

## CULTURE VULTURE

# Belief: just a private affair?

By TONY CUMMINGS

THE debacle of Glenn Hoddle's sacking by the FA might give a certain smug satisfaction to those Christians long embarrassed by the England football manager.

The Christian community's naive and worldly obsession with fame and celebrity had been such that many believers were happy to identify with Glenn when it was first announced he was "born again". But like other high profile figures such as boxer Mike Tyson and model Samantha Fox, reports of Glenn's Christian conversion proved as unreliable as a chocolate fireguard. Within a year or two, Christians were wincing as the reports of Glenn's enthusiastic support for a New Age teacher filled Britain's newspapers.

Now the doctrines of demons – and the belief that anyone born with a handicap is in fact being punished for sin in a previous life is indeed a concept with origins in the Pit – has taken its toll. But before Christians get too carried away in a display of santimonious doctrinal correctness, they might care to consider the implications of Hoddle's ignominious fall from high sporting office. His sacking will no doubt reinforce the views of those who contend that religious belief should be a

completely private activity, best kept very much to oneself.

A piece in the *Daily Mail* the day after Hoddle's dismissal echoes this view. It reads: "What Hoddle was sacked for yesterday was not for sharing the metaphysical beliefs of a few billion Hindus, Buddhists and Mrs Eileen Drewery, but for being dumb enough to reveal them on BBC radio and to a thoroughly reliable reporter on *The Times*".

This somewhat cynical belief that a sensible religion is a

privatised one has long held sway, particularly among politicians. Now, no doubt, more figures in the public eye will think twice before opening their mouths about something as potentially divisive as religious belief.

Committed Christians must not take such an option. We are all called to go out into the world and make disciples. We are all called to be witnesses of what Christ has done in our lives. Let's hope and pray that while the celebrities with pernicious New Age ideologies or those sporting the weak and wet beliefs of nominal Christianity will keep their thoughts to themselves, committed Christians will continue to speak of the riches they've found in Christ.

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[www.christianherald.org.uk/vulture.htm](http://www.christianherald.org.uk/vulture.htm)

■ Tony Cummings is editor of CrossRhythms magazine and a broadcaster with UCB/CrossRhythms



## profile

SIMON WATKINSON



meets Paddy Henderson OBE, a man

with a mission to bring the love of Jesus to the poor in Bulgaria

PADDY Henderson feeds 620 people a day in Sofia, Bulgaria. A former British Army logistics officer, he believes his army experience has prepared him well for his role as a relief aid worker.

Paddy's army training was related to the project management and distribution of equipment in countries whose infrastructure had been disseminated. Referring to his service in northern Norway as having well equipped him for winter feeding programmes, Paddy beamed: "You see, I've just been trained for the cold!"

After leaving the Army, Paddy and his wife Carol worked for Tearfund in Northern Armenia for seven months. Here they oversaw two major food distributions (each involving 960 tons of food) and became friends of Mission Ost, an independent Danish humanitarian and missionary organisation.

Paddy is now Mission Ost field director and chairman of the Trussell

Trust, a registered UK charity (no. 1061207) funding small, one-off relief and development projects, in the UK and overseas.

With Mission Ost, the Trust is currently involved with Lipniza Orphanage, a Government-owned orphanage and residential school for 50 children aged from four to 16. In this dilapidated building, the children lived in freezing squalor with woefully inadequate toilet facilities.

To date, the Trussell Trust has given these children much needed love and attention; set up a plan to improve sanitation within the orphanage and, with the help of two stage designers from Forest Forge Theatre, redecorated its main walls.

"We're about people; we know the names and stories of all the kids in the orphanage. The 'Murals Project' went ahead because children need visual stimulus!" Paddy explained.

"They now wake up with colour and we've also supplied new bed linen."

As the orphanage closes for holiday periods, those with nowhere to go used to drift back to Sofia, where they fell prey to the dangers of street life. Each holiday, two or three children never returned.

But no children were 'lost' in 1998 because Mission Ost and the

Trussell Trust sent them and their support staff away to a safe haven during holiday periods. The 1998 Christmas Lipniza project provided a 12-day stay (costing just £20 per child) for 50 children.

Paddy is also overseeing the refurbishment of the Trun Orphanage (which featured in a BBC 1 *Songs of Praise* programme with Sir Cliff Richard last year).

"We'll assess an orphanage and then work through a total refurbishment programme. We'll leave it after a year with a sustainability

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project which will give training for the children and help provide food," Paddy stipulated.

