

# FREE THINKER

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## HOW RATIONAL CAN YOU GET?

CHRISTIANS never cease to amaze us by their approval of double-talk and deception, but how rational and honest can we Secular-Humanists claim to be?

The early Christian Fathers

"laid down as a distinct proposition that pious frauds were justifiable and even laudable, and if they had not laid this down they would nevertheless have practised them as a necessary consequence of their doctrine of exclusive salvation" (Lecky's *Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. 1, p. 144).

This is part of our "Christian heritage". Hypocrisy was also defended in Addis and Arnold's *Catholic Dictionary* — "Almost all theologians hold that it is sometimes lawful to use a mental reservation . . ." and none makes better use of this than our modernist Christians today. The orthodox Protestant propaganda was always full of attacks on the dishonesty of the Catholics. In the *Scottish Guardian* of the 1890's we read

"It is impossible to exaggerate the general untrustworthiness of Roman Catholic statements and quotations, even when the writers have no polemical end to gain by their misrepresentations".

And of course Rationalists would not have had much more to say in favour of the Protestants!

When a Christian today says "I only believe as I do because indoctrination has made it emotionally impossible for me to reject my childhood faith", or "I only remain an Anglican because my bread and butter depends on it" we can understand. Secular-Humanists have their own problems when to express their beliefs openly is to threaten their careers or those of their husbands. But whereas such an attitude is understandable and even lovable in the individual, in the official representatives of organisations which are themselves dependent on fraud and hypocrisy for their survival, it is a different matter.

The facts of life regarding man's inconsistency were revealed to me before the war when I watched my left-wing, anti-monarchist elder brother jumping up and down outside Buckingham Palace, shouting with the crowd, "We want the King! We want the King!" "Something" (as *Woman's Own* might put it) "went out of my life". And a very good thing, too. Rationalists, of course, are often

inconsistent and irrational, and if any virtue at all be ours it is the desire to recognise this and to admit it without pride. Nostalgia and sentimentality can equally distort judgment; it is the "rational" man who can say, "I like that picture because I grew up with it and not because I think it is good art", or "although I like the music (or architecture) I know it is only because of its associations. I really cannot pretend that the 'Church's One Foundation' is anything but second-rate . . ." Reason here is following close on the emotions, and honesty and humility are the result. Take away the reasoning (the clear thinking) and you have the potentiality of all manner of nonsense to be proclaimed as "true" or "valuable" just because it is strongly felt.

It may be that it is doubt about Man's ability to be honest with himself that prompts some of our supporters to belittle the "do-gooders". It is imagined perhaps that behind every social reformer there is a Lord or Lady Bountiful, dispensing soup to a poor who can cheerfully be despised. It is sometimes suggested that the sexually fulfilled would have no energy for fighting causes. To admit openly in the 1960's to being sexually unfulfilled is still more a sign of failure than of deprivation. And for all our lack of inhibitions, admission of failure is still taboo. It is important to do all we can, then, to avoid giving the impression of sexual incompetence. Men, perhaps, avoid "good works". Women settle for six children with cabbagey days, as if gathering energy for the nights to come. But the fact is quite simply that laws and society do not improve by themselves, and progress depends on rational men and women (no matter what sort of sex lives they lead!) actively tackling the wrongs that persist. We cannot afford to have the cranks and religious dreamers in sole control.

T. E. Huxley wrote

"The foundation of morality is to have done, once and for all with lying, to give up pretending to believe that for which there is no evidence, and repeating unintelligible propositions about things beyond the possibilities of knowledge . . ."

but how many Christians today can really shake hands with us on this? While it may take courage to reject Christianity altogether and to live without any belief in magic, it is hard to understand why the modern heretic-liberals cling to the orthodox creeds and rituals instead of joining the Quakers. And, not understanding, it is very hard for us to be sympathetic about this particular form of pretence. The "pious frauds" and falsifications are now called "de-mythologising" and "re-interpretation", but their effect is no less harmful.

What, then, is the answer to the question, "How rational are we Secular-Humanists?"? I suggest something like this, "Not nearly rational enough. We believe with Lecky

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that "The man who loves truth cannot possibly subside into a condition of contented credulity . . . , but so long as our institutions and our society based on those institutions revere and preserve a tradition of deception, we shall all to some extent be affected. And we have to learn to recognise the effects in ourselves as well as in others. For far too long the place for frankness has been the secrecy and dark of the confessional. We still, so to speak, have to develop the courage to step outside and keep talking, but to do this we need to be sure that our society will match our honesty with as much understanding. This means that our need for rational social reformers and 'do-gooders' is urgent . . ."

If Christianity is a lie, nurtured for nearly two thousand years in pretence, no amount of wishful thinking or semantic fiddling on the part of sentimental and unsettled laymen or priests will make it true. However many liberals want to reform the churches from within, the majority of Christians will inevitably continue to cling to the lie, demanding the right to wield power and influence in its name, and no one inside the churches will want to stop them.

