

# Freethinker

Registered at the GPO as a Newspaper

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

VOLUME 88, No. 49

Saturday, December 7, 1968

Sixpence Weekly

## CENSORSHIP

THE RECENT suppression in Edinburgh of the film *Week End* may well have been triggered off by the person, who having seen it legally stood up at the end and shouted, "This is rubbish, filthy rubbish and should not be shown".

This highly emotional statement could be said to point to the underlying irrational and evil premiss that leads to the existence of censorship. The censors and would-be censors, are quite at liberty to express their opinions of a film or book. But what right has this man or any man to dictate that a film "should not be shown". We criticise the authorities in the countries behind the Iron Curtain for their exercise of censorship. Recently much sympathy has been shown towards the Czechs for their having to accept heavier forms of censorship imposed by the Russians. Why do the authorities in these countries impose their forms of censorships? Isn't it because they think they know what is best for the people and want to preserve it? Our forms of censorship are admittedly less stringent, but are they not applied for precisely the same reason?

Those who criticise the communists, but seek to uphold the British laws are thus reducing the question to a matter of degree. They are saying, in effect, that a line must be drawn somewhere—that the communists have drawn it in the wrong place, but the British have drawn it in the right place. In itself this is both presumptuous and dangerous.

In both cases the laws are basically devised to protect the established way of life. In Britain a film, book, magazine or newspaper article may be termed 'obscene' and be banned by the establishment. The establishment considers it liable to corrupt us, just as the former editorial line of the Czech newspaper *Rude Pravo* might have corrupted the Czechs.

Thus our authorities consider it in our interests to attempt to protect us from the evils of artificially induced sexual excitement, undue feelings of horror, occasional whimpers about revolution, and a few other equally unimportant 'evils'. The Communists are trying to protect their people from the horrors of capitalism.

Facetiously, one is tempted to give more sympathy to the Russian authorities. At least their cause is sufficiently significant to warrant all the fuss and red tape. But looking at the matter seriously have our government any more right than the Soviet government to exercise censorship? What right have either of them to determine what is corruption and what is not? What right has any man to restrict what another man writes or says, unless of course that man states an untruth. Lies can be proved to be lies and thus they only are reprehensible. Again what right has any man to restrict what another man sees, reads, or hears. Opinion, horror and sexuality are things to be taken or left. If people want to go to a blood-curdling horror film, which would make many people physically sick why shouldn't they? If



### INSIDE "SUNDAY FREEDOM"

by

JOHN PARKER, M.P.

The sponsor of the latest Sunday Entertainments Bill puts forward the case for his bill becoming law.

they find they are not sick, and in fact enjoy it why shouldn't they go again. Who is to say that any abnormal enjoyment is corrupt? Or that any extreme opinion is corrupt? Bradlaugh was generally thought to be corrupt 100 years ago. Relatively Tariq Ali is little more extreme. Whether he is as uncorrupt and as durable can best be determined by giving him a fair hearing, instead of censoring his *Black Dwarf*, and after the fashion of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* making the publication deceptively enticing.

It cannot be denied that real freedom of thought can never be attained in a society where there is not real freedom of opinion and expression, 'however' pornographic that expression might be.

The National Council for Civil Liberties and the Defence of Literature and The Arts Society are presenting a show (details are given elsewhere in this issue), the funds from which will go towards promoting the campaign against censorship. It promises (in my opinion!) to be excellent entertainment and is in an excellent cause.

# Freethinker

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.

Editor: David Reynolds

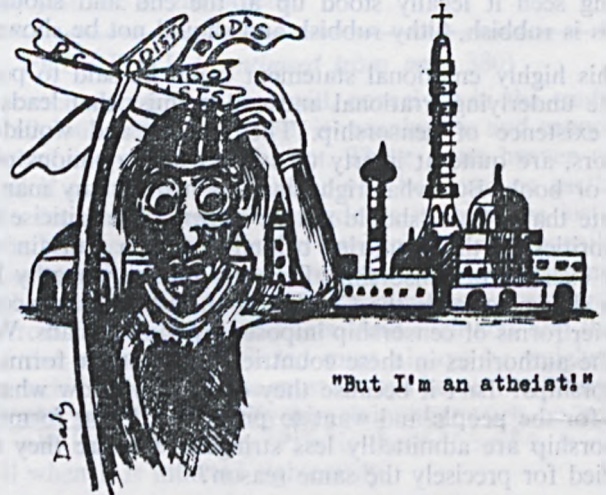
## TOO MUCH TO ASK?

