal about brutal monks mistreating children in Irish schools, or sadistic nuns tormenting children in Scottish orphanages, to name but two that came up recently. These things do happen.<sup>19</sup>

Pullman's view of Christian history is profoundly negative. At times he concedes that there have been some very positive aspects:

I'm fascinated by the history of religious thought and the structures of religious life. It was a natural thing to write about, because it encapsulates so much of the best as well as the worst of what human beings have done.<sup>20</sup>

He also happily affirms that there are many good Christian people. But the overall tenor of his assessment is still rather jaundiced. He says that his antipathy towards the Church comes from history:

It comes from the record of the Inquisition, persecuting heretics and torturing Jews and all that sort of stuff; and it comes from the other side, too, from the Protestants burning the Catholics. It comes from the

insensate pursuit of innocent and crazy old women, and from the Puritans in America burning and hanging the witches – and it comes not only from the Christian Church but also from the Taliban.

Every single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up by persecuting other people and killing them because they don't accept him. Wherever you look in history, you find that. It's still going on.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere he says:

The God who dies is the God of the burners of heretics, the hangers of witches, the persecutors of Jews, the officials who recently flogged that poor girl in Nigeria who had the misfortune to become pregnant after having been forced to have sex – all these people claim to know with absolute certainty that their God wants them to do these things. Well, I take them at their word, and I say in response that that God deserves to die.<sup>22</sup>

Pullman's antagonism towards religion generally, and Christianity in particular, certainly doesn't seem to be motivated by bad personal experiences of it. His grandfather's influence was very positive, and he admits that his early experiences of church gave him a love for the Bible, or at least, the Authorised Version of 1611:

All through my childhood, I went to church every Sunday. I went to Sunday school. I know the Bible very well. I know the hymns and the prayer book very well – and this is the old, authorized King James Version

of the Bible, and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer that used to be used in English churches, and the old hymns that used to be sung. When I go into a church now, I don't recognize the language. It's sort of modern and it's flat and it's bureaucratic and it's derivative . . . In attempting to be inclusive and friendly, it becomes awfully . . . jolly and I can't bear that. But I love the language and the atmosphere of the Bible and the prayer book.<sup>23</sup>

But this does not mean that he believes it. He continues:

I don't say I agree with it . . . Since growing up and since thinking about it, I've come to realize that the basis on which these belief systems were founded isn't there. I no longer believe in the God I used to believe in when I was a boy. But I do know the background very well, and I will never escape it. So although I call myself an atheist, I'm certainly a Christian atheist and even more particularly, a Church of England . . . atheist. And very specifically, a 1662 Book of Common Prayer atheist. I can't escape these influences on my background, and I would not wish to.

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It's interesting that he would not wish to escape these influences, but they are influences at a literary, artistic, perhaps emotional level, rather than at the level of belief. However, I would argue that this background also continues to have a profound influence on Pullman at a moral level too.

## ***Pullman's Christian values?***

Many of the values Philip champions in his books are thoroughly Christian. We saw in the previous chapter how committed he is to notions of truth and integrity. He is also a great believer in courage, love, freedom, responsibility, duty, curiosity and tolerance.

Pullman is correct to point out that in history and around the world today, there are all too many expressions of Christianity which are far removed from these values. But these values are nevertheless a core part of Christian behaviour when it is lived with integrity and in faithfulness to God. Everybody – Christian or otherwise – has lapses and fails to live up to his or her own standards. When so-called Christians depart significantly from Christian values, it shows that their faith is not a heart matter – not a relationship with a living God, but merely the inspiration for their own invented religion which superficially looks like genuine Christianity.