Dr Charles Davis, the most recent refugee from Rome, writes that his church is dying. Can we really say anything but "let it and all the other churches die, and let us hasten their demise in every possible way"? No one knows better

## MEN FRUSTRATED

"PEOPLE are beginning to face that fact that women have sexual needs", so writes the author of the thoughtful article "Women Alone" (FREETHINKER, Oct. 21). I certainly agree, but I would also add that the sexual desires of some women seem to be satisfied by motherhood.

On the other hand the sexual desires of a man are not met completely by fatherhood; he still wants, and needs, sexual intercourse. A woman, however, having been through childbirth one—or more—times, may react so strongly against having another child that she loses all sexual desire. She could, it is said, use contraceptives, but even in 1966 we still haven't evolved a contraceptive which is 100 per cent safe in all directions; that is, one that will make conception absolutely impossible, and at the same time, will be guaranteed not to risk the woman's health either in the near, or distant, future.

What can the man do? No husband who really cares for his wife will force himself on her; he can resort to a prostitute or take a mistress, but, to many men these solutions—if they can be called such—are ruled out of court.

Sexual frustration for such men seems unavoidable, but it can, I feel, be lightened—at least a little—by the pleasure gained from looking at photos of the naked female body.

Art which is claimed to be pornographic and erotic can, in fact, serve a very useful purpose. Unfortunately however, for many who have been brought up in the Christian Faith, there is a feeling of guilt at getting pleasure from such pictures.

As a frustrated male myself, I have every sympathy with the writer of "Women Alone". I would however point out that for a woman, if she is single, a widow or divorcée and also if she is in the second half of life so that the problem of child-bearing need not worry her, then she may well meet a man who is single, a widower, or a divorcée and so find sexual fulfilment.

than we do that nothing good in life is diminished by the loss of a religious faith

Of course the churches do not have a monopoly of face-saving activities. In America a Congressional Committee is to investigate the Johnson Administration's "credibility gap" and "lack of candour" in admitting civilian casualties in North Vietnam. It may be impossible to prove or disprove that *homo sapiens* is "naturally" honest except in fear or failure. We certainly know how gullible and credulous man can be; all the more reason, then, to increase the incentives for clear thinking and honesty. Teaching children in RI at school to believe (and therefore to talk) nonsense is a positive discouragement. So long as organised religion and Christian propaganda continue to be given official recognition, support and respect, how can we hope to create a society in which integrity and toleration are valued above credulity?

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NEXT week the FREETHINKER will be in the able and enthusiastic hands of David Collis who takes over the editorship and is already well-known as a speaker and writer on Secularism. He has my especially warm wishes. I hope that contributors and readers (and the printers) already know how grateful I have been for their co-operation and support. May 1967 see our circulation doubled and be the best year yet. KIT MOUAT

Anon.

The married man, however, who does not want to break up his marriage, either because of his love for his wife, or for his children, or for both, and who is married to a woman who recoils from sex, is left only with his "pin-up"; at least let us give him that.

We men are guilty of many things; but I would say that, speaking generally (of course, there are exceptions) there are fewer men who do not desire sex than there are women; therefore there are far more frustrated males than females—and society must deal with this problem more realistically.

Against this it will be said that there are a large number of unmarried women who have not had the opportunity to marry and are therefore sexually frustrated. Some of these women however are "married" to their careers and do not want a sex life; some like being single legally—if not physically; some are borne up by the hope that one day they will get married—even if they are temporarily frustrated.

The man who is already married to a woman who has no further need of sex must, if he wants to remain true to his partner, resign himself to being, physically, on his own. He does not have the loneliness that the writer of "Women Alone" speaks about, but he knows that "the union of male and female" is no longer for him.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

PUBLIC FORUM

### RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

Speakers include—

Dr RONALD GOLDMAN ALAN HUMPHRIES  
DAVID TRIBE

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10th, 7.30 p.m.

CAXTON HALL

Caxton Street, London, SW1

## A LOOK AT BUDDHISM

B. T. Rocca

HISTORIANS are unable to establish the dates of Gautama Buddha's birth and his death eighty years later. Buddhism spreads throughout south-east Asia rather rapidly, and the Cambodians, Ceylonese and Indians report entirely different dates. Since there are no reliable records, one may consider Buddha's life span as between 623 to 543 BC or 566 to 486 BC. The main point of interest is, of course, that from that dim, distant past nothing has come down to us but legends, some of which approach mythology.

At first Buddha was regarded as a great teacher—his teaching being of a humanistic or philosophical nature, with stress on good deeds, and thoughts, and with utter selflessness as the desired ideal. Selfishness was eschewed, and every human effort was to be made by his followers to become perfect human beings by forever striving for greater peace of mind and peace and tranquility with all others.

Throughout the last twenty-five centuries many, many branches of Buddhism have developed, as would be natural since the teachings of Buddha were not recorded but were supposedly memorised and passed on from generation to generation for a few hundred years before they were reduced to writing. An elaborate priesthood developed and, of course, many changes were inevitable in the teachings of this so-called religion. The word "religion" here, must be thought of in a broad sense since Buddha was not regarded, at least originally, as a supreme being. This will be referred to later.