A RECENT conference of British Sikhs passed two resolutions. One condemned Enoch Powell's speech on immigration. The other called for the teaching of Punjabi and the Sikh religion in British schools to preserve "our way of life". As David Tribe, the President of the National Secular Society, has pointed out in a recent press release, "If the Sikhs are to become obsessed with this concern, it is unfortunately certain that Powellite speeches will increase".

Of course it would be ridiculous to allow the Sikhs to have their religion taught in schools. If it were taught, then why should not innumerable other religions be taught as well. This would obviously be impossible. If for no other reason than because there could never be the facilities for a multitude of morning assemblies, let alone the money for the state to pay the various ministers. The Sikhs, however, have obviously come up with this demand because of the existing position of the Christian minority and unwittingly they have put their fingers on just why Christianity should not have an exalted place in our schools. As I wrote in a

recent editorial, "Ethically there is no more justification for ramming the Church of England down our children's throats than there is for indoctrinating them in Zen Buddhism". With the present situation maintained by the 1944 Act the Sikhs have every right to claim that their religion should be taught in schools. So have all the other religious bodies.

People religious enough to actively want their religion taught in schools are a minority. If they were all to follow the Sikhs lead and agitate on behalf of their religion, the apathetic agnostics and woolly deists, who make up the majority of the population, might be brought to realise just how uneuthical the position of the Church of England is at the moment.



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN and MCRAE.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOORS

Belfast Humanist Group: N.I. War Memorial Building, Waring Street, Belfast: Monday, December 9, 8 p.m.: "Humanism in the Land of Saints and Sinners", Mrs ANTONIA HEALY (Dublin Humanist Group).

Glasgow Humanist Group: George Service House: Wednesday, December 11, 7.30 p.m.: "Human Rights", JOHN C. NEIL.

Leicester Secular Society: 75 Humberstone Gate: Sunday, December 8, 6.30 p.m.: "Problems of a Secularist Teacher", Miss Gillian Hawtin, BA, FSA.

London Young Humanists: Friday, December 13, 7.30 p.m.: UnChristmas Dinner. All Humanists welcome. Details from Carol Upton. Tel. (day) 01-636 8636, ext. 373.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Thursday, December 12, 8 p.m.: "Bringing up children without religion", Diane Munday.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, December 8, 11 a.m.: "Human Rights". IAN GORDON-BROWN. Admission free. Tuesday, December 10, 6.45 p.m.: Discussion, "History and Economics (Israel Today)", Eliahu Hirschberg. Admission 2s (including refreshments) members free.

Perhaps that way people could be brought to realise that as David Tribe wrote "Two wrongs don't make a right". That for the Sikhs to be given the same privilege as the Christian Church of England is only to make matters worse, and as David Tribe concluded, "If the younger generation of any religion is turning away from the traditional faith of its ancestors that is its own concern, and it is not for the older generation to try to impose the ancient modes of thought. Some people would say the younger generation was making a wise choice. But whatever choice is made it must be what the individual himself or herself wants".

Secular-Humanists have just as much right as Sikhs or Hindus or Moslems, Holy Rollers or Latter Day Saints to have their views rammed down children's throats. However, they concede that this is unethical. Perhaps in a roundabout way the Sikh's understandable claim will make more people take this view.