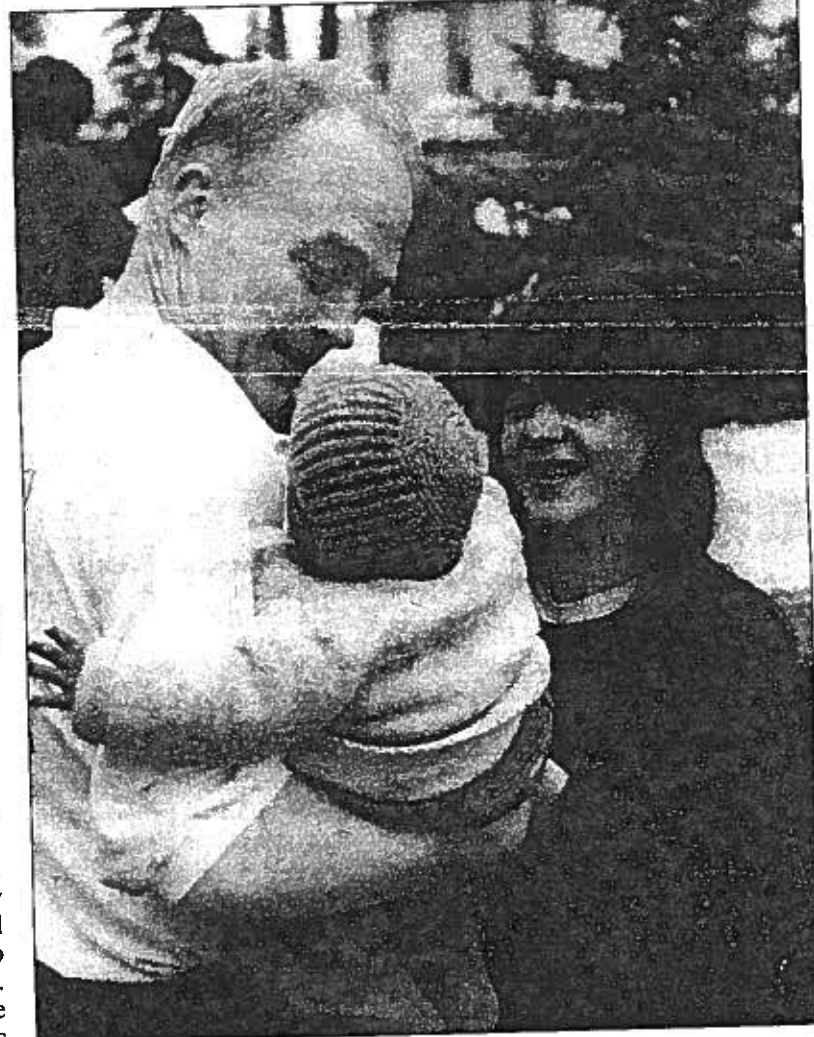
"This is essential in the Gypsy areas where unemployment rates are 93-97%."

"We just have more work than we can resource! There are roughly 138 orphanages in Bulgaria and we're working in two. We won't go onto a third until these are finished. There's no point in spreading the jam so thinly that it benefits nobody. We could feed thousands of people in Sofia and they'd still all be starving. It's much better to feed 600 properly," Paddy stressed.

In Sofia, Tearfund and Mission Ost are running both an elderly soup kitchen which feeds 400 people and a feeding project at the Central Station which caters for over 120 street children.

"The best part of this job is the people and not the paperwork!" Paddy mused, showing me photos of tiny children standing barefoot on icy ground.

Pointing to a toddler in rags, Paddy reflected, "When I discovered that this little chap's name was Jesus, it really made me think!"



● Paddy introduces Stepka and her son Boris

"Most of the street children feel like vermin," Paddy continued, "When I chat to them and give them a hug it empowers them by making them feel wanted."

"It's just so amazing to see them smile when they realise I'm interested in them. We give them food, clothing and, if necessary, take them to the doctor. All the provisions are bought in Bulgaria."

"Being on the streets or in the orphanage or with the elderly people is just so uplifting because you're enhancing their quality of life, but I just hate leaving them behind. It's the worst part of the job."

"I just want to tell these people how much Jesus loves them." Paddy enthused as we went our separate ways.

■ Simon Watkinson is a freelance journalist based in Wiltshire

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● Paddy explains his work to Sir Cliff Richard and Steve Chalke for the special *Songs of Praise* programme