Pullman is also correct to say that these values are not *distinctively* Christian. One interviewer, Huw Spanner, asked Philip about the source of values: 'Where in a world without God does [the] sense of "ought" come from? Pullman's response was vigorous:

I'm amazed by the gall of Christians. You think that nobody can possibly be decent unless they've got the idea from God or something. Absolute bloody rubbish! Isn't it your experience that there are plenty of people in the world who don't believe who are very good, decent people? <sup>25</sup>

When Spanner pressed him on where the values come from, Pullman continued:

For goodness' sake! It comes from ordinary human decency. It comes from accumulated human wisdom – which includes the wisdom of such figures as Jesus Christ. Jesus, like many of the founders of great religions, was a moral genius, and he set out a number of things very clearly in the Gospels which if we all lived by them we'd all do much better. What a pity the Church doesn't listen to him!<sup>26</sup>

### ***Morality in a godless universe***

Pullman's comment that Christians 'think that nobody can possibly be decent unless they've got the idea from God or something,' misses the point. Spanner was not suggesting that each person's moral sense comes *directly* from God; nor was he denying that many non-Christians, including atheists, are deeply moral people. Pullman himself is a good example. The question is, why is there *any* sense of ought, *any* moral value, in a world without God? Why is it possible to talk about 'ordinary human decency' at all? How do we give such a phrase any meaning?

Pullman's view is that it is through 'accumulated human wisdom.' But *human* wisdom, accumulated or otherwise, has nothing transcendent about it. In other words, there's no objective basis for it, nowhere to ground it. On what basis do we decide that 'Jesus, like many of the founders of great religions, was a moral genius'? Which 'founders of great religions' do we include in the category of 'moral genius', and which do we exclude – and why? Is it simply that we *like* the

moral positions of Jesus, Zarathustra, Siddharta Gautama, Mohammed, or Guru Nanak,<sup>27</sup> but we don't like the moral positions of Sun Myung Moon,<sup>28</sup> Joseph Smith Jr.,<sup>29</sup> Charles T. Russell,<sup>30</sup> or L. Ron Hubbard?<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps it is the *accumulation* of wisdom over the centuries which allows us to see that some moral positions work well and others don't. But if we really were accumulating wisdom, surely we should be seeing an improvement in the moral foundations of society. Yet as I write this chapter it's exactly ten years since the genocide in Rwanda – 800,000 people killed in 100 days. Since then we've seen massacres in the former Yugoslavia, East Timor, Sierra Leone, Liberia and elsewhere. The supposedly morally upstanding forces of the west are currently facing allegations of abusing Iraqi prisoners. How much did we learn from the slaughter of six million Jews at the hands of the Third Reich? Why doesn't our 'accumulated human wisdom' prevent such things happening? Simply because it is human wisdom with no objective basis.

If morality is simply determined by humans, then why should one powerful group listen to the rest of the world? Or why should one individual listen to anyone else, when self-interest clashes with the 'herd morality' of society? If moral principles are simply the customs of wise human beings, then someone who chooses to reject those morals is doing nothing more serious than being an individualist, a non-conformist. Pullman himself is against the moral anarchy that would result from people making their own moral decisions without reference to everybody else – he believes there are genuine moral principles. But in a world

without God it seems to be extremely difficult to find any objective basis for those principles; they become arbitrary.

Christians are not claiming a monopoly on morality and values. But they believe that morality only functions because it has an objective basis in the character of God, *whether or not* anybody believes in him. Pullman rejects the existence of God yet clings to moral principles – but basing these simply on ‘accumulated human wisdom’ isn’t good enough. Besides which, Pullman is a materialist – he believes this world is all there is. So where does his cherished freedom come from? If there is nothing other than a physical universe then *everything* Pullman does or thinks is a result of physical processes. Everything is a result of his genetic inheritance or of physical influences from outside his body. But these two are a result of prior physical processes. Everything is deterministic – there is no freedom. As Will Provine, professor of biological sciences and the history of biology at Cornell University, insists:

Humans are comprised only of heredity and environment, both of which are deterministic. There is simply no room for the traditional concepts of human free-will. That is, humans do make decisions and they go through decision-making processes, but all of these are deterministic. So from my perspective as a naturalist, there's not even a possibility that human beings have free will.<sup>32</sup>

It's not sufficient to bring in quantum effects within the human brain to answer this problem either – all that does is introduce complete randomness into the mix. The only way humans can be genuinely free to make real moral choices is if

something outside the physical system of the universe gives us that freedom – if there is a God.