## FREETHINKER FUND

THE FREETHINKER is the only weekly Secularist-Humanist paper in the country. It is still only 6d. How much do YOU care how many people it reaches? To advertise we need money, and our expenses are ever-increasing. Whose copy are you reading now? Have you got a subscription? Couldn't you contribute something to the Fighting Fund, say 6d or 6s or £6 or £60? How much do you really care about Freethought and helping other people to hear about it? Do, please, help if you can. The FREETHINKER, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1

## SUNDAY FREEDOM

JOHN PARKER, MP

IN A DEMOCRACY it is right and reasonable that all adults should be able to hold what views they like and to practice any religious cults they so desire provided that they do not interfere with another citizen's rights to do likewise. Ever since the 17th century full freedom in the religious field has not existed in this country, for devout Sabbatarians have succeeded in using the law of the land to force their particular views, as to how Sunday should be spent, upon the very large number of citizens, who do not agree with those religious views. To compel non-believers in the Sabbatarian way of life to conform to such tenets is a form of Religious Persecution which should be rigorously opposed by all fair-minded citizens. It would even be wrong for a majority to seek to impose their views in this field on a disbelieving minority. It is even more intolerable when a Sabbatarian minority try to enforce their views on a disbelieving majority.

The present law is full of absurd and hypocritical anomalies. Payment for entry to see a game, a sport or a theatre is forbidden on a Sunday. But you can pay a parking fee to watch a game of polo, buy a programme to see a game of cricket and join a theatre club to see a play. Television can show you games and theatre live if they so desire without any trouble. My bill, The Sunday Entertainments Bill, aims at sweeping away all these absurd

anomalies and leaving the public free to choose for itself how it will spend its Sunday afternoons after 2 p.m.

I first introduced such a Private Member's bill in Parliament in 1953 when it was thrown out by a large majority. Public opinion has greatly changed in the last fifteen years on this question. Now all the main sports organisations are in favour of the bill. Equity, the actors' trade union is now 80 per cent in favour of Sunday opening of theatres whereas in 1953 it was split 50-50.

Of course sensible adjustments will have to be made if the law is changed. Theatres will probably close on Mondays if open on Sundays. First class football teams are unlikely to want to play regularly on both a Saturday and a Sunday and will arrange their fixtures accordingly. The trade unions take the view that they can adequately protect their members from any danger of inadequate leisure time if the bill becomes law.

A similar bill piloted by Lord Willis in the Lords, through which it passed with little difficulty, failed to get through the Commons last session largely owing to a filibuster by a small group of fanatical opponents. It is to be hoped that the public will make clear to their MPs that they want the Bill which I am introducing, to become law this time, and end the hypocrisy and frustration which has spoilt Sunday for so many for so long.

## THE SECRET IMPLICATIONS OF THE ENCYCLICAL

R. ANSAY

ALTHOUGH the Encyclical on the permissibility or otherwise of contraceptives has been widely discussed and commented on in the international press, it does not seem as if it has been thoroughly analysed. At least not publicly. Or shall we say "psychoanalysed"?

The majority of critics seem to have been content to reproach the Pope that an old celibate gentleman has no capability to understand the problems which confront married couples.

The answer to this first objection is that none others but celibates, who have been careful not to put their necks in the marriage noose, are capable to observe without bias the predicaments of those unfortunates who have burdened themselves with family responsibilities.

Birth is not a boon. No living being has ever wanted to be born. Birth is the initial calamity which starts the life process with all its tragedies and its inevitable end in death, considered capital punishment. The very aim of religions, of all religions, is to represent life as a divine favour, to shift the responsibility of birth on to God and thus absolve the genitors.

Contraception reverses this mystic concept. It is now up to man and no longer up to God to decide if a life has to be created or stopped. The very first result of this reversed fundamental is to desecrate life. The fourth commandment: "thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother" no longer operates. The child is now fully justified to reproach his mother: "Why didn't you take the pill? I did not want to be dumped into this valley of tears?"

If marriage and procreation are no longer sanctified and the inviolability of life no longer morally upheld, legal

measures and police protection will not suffice to keep a capitalistic society together.

It has not been sufficiently stressed that the Pope and the Catholic church are not the only religious authorities to have condemned contraception. The Pope's encyclical has been emphatically endorsed amongst others by the Armenian patriarch Ignatius Basanian, by the Rev Fred Corson, methodic bishop of Philadelphia, by the patriarch Athenagoras, head of the Orthodox Church. And last but not least, by the Jewish Rabbinate, Head Rabbi Yotzabak Nizzin, of Jerusalem, who has declared that "artificial birth control is immoral and contrary to the principles of Judaism".