In the pamphlet entitled *Is There a God?—a Buddhist Answer*, published by the Bureau of Buddhist Education, Buddhist Churches of America and compiled by Taitetsu Unno, assistant minister at the Senshin Buddhist Church lecturer at UCLA, we, no doubt, have the modern version of Buddhism.

### Salvation by compassion

The author pictures Buddha, whom he calls Amida Buddha (Amida meaning "boundless compassion, and immeasurable wisdom") as the fullness of compassion, whose sole concern is the expression of unconditioned love to every form of life. He differs markedly from the Judaeo-Christian God because he is not a Creator but is a Saviour through his compassionate work. There is no judgment or punishment, no miracles, but he works through natural laws for saving mankind through compassion. He is subject to the limitations of this world, which he will transform by his great love.

Continuing, the author says Amida Buddha is not a wrathful or jealous God, but through the power of compassion in his Original Vow he will not rest until all beings attain the same enlightenment as himself—complete Buddhahood. He adds that Buddha did not believe in any self-sacrificing crucifixion, but by making his compassion available to man by the mere pronouncing of his sacred name, Namu Amida Buddha, he would be present as the timeless enlightenment realised by the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. Through his immeasurable wisdom he sees into the fragility of human life and through his boundless compassion he is moved to actively embrace all life into the timeless fulfillment of truth.

In this pamphlet it is stressed that it is meaningless to discuss enlightenment and other goals unless all are committed to practice these in home and community. We must

make others happy; the Four Immeasurable Attitudes being friendliness, compassion, joy and equanimity. This is based on the clear understanding of life which is oneness, or interdependence. When we make another being happy, our world is that much happier and there is no enemy to love, for we are parts of one living organic whole.

Further thoughts expressed are that the ultimate concern of Amida Buddha is for one's existential awareness until one arrives at the very heart of living peace. From the centre flows the name of Amida Buddha which gives a sense of being and a fresh source of strength as the basis for creative morality, for he (Buddha) is ever present when his name is recited.

The answer to the book's title is given as "No", there is not a God of fear and mercy who is Creator and Judge. Buddha, through the fullness of his compassion, fulfils the existential experience of reality.

### Inconsistencies

No one can quarrel with the foregoing as a fine code to live by, but at the same time one is constrained to question much that the writer claims. Buddhism has gone through many changes from its wellnigh mythological past twenty-five centuries ago, and while the Buddhist still recognises that Buddha was a human being, somehow this human has acquired supernatural powers!

To think that a man, regardless of his goodness during his lifetime, could exert any direct powers for good or evil two thousand years after his death is, of course, completely incredible. The writer states that Buddha, through his great love and compassion, will transform the world—which is a fine thought—but completely impossible to any human even if he were living. But to one long since dead, and who died before his teachings were recorded, it is far beyond any human credulity to concede any of these claims of accomplishment and omnipresence. It would seem that throughout the ages the name of Buddha has been deified, otherwise the claims would be meaningless.

Comparing Buddhism with Judaism and Christianity, we find all three began at times and places from which no reliable records have ever come down to us. Even Christianity, which came six centuries later than Buddhism, has no contemporary records of Christ's coming and going. The later writings which are purported to tell us of His life and teachings, miracles, crucifixion and ascension are admittedly NOT actual historical records, but the Christians overcome this by claiming them as "Revelations" in others words, as "divinely inspired". No one, however, ever attempts to explain why these revelations were confined to ancient times. Why don't we have "revelations" in modern recorded history? Christianity has much to explain, which its followers cannot do.

### The anti-Humanist conception of Nirvana

Judaism also goes back to such ancient times that much is shrouded in mythology or mystery. There is no possible verification of the God of the Jews ever having appeared before Abraham, Moses or any other human. Even as far back as Thomas Paine's time, he expressed complete doubt about Moses and his Commandments. And in the last two hundred years we have learned so much about the vastness of the Universe, the laws governing it, and the story of life itself, with evolution giving us ever more complex life forms for hundreds of millions of years. Apparently

(Continued on page 14)

## NEWS AND NOTES

THE National Secular Society has put out a Press Release stating its own concern (recently expressed by Roman Catholic teachers) "over the crime and delinquency in Britain today" drawing attention to the responsibility of Catholic segregated schools which are making a "large contribution to the criminal statistics, particularly for crimes of violence". The NSS calls "for national education in social morality and citizenship"; and let's hope it goes on calling, loud and clear.

### Welcome response

THE Sevenoaks *Chronicle and Courier* has been publishing a most encouraging batch of letters in support of Mrs Ruth Hancock, the Humanist teacher who was asked to resign because she publicly expressed her Humanist views. A letter signed by twenty "Parents of Ide Hill school children" ended thus:

"It appears that given the choice between an excellent honest, non-Christian teacher, and a second-rate but Christian teacher, the latter would be appointed. Should this happen in a State supported village Church school where no alternative secular school exists?"

