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The Times

March 21, 2005

True fiction

Oh, Lordy, what a school

BY DAVID MATTIN

Ofsted has praised the educational policies of the Exclusive Brethren. At an open day . . .

“GOOD morning . . . soldiers of evil,” said the master, with his head down. “I mean, non-brethren. With reluctance I welcome you to our Exclusive Brethren school open — but not too open — day. I hope that during your visit you will feel only slightly guilty about your sinful lives.”

A small troupe of nervous parents and children followed him. On one wall was an honour board entitled Best Bible Reader.

“I expect some of you are wondering about this,” he continued from behind a large, black screen. “This is to stop me inadvertently looking into your eyes, which are those of the Devil. Right, let’s get going! First question?”

“It’s awfully dark in here,” volunteered one timid father.

“Yes. Well, at the Exclusive Brethren school we do not have windows, which are a portal to the world of sin outside. I have not left this building since 1908, but I hear that many beyond these walls have also become disillusioned with windows, which, to confuse us, the devil has called 98 or XP.”

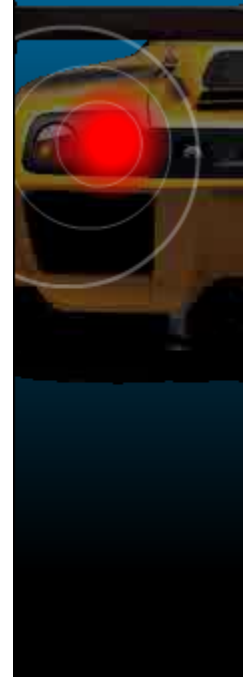
The crowd shuffled its feet before a concerned mother asked: “Will we be able to contact our children via e-mail?”

“The internet,” said the headmaster, “is a device created by Satan to yoke together unbelievers. In www we see the stamp of the devil, and it says: wicked, wicked, wicked.”

A mother asked: “Do you do any sports? I don’t want little Alfred’s health to suffer.”



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“Contrary to the teachings of the established churches, Our Lord did not engage in sports, but we have a long tradition in the school game of Second Coming Rounders, which works as normal but with bonus points if Christ’s reign on earth starts when your team is in to bat.”

“What about the syllabus?” asked a father. “Do you teach mathematics?”

“Yes, but this is not some kind of university. When we do arithmetic, it’s never about money. One question might be: ‘If Matthew contributes seven palm leaves, and Mark five, and an evildoer steals two, how many are there?’ Or: ‘If a twig burns in three minutes and a bush has 30 twigs, how long does it take for the whole bush to combust?’ ”

“What about lunch?” said one podgy boy. “Do we get chicken drumsticks?”

“The words of Our Lord pertaining to school dinners were not recorded, so we’ve taken a liberal view — allowing turnips *and* carrots, so long as they come from our allotment and have not been exposed to mobile phones.”

“Is everything evil?” asked one father, crossly. “What on earth is wrong with mobiles?”

“The Devil moves among us in radio-wave form, brother. Is not Orange curiously close to another colour: red, the red heat of Hell?”

“What about discipline? Do you have expulsions?” said a primly dressed man.

“We really don’t do expulsions,” said the headmaster. “The Lord has already expelled us from The Garden. We prefer to call our method excommunication.” He smiled, then added: “You really have got the wrong end of the stick, haven’t you? Or should I say pitchfork?”

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