

New Year Stuff & Nonsense

New Year just wouldn't be the same without the New Year honours, nor it seems, without the annual exploitation of astrology. While popular magazines feature year-ahead predictions from the likes of Mystic Meg, the more 'credulous' of the broadsheets cater to the same human fascination in all things mysterious through ridicule. Just to prove that you can have your harmless fun and knock it too, some will run double page Sun-sign features which are often nothing short of an insult to most astrologers, whilst balancing them with articles of 'reasoned' comment on why astrology is an insult to the intellect. Attracting prime time attention at this time of year is never difficult; representing yourself as an astrologer often requires an ability to be outrageous and extreme, but it's possible for just about any insignificant and futile attack on astrology to be grasped and magnified by an ever hungry press looking to feed its readers their supply of year end mysticism.

Well at the turn of this New Year, we thought we'd consider the three most ludicrous suggestions presented by the media of late and award them our own certificates of achievement. The nominations weren't hard to find, and we present them here in chronological order:

1 There are 13 signs of the zodiac, not 12 as astrologers would have us believe

— Full scale media attention was given to this in January 1995 when Dr Jacqueline Mitton of the Royal Astronomical Society 'discovered' that the Sun passes through part of the constellation Ophiuchus in December. She suggested that if astrologers really knew what they were talking about, they'd be using 13 zodiacal signs, not 12.

2 Astrology is purely superstitious nonsense, based entirely on quackery without 'a smidgen of validity... and neither evidence nor any inkling of rationale that might tempt us to look for evidence'

— Again timed to maximise New Year interest to its fullest, self-appointed expert and astrological ignoramus Richard Dawkins gained much self-attention through his outrageously uninformed criticisms against astrologers in January 1996, just in time to publicise his new book.

3 Astrology is spiritually damaging. The cause of breakdown in family life and decaying moral values

— This is the latest snippet that the media has chosen to turn into a hot debate. This conclusion was presented in a report commissioned by the Church of England to explore why people are turning to astrologers; and why, although 70% of us believe in God, only 14% of us seem willing to commit our time to spiritually flat church services. Not only do the C. of E. believe that 'Thou shalt not worship any God but Mine', they also believe that 'Thou shalt not find any other route to that God but mine', it seems.

Though each in itself would be an easy argument to defend, taken together there's a strong, three-pronged attack here. Consider the overall message that we're up against:



- 1 Astrology is not set up right, even by its own logic.
- 2 If it is set up right, it's still ridiculous, illogical, ineffectual and stupid.
- 3 If it isn't ridiculous, ineffectual and stupid; it's potentially dangerous, morally damaging and bad for the soul.

What chance do we have in maintaining a position of respectability when scientific ignorance, sceptical hostility and religious prejudice combine against us? Alas our responses are too reasoned to be deserving of equal media air time; but for the record let's just summarise them here with our own 'raspberry' awards for the idiocy of the initiators.

To the claim that is most unlikely to add up — Jacqueline Mitton and her 13 sign zodiac.

Dr Mitton, astrologers have *always* been aware of the presence and significance of Ophiuchus. But it is not a zodiacal sign. The signs of the zodiac are mathematical divisions of the ecliptic which relate symbolically to the seasons, the Sun's annual cycle, and the 12 months of the year. They are not observable — where *have* you been looking for them? Please let us know if you ever manage to spot one through your telescope.

Surely you don't need an astrologer to point out that the first zodiacal sign is not measured from the start of the constellation Aries, but reckoned (by astronomers and astrologers alike) to begin at the Spring Equinox where the Sun crosses the Equator in March. Nor do you need us to tell you that none of the zodiacal signs match up to the constellations they were named after. So what was your motive for publicising the 'discovery' that was actually 2000 years too late? Was it self-promotion (?) or sheer irritation at people confusing you for an astrologer and presuming that you can tell them something meaningful?

In case you haven't 'discovered' this yet, astrologers use zodiac signs very differently to how they use constellations, and the fact that they don't overlap makes no difference to the ability to interpret a chart.

To the claim most lacking in validity, evidence, or any inkling of rationale —

Richard Dawkins: that astrology has no proof.

According to Dawkins, Mystic Meg is the 'best of the bunch' and astrologers are all 'quacks' who drive around in chauffeur-driven stretch limos. Perhaps we should increase our subscription rates? Sadly my experience suggests that to study this subject seriously it is almost a prerequisite to be financially independent or happy to be poor. I for one would happily to swap my income for Dawkins'.

Ignoring the host of well-documented studies that show murders, suicide rates, haemorrhaging and violence all hit peaks on new and full Moons, Dawkins claims the Moon exerts no more of a psychic or gravitational pull on a new-born baby than the doctor's paunch across the room. I don't profess to know much about the attraction of doctors' paunches, but I do know that the Moon moves the oceans — can the doctor's paunch do that? Given that at times of full Moon the surface tension of all water is increased, and the human body is mainly composed of water, is the possibility that this powerful cosmic force affects us too much to ask? Not to a real scientist it isn't; one who doesn't fear that being open-minded may let the brain fall out.



Dawkins typifies the prejudiced, hard-nosed sceptic who can't accept that the arguments we make for an integrated cosmos are reasonable and informed. Perhaps it scares him to live with the idea of a universe with a spiritual essence. How could he quantify it, measure it, test it? How could he live with an awareness of Divine intelligence that might be greater than his own?