The Sevenoaks Labour Party is raising the matter with the Minister of Education, and says that "this action is being taken against a background of hostility to the Church of England authorities". In his letter to Mr Crosland, Mr Jim Wood, division party chairman, has written that

"By far the greatest sum used in running the school is obtained from the State and from local taxes, and only a small proportion from the Anglican Church".

### How to make friends and influence people

THE *Mid-Sussex Times* (Dec. 28) reports our local Congregationalist Minister, Rev Norman E. Jones of Burgess Hill, saying that

"there were far too many who tried to go it alone without God. Just as they tried to find loopholes in the laws of the land, so they tried to get out of their responsibilities to God, to disparage the Church, all in an effort to reduce their own sense of guilt. There was only one true basic law, that of Jesus, and part of it was the over-riding conjunction 'to love thy neighbour as thyself' . . ."

As one of your neighbours, Mr Jones (happy to be going it alone without God, and of course, busy trying "to find loopholes in the laws of the land"), thanks for the "love" . . .!

### Victory—or another defeat for abortion law reform?

IF THE OBSCURANTISTS have their way, it will again be defeat. The Bill goes into its committee stage on January 18th. So long as we have done all we can to counteract reaction, we can only hope. In America recently a couple whose son was born blind, deaf and dumb sued two doctors for allowing the birth after the mother had caught German measles (*The Sun*, Nov. 11).

### Ministerial timidity that may already have proved lethal

SCANDINAVIAN laws regarding motorists who drink and drive have always been realistically fierce. Imprisonment without option, licences removed, and a system by which the party-goer takes it for granted that he hires someone sober to drive him home. No Norwegian road deaths were reported over Christmas. In Britain, however, Barbara Castle has yielded to pressure from the AA and RAC and decided not to start random breathalyzer tests. Quite clearly the British are more worried about the unborn foetus than about mere men and women or there would be as much pressure to bring into force Scandinavian-type driving laws as there is to prevent women being allowed medically controlled abortion. As usual, it just

doesn't make sense, least of all in terms of "reverence for life".

### Vietnam

THERE MUST BE NO slackening in our condemnation of the Vietnamese war, in which even the American Catholic journal *Ramparts* suggests that, at a "conservative estimate", 250,000 Vietnamese children have been killed accidentally since 1961, and 750,000 wounded or burned (*Catholic Herald*, Dec. 30). And there must be constant pressure to persuade our own government to take every possible action to bring the war to an end. What is necessary for them to do is to decide *how*. Cardinal Spellman has done nothing to create confidence in the Pope's pleas for peace by insisting that this war of death and torture is "for civilisation" and that "less than victory is inconceivable". There can be no victory in Vietnam. Only a continuation of the most unspeakable horrors, until the Powers that Be really want the war to stop. Then it will.

### "Hell still has a hold on the Church"

WROTE HUGH BURNETT in the *Sun* (Dec. 30). "The Bishop of Woolwich", he went on, "demonstrated that he is not honest to God. I am not a Christian, and go by what I read". Mr Burnett points out that the doctrine of Hell is still part and parcel of any Christian doctrine which is to make sense. Roman Catholics "have no scruples about teaching these doctrines to the very young".

In the *War Cry* (Nov. 19) Salvation Army Mrs Lieutenant-Commissioner Flora Larsson ended a nifty bit of verse with

"One thing You have said, Master, in no mistaken terms,  
You have warned us of the horrors of hell,  
And you have provided an alternative."

Decent of the Master, you have to admit. On the same theme Charles Graham (*Scottish Daily Express*, Dec. 24) wrote "Life was easy in the old days when there was Good and Evil, God and Devil . . ." and, after a lot of codswallop, he goes on

"This lax, permissive, humanist society of the new morality—if any at all— is corrupting and self-degrading. Perhaps even self-destroying".

Perhaps our already grisly toy-makers ought to start producing thumb-screws and racks, stakes and faggots for the grown-up hell-mongers to play with. They obviously need some outlet for their energies.

### Among friends at last

QUOTE FROM LETTER in *Catholic Herald* (Dec. 16) Mr Malcolm Muggeridge's "articles are a source of joy to all who cling to the true faith".

### On women . . .

AN ITALIAN husband has been given a separation from his wife on account of her making him wash up the dishes. The judge said that "she had committed grave injustices" (*Observer*, Dec. 18). On December 15th the Anglican Church announced that it was "inexpedient at the present time" for the Church to permit women to be ordained. In the *Sun* on that day, Anne Hope wrote an article quoting a Dr Hobson, Lecturer in Psychiatry at London University, the only layman on the church commission, as saying that the opponents to the ordination of women objected most strongly "to the suggestion of a woman giving food at Holy Communion—just imagine a woman giving you bread and saying, 'This is my body' ". Freud would have loved that, I'm sure! If only someone would produce a secular doctrine by which the suggestion of women preparing and cooking food (and washing the dishes) were considered equally revolting, there might be more women editors . . .