Yet there is no getting away from the bare mathematical fact that the world is already grossly over-populated and that urgent thinning out measures will have to be resorted to if world chaos is to be averted.

Two methods are open for disencumbrance: (1) birth control; (2) war.

In opposing the pill, the Pope and his backers are clearly intimating that they have chosen war. The moment war is declared, all authority is automatically transferred to the military command and the Churches are relieved of their responsibilities. The sacredness of life is suspended, killing is glorified as a patriotic duty.

A second reason motivates the Pope's choice of war. The whole world is at this very moment undergoing revolutionary fermentation, the revolutions being directed against the whole structure of the Judeo-Christian world order. If the revolution succeeds and its aims are accom-

(Continued on page 391)

# THE REFORMATION AND ITS BACKGROUND P. G. ROY

THE FACT that today—a century after the American Civil War—the Negro in the USA has still to fight for basic human rights, ought to dispose of the widespread lie that the war between North and South was fought over the emancipation of the Negro slaves; no conscript would ever have risked his life for that and the House of Representatives declared on July 22, 1861, that the question of slavery was not the cause of the war nor was the freeing of the slaves as such its purpose.

War aims are the formal pretence to justify it, the contents are always quite different—in the Civil War it was the need of the industrial North to set free a pool of 'free' (and cheap) labour for its factories. Similarly, the Crusades and the Thirty Years War were religious wars in appearance only, not in fact. Until the French Revolution, all social and economic struggles (e.g. Peasant Rebellions) were disguised as religious disputes because society as a whole appeared to be rooted in the maintenance of religion pure and undiluted. The socio-economic problems were dimmed by this aspect.

The bulk of the crusaders consisted of people who had nothing to lose at home, yet hoped for great loot abroad. The 'haves', however, became frightened of the host of 'have-nots' and readily grasped a pretext to send them out of their lands. In fact, the Crusades were a diverting manoeuvre and the first colonial wars. Venice contributed her fleet of galleys and armed convoys for a handsome fee and a share in the prospective spoil. During the fourth Crusade, Enrico Danilo, the blind Doge, maintained that the crusaders had failed to pay the fares and demanded the whole plunder together with certain townships. Unholy as the means were, the rise of the rich commercial centres in Upper Italy marked the birth of modern bourgeoisie, whilst the contact with the far higher civilisation of the Arabs of that time helped towards restricting the undisputed hegemony of the Catholic Church and consequently furthered our own cultural progress.

So long as the Mediterranean remained the main route of commerce, the Italian towns prospered; but when in 1452 Constantinople fell to the Osmanli Turks, a way round the world had to be found; it led to the discovery of the Americas and new colonial spoil. As a result, Western Europe—in particular Spain and Portugal, but also the Netherlands—became prosperous and politically important, whilst Germany and Scandinavia remained backwaters. However, the influx of precious metals with the beginning of monetary economy destroyed the roots of feudalism. The knights became increasingly indebted to the rich merchants and money lenders and took to robbery; the manorial lords no longer accepted their 'dues' in kind but demanded payment in money which the peasants could not afford. In the end the masses of landless peasants were driven into desperate rebellions—a godsend for the lower knights who quickly usurped the leadership of the badly armed, unorganised hordes; nobody had any vision what to put in the place of the tottering old order, revenge and enrichment was the only temporary aim. The multiplied and protracted agonies of Feudalism enabled the kings to establish themselves as absolute monarchs.

So far nobody had doubted that Christianity was the one and only truth; still the fact that for all that, mankind remained beset with growing calamities and evils, occu-

pied the minds. The old explanation of sinful departure from the pure way of god-belief was extended to all and sundry, the Pope included, and various ways of 'Reform' were expounded. However, even Reformed Christendom could be nothing else but the religious cloak of a new social class and society, and it was exactly this which had eventually to lead to the armed clash with Rome as the ideological centre of feudal conservatism.