But Pullman doesn't believe there is a God – or at least, he says he's seen no evidence of God; he doesn't rule out the possibility that God may exist somewhere very remote from human life. The Christian response is that the evidence is all around – a world of magnificent beauty and diversity; a world of freedom and moral responsibility; a world in which even today the vast majority of people believe in the existence of the supernatural;<sup>33</sup> and in particular there is the historical textual evidence of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is possible to explain such things away with alternative theories, but the question is which explanation best fits *all* the evidence – a materialistic, deterministic universe; or a God who is intimately involved with his creation? A rationalist man like Philip Pullman sees the idea of God as 'now perfectly incredible,'<sup>34</sup> but as Will says, 'You think things have to be *possible*? Things have to be *true*!' (SK p.337).

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<sup>1</sup> Meacham, Steve: 'The shed where God died' in *Sidney Morning Herald* 13 December 2003

<sup>2</sup> Wartofsky, Alona: 'The Last Word' in *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2001

<sup>3</sup> Spanner, Huw: 'Heat and Dust' in *Third Way*, vol. 25 no. 2 April 2002 pages 22–26

<sup>4</sup> Meacham: 'The shed where God died'

<sup>5</sup> Pullman, Philip: 'The Republic of Heaven' in *The Horn Book Magazine* November/December 2001, p.657

<sup>6</sup> Pullman, Philip and Williams, Rowan: 'The Dark Materials debate: life, God, the universe . . .' in *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 March 2004

<sup>7</sup> Pullman, Philip, Discussion on Readerville.com  
([www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.17@.ef6c70e/28](http://www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.17@.ef6c70e/28))

<sup>8</sup> Pullman: 'The Republic of Heaven', p.655

<sup>9</sup> Pullman, Philip: *His Dark Materials: The Myth* (unpublished)

<sup>10</sup> Pullman and Williams: 'The Dark Materials debate: life, God, the universe . . .'

<sup>11</sup> See Hebrews 1 for one discussion of Jesus the Son of God's superiority to angels.

<sup>12</sup> See Hebrews 1:3 for example

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Psalm 111 and Psalm 145

<sup>14</sup> See Romans 8:19–23

<sup>15</sup> Williams, Rowan: 'A near-miraculous triumph' in *The Guardian*, 10 March 2004

<sup>16</sup> Male circumcision is a central part of the religious practices of Jews and muslims; it is generally performed expertly and carries little or no health risk. Female circumcision, also known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is a cultural practice *not* a religious one (though there is some controversy within Islam about two sayings of Mohammed which are interpreted as approving of the practice). It is a barbaric practice intended to preserve a girl's virginity by preventing or reducing any sexual feeling, and it carries very severe health risks. For more information, see [www.religioustolerance.org/fem\\_cirm.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/fem_cirm.htm).

<sup>17</sup> Since John Calvin is a real historical figure in our world, it's important to remember at this point that Pullman is writing about a fictional John Calvin in another world. The Calvin in our world was never guilty of such a thing.

<sup>18</sup> The idea of pre-emptive absolution is Pullman's invention – it is not an idea accepted in any orthodox, mainstream church.