Astrologers maintain there is no real distinction between the natural world and the celestial environment. Our 'universe' (L: *One Being*) is a living, vibrant whole. How could anyone with any inkling of rationale deny that the rhythms of the Sun, Moon, Earth and stars determine the conditions we live under? Every day the quality of life shifts through morning, noon, evening and night, and every year a grander shift occurs through the youthful energy of spring, the maturity of summer, the mellowing of autumn and the decay of winter. Take a few moments to observe the world of nature Mr Dawkins, and consider how those cycles form the backbone in the behaviour patterns of plants and animals. Human beings may be more sophisticated and complex, but we are still part of nature's scheme, still motivated by the same fundamental instincts as every other living species — to develop, mate, reproduce, nurture the young and pass on to the next generation — and although the influence is often now an unconscious one, we are still moved by the same cosmic patterns that are interwoven through the motions of the Sun and Moon.

Astrology is not the '*aesthetic affront*' that Dawkins claims it to be, and neither is the work of Plato, Pythagoras and all philosophers who thought as astrologers do and knew that to grasp the nature of the universe one must approach it with the heart and soul as well as the brain. Such people explored the depth of astrology while Dawkins splashes around in his shallow pool of Mystic Megs and Sun-signs.

It would, of course, be difficult for anyone to follow Dawkins' level of arrogance and ignorance — anyone except Dawkins that is, and sure enough he's at it again in the run-up to Christmas 1996, promoting himself on the BBC, the Daily Telegraph, Radio 4, and anywhere that will air his misinformed views and add to his media celebrity status.

To the claim that is most devoid of spiritual enlightenment, wisdom or understanding —

The Church of England: that astrology is bad for the soul

Not as arrogant as Dawkins or as ignorant as Mitton, but surely the most bizarre claim of all, is the current suggestion that falling attendance in church is the result of an upsurge of '*folk religion*' epitomised by horoscopes. This 'worrying trend' towards 'drifting belief and New Age Philosophy' is apparently the cause of 'fragmentation of society' and the breakdown of traditional family moral values — according to a report which took some people with a lot of time to waste nearly five years to compile.

In their haste to find someone other than the Church to be responsible for the Church's failings, and in their eagerness to attack the activities of astrologers, the Church appears to have forgotten the words of that wise man located, erm... by three wise men and a star — *let him that is without sin cast the first stone?* Can the Church of England not see the 'fragmentation of society' reflected closer to home in the behaviour of its own representatives, and that more often

than not when a high-ranking cleric displays any kind of notable behaviour it is the result of impropriety, sexual deviation, public squabbling or dispute over Church politics. On the day the Times ran the headline *Faith in horoscopes is a sign of moral decay, say Churches*, the same page ran the story *Shut the Cathedral, says Dean in-Feud*. It went:

"The beleaguered Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, who has been involved in a feud with another senior clergyman, yesterday called for the Cathedral to be closed for six months and exorcised, and for everyone from the Bishop down to be sacked." (*Times*, Nov. 11, 1996) I can just imagine the conversation taking place in Church headquarters.

Dean 1: Very worrying, no one comes to Church anymore.

Dean 2: Yes, very worrying, and strange too because it seems that more people than ever do believe in God.

Dean 1: A sad situation, clearly the result of astrology.

Dean 2: Damned astrology, the work of the devil. People are losing touch with family values and morality. No one knows the meaning of tolerance or acceptance anymore. They should all be burnt at the stake.

Dean 1: I agree its a nuisance but that's perhaps a bit extreme. It is murder you know.

Dean 2: Are you arguing with me?

Dean 1: So what if I am? Do you want to make a public debacle over it? Where's my press agent?

Historically, Christianity accepts astrology as harmonious to the teachings of the Bible, as long as it does not deny the power of the individual to use their own free will in response to the planetary influences. The stars were seen to be the instruments of the Lord, and subject to his power. The book of Daniel teems with tales of prophecy and Daniel himself was an astrologer. Every prayer and hymn book is full of references to the power of Heaven; every church abounds with astrological symbolism in its architecture; many Popes have practised or employed the services of astrologers and St. Thomas Aquinas firmly accepted its practice saying "Astrologers can, for the most part, make true predictions, especially for mankind in general".

To suggest that astrology is a 'New Age philosophy' is a bit of a joke, considering it predates Christianity by 2000 years and as a philosophy helped more than any other to foster the popularisation of Christianity in the 3rd century AD. We were, after all, the first to advocate monotheism: One God, resident in all parts.

There is nothing in astrological philosophy that encourages anti-Christian practices, nor does any part of it endorse devil-worship, demonology, spells, witchcraft or any kind of selfish act — despite what some members of the media and church authorities would have us believe. They claim that astrologers prey on the vulnerable, but the whole philosophy of astrology is aimed at promoting personal development, spiritual growth, universal harmony and wisdom. We do not prey on the vulnerable, we seek to help them, and we give them the confidence and comfort that some members of Britain's official religion seem unable to offer, just as they seem unable to take an honest, critical look at why they no longer appeal to or inspire the populace.

Only in recent times do the Christian authorities appear to have become so narrow-minded, and this is the result of their own ignorance of the basis of their teachings and the