Unable to see the social roots, Martin Luther did not mean to go that far and he was greatly alarmed when he noticed the effects of his Theses namely that they became the war cry of the revolting peasants. Like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, unable to stop the forces he had unwittingly unleashed, he backed the petty princes: "Hunt them like the wild dogs they are—kill them by the thousands, hack them to pieces . . ." he yelled.

However, conditions in Germany and Scandinavia—lands remote from the commercial routes—remained backward and Lutherism was thus the ideological expression of a backward bourgeoisie where petty princes were the only uniting centre in general disunity. In France the Huguenots remained a small section of well-to-do merchants, but as the country had a double maritime outlet, they failed to rouse popular support; they were quickly destroyed or expelled. West Europe—including the English isles where a centrally uniting power remained active but was able to break with Rome—had the advantage of a far superior economy, and therefore was not in the same desperate plight as the remainder of Europe.

The Catholic Church, the power house of international reaction, provided the old order with the halo of divinity. The burghers prior to attacking the secular strongholds, had to destroy the papal octopus first. This was impossible in Italy, cultural France and the Iberian peninsula; these cultural centres remained loyal to Rome in order to secure progress and business. Germany and Scandinavia, however, could only gain by breaking off their dependence from the Pope whilst pocketing Church property. The countries of higher education and wealth were far less exploited by the insatiable greed of the traders in indulgences and therefore had no reason to break away from Rome; contributions to the Penny of St Peter's in these countries were subject to the permission of the absolute monarch at whose disposal Rome put that useful police machinery, confession (plus Inquisition). For them the Vatican was useful.

Whereas in Germany, before long even the ruling class were alarmed at the immense riches of which the country was denuded in the interest of the Vatican, whilst the indescribable misery of the peasantry was at breaking-point.

The frequently heard view that Protestantism represented the struggle of the revolutionary bourgeoisie against the Church of Rome as the fortress of Feudalism is a crude simplification. Capitalism arose in Europe irrespective of the creed of the country's inhabitants, and by and by Catholicism itself became gradually changed by the new mode of production (as expressed by the doctrine of the Jesuits). European Protestantism, however, was from its inception the expression of a backward economy.

Whilst in Protestant Germany and England the peasants were driven to utter desperation, in Catholic France until

the Revolution of 1789, three-quarters of the land was shared up amongst smallholders (i.e. former serfs). Here again, we have to differentiate between form and content: the artists of the Renaissance went back to the formal expression of classical Antiquity, yet the content of their work is frequently different. The counter-reformation re-established formal Catholicism yet in essence it was no longer Medieval Catholicism as it had been before.

In the Thirty Years War the Emperor in Vienna was the undisputed leader of Catholicism, i.e. of all forces interested in the perpetuation of the existing order. The Protestant cause was taken up by a motley alliance of merchant towns, burghers, impoverished aristocrats and petty princes whose aims differed greatly apart from one point: to weaken the central power of the Emperor with his suzerainty, and to enrich themselves on the rich ecclesiastical estates. However, they all were scared of their own fighting men, the peasants and artisans, and the growing power of the guilds.

In addition to this inner weakness of the Protestant camp,

## JOSEPH LEWIS, ATHEIST

**We regret to announce that Joseph Lewis has died suddenly in New York.**

I FANCY that Joseph Lewis did not care much for obituaries. He did carry them in *The Age of Reason Magazine*, the bi-monthly of the Freethinkers of America, which he edited; but he prominently displayed a "Tribute to the Living", dedicating an issue of the magazine to a supporter and wishing "our Patron good health and long life".

Like many true atheists he had no fear of death, though he acknowledged that the injustice of death included a reluctance to part with loved ones and the loss of opportunity to go on being useful in life.

After his first heart attack fifteen years ago, he quipped, "When you think of all the great and famous people who have died, it should be a consolation to know that your fate will be the same as theirs".

Joseph Lewis was a great American individualist. An unbending atheist—a proud atheist—an atheist who never ceased his propaganda. He wrote unceasingly, he spoke long and clear, he agitated like a bulldog against religion in American schools, against the Vatican, against Christian Scientists and other "fake healers", against the Bible, against Billy Graham, against the use of the cross in public life . . . you name any symptom of religion in the world, and Joseph Lewis was there with his pen, exposing superstition and injustice.