<sup>19</sup> Pullman, Philip: Discussion on Readerville.com  
([www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.18@.ef6c70e/30](http://www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.18@.ef6c70e/30))

<sup>20</sup> Pullman, Philip: Discussion on Readerville.com  
([www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.11@.ef6c70e/111](http://www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.11@.ef6c70e/111))

<sup>21</sup> Spanner: 'Heat and Dust'

<sup>22</sup> Pullman, Philip: Discussion on Readerville.com  
([www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.17@.ef6c70e/28](http://www.readerville.com/WebX?14@216.M6d8aZSiqFu.17@.ef6c70e/28))

<sup>23</sup> Odean, Kathleen: 'The story master' in *School Library Journal*, 1 October 2000  
([www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/ca153054](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/ca153054))

<sup>24</sup> Odean: 'The story master'

<sup>25</sup> Spanner: 'Heat and Dust'

<sup>26</sup> Pullman says: 'Jesus is a very interesting character, whom the Christian church in all its branches has completely misunderstood – more truthfully, misrepresented – for two thousand years. In almost every respect his actual words directly contradict what churches tell us - about the family, to take one obvious and current example. To hear the church, you'd think that Jesus was completely obsessed by the question of homosexuality and what a threat it was to the family. But he never mentions homosexuality, and his view of families was that you should leave them behind entirely. And so on. My view of him, of course, would say that he was not God at all, but a man – a man of genius, a great moral teacher and storyteller, but only a man – who died. The resurrection was a story made up later in order to consolidate the authority of the new and shaky structure of the church, and to bolster the fantasies of Paul about the imminent end of the world.' (personal email to the author, 16 June 2004)

<sup>27</sup> Zarathustra (Zoroaster in Greek) (probably around 1500 BC) was the founder of Zoroastrianism; Siddharta Gautama (563–483 BC) was the founder of Buddhism; Mohammed (570–632 AD) was the founder of Islam; and Guru Nanak (1469–1539 AD) was the founder of Sikhism.

<sup>28</sup> Sun Myung Moon (born 1954) is the founder of the Unification Church. Moon and his followers have frequently been accused of manipulative recruiting techniques, deception and brainwashing. Moon was convicted of tax fraud in 1982 and is alleged to have links with extremist right-wing organisations and arms manufacturers. While I was writing this chapter it was announced that Moon, while in the US Senate, had declared himself Messiah, and claimed that 'communist leaders such as Marx and Lenin, who committed all manner of barbarity, and dictators such as Hitler and Stalin, have found strength in my teachings, mended their ways and been reborn as new persons.' (Julian Borger, 'Moonie leader 'crowned' in Senate' *The Guardian*, 24 June 2004) *See also* [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun\\_Myung\\_Moon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Myung_Moon).

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844) was the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). He was accused of being a charlatan, and many of his early associates turned against him, not least because of his practice of polygamy. The Mormon church is accused of being authoritarian, deceptive and oppressive of women, as well as secretly continuing to encourage polygamy. *See* [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_Jesus\\_Christ\\_of\\_Latter-day\\_Saints](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Jesus_Christ_of_Latter-day_Saints) and [www.irr.org/mit/Default.html](http://www.irr.org/mit/Default.html).

<sup>30</sup> Charles T. Russell (1852–1916) was the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses (although this is disputed by some). He too is accused of being a charlatan and not only lost a libel suit when contesting such allegations, but perjured himself in the process. The history of failed prophecies (it has prophesied the end of the world at least six specific dates). *See* [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah's\\_Witnesses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jehovah's_Witnesses) and [www.watchtowerinformationsservice.org](http://www.watchtowerinformationsservice.org).

<sup>31</sup> L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) was the founder of the Church of Scientology. Hubbard, a science fiction writer and convicted thief, is said to have been a pathological liar, a fraud, a cheat, a wife-beater, alcoholic and drug-addict. The Church of Scientology has repeatedly been accused of mind

control, exploitation, espionage, intimidation, violence, even murder. See

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology) and [www.clambake.org](http://www.clambake.org).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Stannard, Russell: *Science and Wonders: conversations about science and belief* (Faber & Faber, 1996) p.60

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Nelson argues that many secular people have a deep, unconscious belief in the transcendent which is why science fiction and fantasy are such popular genres in both literature and film. (*The Secret Life of Puppets* (Harvard University Press, 2003)).

<sup>34</sup> Pullman: 'The Republic of Heaven', p.655