## BE BRAVE AND ANGRY (Part 2)

Kerstin Simon London

WHEN the war is over Albert is ordered out of Denmark, more or less by mistake. Back in Sweden he is immediately put in jail for some previous anti-military propaganda. Elise starts work in Stockholm for the Norwegian and the Swedish Labour Press. She is back on old themes: sexual problems, family planning, the care of unwelcome children and their mothers. She has one obsession—to help the distressed. Sweden in the twenties is a poor country. She tours it year after year—lecturing, talking, helping; defying the law which forbade not only the selling of contraceptives, but also advice and information, which should and could have been given by doctors and midwives had the world by that time been wiser. Elise is tough, and her tours are rough. There was hardly any money. She sleeps in the huts way out in the woods; she gets badly bitten by fleas. Large families live in lodgings not worthy of the name “home”. TB is everywhere, the death rate among children is appalling. In the darkness of the night Elise receives the confidences of the worn-out mothers who do not know how to avoid producing more and more children.

Trying to stop all this misery Elise Ottesen-Jensen goes on lecturing and talking to all and sundry in public and to the poor wives privately. After meetings the only place for this was the lavatory, a hut out in the snow. Elise was frequently sick when examining the women and fitting them with diaphragms. But nothing can stop her. She has some heart-breaking interviews. One young woman, mother of five, comes to a meeting wanting information—but when examined she has to be told that she is again pregnant. Her only, hopeless answer is: “But we are so poor”.

“No one as clever as she . . .”

There are, of course, happy and rewarding moments as well. Somewhere in Sweden she is introduced at a meeting like this: “Now she is here and I want this said in front of witnesses: it is not my fault that we had to wait so long. She had been booked for two years. But we did not want anyone else, because there is no one as clever as she in sexual matters”.

All the time she keeps on writing. She gets followers and helpers, but the law and the authorities are still against her. Avant garde doctors and lawyers are behind her. A magazine is launched which has sexual information as its main theme; an advisory bureau is set up. A society is formed to spread information. To her own surprise she gets support from a Royal Commission whose task it is to solve a threatening crisis in the population balance. A brilliant husband and wife team, Gunnar and Alva Myrdal, have published a report showing that there will soon be too few young people to support the aged ones. The committee boldly throws all taboos overboard, and points out how a happy married life without fear is one of the conditions for a large happy family.

The law against selling of contraceptives was abolished in Sweden in 1937. The abortion problem still remains. It is a world-wide assumption that everything now is free and easy in Sweden in this particular field. That, of course, is simply not true. But whatever has been done so far to help any woman in distress and with a responsibility she cannot face alone—is largely due to the compassion and everlasting energy of Ottar.

The memoirs do not go any further than 1939. Long before that, Elise Ottesen-Jensen had been deeply shocked

by the plight of the Jews. Norway was a closed country for Jews until 1851. A famous poet called Henrik Wergeland (who died in 1845) had been fighting for their rights all his life and naturally he became a favourite of Elise, however old fashioned his verse might have seemed. When talking against anti-semitism she frequently quoted him, especially one of his messages to a fellow-in-arms who was a member of parliament: “Farewell. Be angry and brave”. That is exactly what she herself has been all her life. Not only angry and brave, but also kind and understanding. On those merits she has broken the bonds of small Scandinavia and brought her message to the whole world.

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## WOMEN FOR DISARMAMENT

Kathleen Tacchi-Morris

I HAVE attended many meetings of women on both sides of the so-called Iron Curtain, and the result is that I think women must study much more all subjects relating to disarmament. I have therefore come to the following conclusions:

There should be one woman leader in every country.

She should be non-party political and not prejudiced regarding colour, religion or creeds.

She should be a good organiser, a good speaker and with a good knowledge of women's problems relating to disarmament. (In Great Britain this is being organised by the Women's Advisory Council of UNA under the chairmanship of Lady Hall.) The Women's Advisory Council has one woman representative of each organisation of women.

One woman is being appointed as leader in every county. She has her own committee consisting of one representative from every woman's organisation (if wanted, a list of organisations can be sent). Each woman on that committee will obtain information from the leader, so that each organisation can study all matters leading to disarmament. The leaders obtain this information from UNA headquarters in Great Britain. The leaders arrange conferences, so as to be able to pool the ideas taken from their studies, so that they may act through knowledge of all world affairs connected with disarmament.

The time has come when women must face and realise the importance of their responsibilities, and I see no reason why, in every country in the world something of this kind could not be done. This can be a constructive way for the women of the world to work together unhampered by the barriers caused by prejudices and fear created by ignorance. When knowledge comes in through the door ignorance and fear will fly out of the window. Not until this happens can women show the men the way and then work side by side with them.

## DAVID TRIBE ON TV

DAVID TRIBE, President of the National Secular Society, appeared in five editions of the ITV programme *Dialogue with Doubt*. These were transmitted late in the evening from Monday, January 9th to Friday, January 13th, and will be repeated before noon from Monday, January 16th to Friday, January 20th.

Please check *TV Times* or the Daily Press for exact times of transmission.

## RELIGION WITHOUT MORALITY

Dave Shipper

*Dave Shipper (b. 1927) was born and has managed to remain an atheist. He is a commercial photographer, journalist and very active on behalf of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, CARD, and the Defence Committee for Victims of Nazi Persecution. He has made several radio and TV appearances.*

THE USA, a secular state constitutionally, is the scene of constant and protracted legal battles with the non-religious or merely unorthodox citizens seeking to preserve normal and sometimes *fundamental*—rights. A particularly bad case of the equation of orthodoxy with morality recently occurred in the state of Iowa, when it became evident that the judges of the Iowa Supreme Court are hampered by their religious prejudices to an extent which prevents, at times, the proper dispensation of law.

Harold Painter, a 35-year-old photographer, of Pleasanton, California, was unfortunate enough to lose his wife, who was fatally injured in a car crash in December 1962. Being left with a three-year-old boy, Mr Painter quite properly asked his late wife's grandparents, Mr and Mrs Dwight Bannister, to give the child a temporary home. They agreed to help temporarily, and one year later Mr Painter became engaged and asked for the return of the boy—which was refused. Loth to take legal proceedings, the father married his second wife—a university graduate who had considerable experience with children—bought a home for themselves and Mark, the child, and asked confidently for the return of his son—which was once again refused.

Forced now to take legal proceedings, Mr Painter sued for the return of the boy in an Iowa district court, was found to be a fit parent, and with the grandparents' plea that he had abandoned Mark dismissed, was given custody of the child.

The grandparents appealed to the Iowa State Supreme Court, and in the spring of 1965 this higher authority reversed the earlier decision, awarding custody to the grandparents on the grounds that they could provide a more conventional, middle-class atmosphere for the boy's upbringing. Here the matter might well have rested, if it were not for the determination of the father and the efforts of the American Civil Liberties Union. . . .

The ACLU, having exhausted legal possibilities at lower levels, have now to urge the United States Supreme Court to review the Iowa Supreme Court's decision, pointing out that it seems that custody has been awarded to the grandparents, both in their sixties—mainly because the father is considered "Bohemian". It is argued that this "is in derogation of the constitutional rights of the father and child involved . . . and is usurpation by the State of the parental rights and obligations of one who is concededly a fit and proper parent". The brief also accuses the State Court's use of Mr Painter's religious and political beliefs to justify its decision as being in violation of the Constitution's First and Fourteenth Amendments.

The ACLU assert that

"the rôle of the court as protector of children against their natural parents is limited to cases involving mistreatment or mishandling by the parent that will in some way endanger the child's health or welfare".

The Bannisters had been granted custody

"on the totally invalid assumption that the court had the right and obligation, purportedly in the child's best interests, to determine whether someone other than the child's natural parent could provide him with a superior environment".

The ACLU argument was actually supported by the Iowa Supreme Court's decision that the child should live

with the grandparents because life with his father

"would be unstable, unconventional, arty, Bohemian, and probably intellectually stimulating" (!) . . . It was contended that "an appellate court's supposition that a child's welfare will be advanced by turning him over to someone wealthier and more conservative than his natural parent is not a sufficiently grave reason for depriving the parent of custody . . ."

The ACLU also maintains that a violation of the First Amendment took place when the Iowa Supreme Court, during its deliberations, "examined several of Harold Painter's philosophies which it felt were "important as they relate to the child and his particular needs". Among factors which were admitted to influence the court decision were the father's interest in Zen Buddhism and the fact ". . . that he is *either an agnostic or atheist and has no concern for formal religious training*". The grandparents, on the contrary, planned to send Mark to a Congregational Church.

It is clear then that in Iowa, in a case which considers jurisdiction over a child, a would-be custodian must observe not only a formal religion, but a religion which has the approval of the court. If the beliefs held do not fit into certain slots, or if there is any profession of atheism or agnosticism, this will be noted and counted against the unorthodox applicant.

As the American Constitution clearly forbids any coercion to follow certain creeds, or practise a form of worship, whether or not such coercion is applied indirectly, I think we can assume father and son will—eventually—be reunited.

In this case religion has been equated with morality: the US Supreme Court will have to rule that here they are in opposition.

### A LOOK AT BUDDHISM

(Continued from page 11)

Buddhism does not incorporate any part of this modern knowledge in its religion. Buddhism, with its mystical or supernatural ideas of the everpresence of Buddha, and of man's ability to attain perfection and to live forever in Nirvana, is so contradictory to the concept of Buddha as being merely human. How can this be explained? Its humanistic teachings, on the other hand, are excellent, but they must be for us humans here and now, with no thought of a mystical Nirvana.

Similarly, there is much good, but not all good, in the teachings of Christianity and Judaism. That the sins of the father should extend for even one generation is unthinkable. That there should be a "Chosen Race" is also unthinkable. The Jews have ceased sacrificing animals to their God, but they are still praying to the same God as of old and keeping themselves apart instead of becoming assimilated with their neighbours, which has led to much misunderstanding and intolerance. If humanistic ideas of all three of these religions were formulated into one religion, ruling out the mystic, the supernatural, the Heaven, Hell and Nirvana, we would have a religion that would encompass all and would permit the greatest good for all here and now on this earth, forgetting all thoughts of an impossible future life of endless bliss.

One can readily agree with the Buddhists that there is no God, and further, there cannot be a God such as envisioned by the Jews and Christians, as he has not made his presence known in recorded history, which would be unthinkable if a God existed!

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W. Bynner

THE LAW COMMISSIONERS' report on the changes in the divorce laws, which seem desirable in the public interest and offer Parliament a choice of three new grounds for consideration (in addition to the present ones based on the notion of the "matrimonial offence" with its concomitant "the guilty party"). These are:

- (1) Divorce by mutual consent (after a period of at least six months' separation).
- (2) Breakdown of the marriage, as the sole ground, and
- (3) Breakdown as an additional ground (involving a period of separation of two to seven years).

The Commissioners were impressed by the large number of existing illicit but stable unions, and consider it is in the public interest to regularise such unions and legitimise the children.

They look with disfavour on the second ground (ie, divorce by mutual consent as the sole ground) as this would not provide a remedy for those cases where consent is refused, whether on religious grounds or other reasons, including financial ones. As things are the deserted wife will frequently be worse off financially than if there were no divorce, and the Commissioners consider what steps can be taken to remedy this situation. One of the facts revealed in the report is that in Australia there has been more than a twenty per cent increase in the divorce rate since the interoduction four years ago of mutual consent as a valid ground.

Whatever inferences different persons in differing situations may draw from these recommendations, they are an attempt to render justice impartially, as between the rival claims of the parties. In the country at large, many ordinary, people believe (and I have often heard it expressed) that a person is permitted to remarry after a separation of seven years during which no communication has been held between them. This is not so, of course, but it may well represent a consensus of commonsense opinion by people who are in close touch with the facts of life as it is lived. My own opinion, for what it is worth as that of an interested party, is that a change in the direction indicated is long overdue in this country, that on balance it would remedy many injustices, and legitimise many children who now bear the stigma of illegitimacy.

I should prefer the new ground of divorce by mutual consent to be valid (after, say, two or three years separation), and that where consent is withheld for any reason, an additional ground should be the breakdown of the marriage, the only proof of such breakdown required being a sufficient period of separation, five years.

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## THEATRE

David Tribe

OVER CHRISTMAS two modern morality plays have taken the London *avant garde* stage: *The Ballad of the False Barman* (Colin Spencer, Hampstead Theatre Club), *The Lion and the Jewel* (Wole Soyinka, Royal Court).

The *Ballad* is a song of our time, sick, sensitive, chaotic, cryptic, a blend of Dickens, Gilbert and Sullivan, Rousseau, Havelock Ellis, Genet, Barrie. Out of transvestism, lesbianism, prostitution, homosexuality, infanticide and other familiar theatre of cruelty ingredients, novelist Colin Spencer extracts a maximum of mirth and tenderness. The plot is too clumsy and bizarre for us to feel for the characters as individuals, but under the shell of perversion and brashness is a kernel of insight, homily and poetry that is haunting, disturbing, sometimes beautiful. The message, unnecessarily laboured in the final scene, is that vice is simply the phantasy world to which we escape when society and circumstances frustrate our natural tendency to goodness, and operates according to the impersonal edicts of a market economy: religiosity is a cloak for frustrated sexuality.

CASTING, often with treble rôles, is uniformly convincing. Among many fine performances James Bree's vicar, Robert Bernal's bishop (who have two hilarious scenes together where high camp blends with the Authorised Version) and Anne Berry's tart-landlady are outstanding. Katherine Barker makes a brilliant transition from virtue to vice, and Rod McLennan makes the most of Clifton Parker's mid-Atlantic music, deftly scored for piano and percussion. Costumes, lighting and direction are slickly professional.

Soyinka is gladly remembered for his *Road*, depicting the strange blend of Western technology and tribal religion in Nigeria. *The Lion and the Jewel* is about the conflict between Western education and traditional marriage and chieftainship, where ancient wisdom triumphs over modern knowledge. In a play whose introductory scene would benefit from cutting, the author and designer present a convincing African village where modernisation (here antipathetic in the personality of the pompous schoolteacher) struggles against superstition, graft, custom, inertia and love of music and dancing. As distinct from the *Ballad*, the plot is simple and lightly textured, but throughout its equally mechanical elaboration interest is more in the social scene than in the characters themselves. Out of this however real insight and poetry flow.

Acting by the Ijinle Theatre Company is uneven, the best performances coming from Lionel Ngakane as the "bale" or chief and Jumoke Debayo as his head wife. There are attractive song and dance interludes, especially an "automobile ballet" with good miming by Femi Euba as the schoolteacher.

## BOOK REVIEW

Oswell Blakeston

IN *Privileged Persons* (Cape, 35s), Hester W. Chapman plunges the reader into the glitter of seventeenth century high society. Cardinals were scheming politicians who might cheerfully arrange for a boy to be brought up as a homosexual so that he would present no threat to the royal succession, or find a suitable mistress for a bored patron of Holy Mother Church, or arrange tactfully for a discrete assassination of a blackmailer. Meanwhile, clerics like the Abbé Camus would amuse their influential friends by stripping naked, killing a pig, and saying a mass over it. The priests were not paid to censor the rich. When the Electress Sophia visited St Peter's, the Pope told her that the Battle of White Mountain had been won for the Catholics through the Virgin's intercession. "Such a great princess as yourself," he added, "should give something to Our Lady." "I would," Sophia retorted snappishly, "if she had been on the other side." Even God himself had to know his place. When the Duc Mazarin's mother heard that a connection of hers had died unrepentant, she said: "I am sure that God will think twice before damning a man of that quality".

Of course if a nobleman, exhausted by his excesses, went round the bend and "got religion", he transferred his extravagances to his piety. Mazarin forbade his servants to extinguish a fire which broke out in one of his country houses. "It is the will of God," he said; and he beat the valets who were trying to save his property. Then he began to worry about whether he was interfering with God's ordinance by training servants for special duties. He told the servants to draw lots, and gardeners were put in charge of the cellars and the butler was sent to the dairy, where the cows' udders were veiled for holy modesty.

The cool commercial calculations which inspired the founding of our Empire may be studied in Maurice Collis' biography of *Raffles* (Faber, 42s). However, although Raffles grabbed Singapore for England, he was a humanitarian at heart who tried to rule justly and free slaves. When the great man died, the vicar could not prevent Sir Stamford Raffles from being buried in a family vault at Hendon church; but he refused to conduct the burial service himself. Application was then made to place a memorial tablet inside the church; and this the vicar was able to refuse to the memory of "a man so unfeeling as to advocate, to the cruel detriment of those who had invested their savings in a Negro plantation, the emancipation of slaves". The vicar's own fortune was invested in a slave plantation; and it must have upset him considerably when a marble statue of Raffles was placed in Westminster Abbey.

Professor C. Northcote Parkinson, creator of Parkinson's Law, has assembled a collection of portrait sketches of his friends in a book called *A Law Unto Themselves* (John Murray, 30s); and he tells a delightful story about the author, T. H. White. One day White was caught at his front door by two Jehovah's Witnesses who pushed forward a collecting box. "Tim glared at the fools who had disturbed him"; and then he came forward as if to make a donation. "I am JEHOVAH!" he thundered, grabbing at the box. "Give me the money!" Professor Parkinson reports that the Jehovah's Witnesses are still running.

## LETTERS

## Freethought and freelove

MY ARTICLE on freelove seems to have aroused some of the righteous indignation I anticipated. David Bird thinks that my statement that the human being is merely an animal "is a dangerous half-truth" because "human offspring are exceptionally dependent . . . Hence the importance of parents". I confess that his logic escapes me—dependent or not they are still only animals.

Mr Bird would do better to stick to criticising what I said in my article, not what I did not say. He implies that I suggested love can be free from risk or moral duty when in fact the opposite was the case. I maintained that the union of man and woman should be held together by mutual respect and consideration and cemented solely by mutual consent—which requires and demonstrates a great deal more moral courage and acknowledgement of duty than does a union whose partners have to be forced to honour each other by law. And is Mr Bird really so naïve as to think that a legal contract would lessen "the risk of heartbreak . . . contagion and unwanted conception"? The heartbreak of a failed marriage that is compelled by law to drag on is infinitely greater than that of a union whose partners agree they have made a mistake and simply dissolve it themselves.

T. M. Edwards' letter also opposes my views, and he states that "the majority of people . . . recognise that marriage is a necessary institution" as if this proves his case. May I remind Mr Edwards that the majority of people also worship some kind of deity—does this mean that we minority atheists must be in the wrong?

At least Mr Edwards is good enough to concede that "when mankind has reached a higher stage in his moral development Mr Gray's views would probably be sound". But how on earth does he expect mankind to achieve a higher morality while condoning its members sticking to their old traditions and prejudices? Society evolves only if its members change their attitudes and this is a gradual process. Mr Edwards seems to be suggesting that nobody should change until everybody has changed! He concludes that the adoption of my views would mean "social anarchy", which is a phrase used by people when talking about social freedom which entails freedom to do something they personally disagree with.

Mr Bird and Mr Edwards both seem to be labouring under certain misapprehensions. They both disagree with my assertion that State authority is an unnecessary intrusion because they contend that society is not morally responsible enough to do without it, when what I said was that it is an unnecessary intrusion into the freedom of *responsible* adults. I do not want to ban marriage for those who feel they need it—I was merely attempting to clear away some of the stupid prejudices and taboos that are attached to free love, together with the abuse of those who practise it. If Mr Edwards and Mr Bird consider that they themselves and society in general need to be compelled by law to acknowledge their moral duty then let them at least respect those people who have enough moral fibre to fulfil their duty voluntarily.

Salford, Lancs.

MICHAEL GRAY