A man with a chip on his shoulder? No!—to attack was only one side of his life. He just as fervently proclaimed the virtues of Thomas Paine, of Bernard Shaw, of Robert Ingersoll, of Thomas Edison, of Helen Keller . . . but always Paine comes out top in some way, for he had immersed himself in his life and works.

Joseph Lewis had statues to Paine erected in Paris, in Morristown (New Jersey), and (as many readers will remember) in Thetford; he wrote books about Paine, and he published and popularised his works; he honoured the Thomas Paine Society in Britain by becoming one of its distinguished Vice-Presidents.

One of his books he called *Thomas Paine, Author of the Declaration of Independence*, in which he brought forward powerful claims to justify the title. It contains a wealth of evidence, but not enough to establish proof. Lewis would always jump to the aid of Paine against those, who would repeat the smears against the great and gifted man. Lewis

there was another consideration: the Habsburgs ruled also in Spain which, after her colonial acquisitions in the New World, was the richest empire; therefore it was unnecessary for her to develop a national bourgeoisie and national industry. The Emperor had to offer trade with Spain and this highly profitable aspect swayed many a Free City to adhere to the Imperial cause. But it also led to jealousy within the Catholic camp. After Cardinal Richelieu had exterminated his Protestants with fire and sword (1624), he underwrote the expenses of King Gustavus Adolphus, the Swedish leader of the Protestants, to put an army into the field against the Catholics. At the same time, Father Joseph, his Ambassador at the Vienna Court, intrigued against Count Waldstein (Wallenstein), the ex-Lutheran Supreme Commander of the Imperial Army, with the connivance of the Pope (then a tool in French hands). Wallenstein had been the great genius of that war and saw further than them all; he was murdered by two Irish officers on his staff.

Religious doctrines had only served as rallying slogans; in fact, the wars had very materialistic aims.

CHRISTOPHER BRUNEL

was always right in that. But he had a minor fault in my opinion—he sometimes went too far.

Generally, though, he knew all the facts and he deployed them with great skill. He loved debate: in public meetings, in private conversations, in broadcasting. He was first class at debate—and he made sure you knew how good he was! The noble causes that he made his were his motives: they drove him to the fore. Until he retired a while ago, he was Secretary of the Freethinkers of America as well as of the Thomas Paine National Foundation. He had money, and he used it generously in the work he undertook.

To my father and to me he was a good, generous friend. Those, who knew him, would be in no danger ever of forgetting him. But as well as being remembered by personal friends and by supporters of his views, I am sure he would like to feel that this obituary also helped to push forward the many causes that he led: they were many, I have told of a few of them.

The National Council for Civil Liberties and The Defence of Literature and the Arts Society

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London, NW1. 01-387 2544.  
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London, W1. 01-734 6900.

# ARE MODERN CHRISTIANS CHRISTIANS?

G. L. SIMONS

WHEN A LARVA (small, soft and ugly) turns into a dragonfly (slender, delicate and beautiful) it is no longer a larva. The stages of this evolution are discrete and definable, but the overall change is great enough to justify using a different word to denote the finished product. Sometimes a combination of changes is not significant enough to justify a fresh word: from spring to autumn a tree will change predictably, but it is still a tree. Sometimes philosophical questions of identity arise: to what extent is Fred, the squalling, puking babe, the same person as the later Fred, the stiff-upper-lipped adult. All Fred's molecules and memories have changed, but he is still Fred—or is he?

The generalised question that arises is: how extensive and of what kind do the changes in an entity have to be before we can rationally say that the entity is not the entity it was? And in particular for our present enquiry, have the modern, reforming, radical Christians reformed Christianity to the point that it is no longer Christianity?

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For most of Christian history most Christians have believed an assortment of curious superstitious and silly things: that an all-powerful, all-knowing God found human beings interesting; that this same God, being all-loving and all-forgiving, decided to torture most human beings in hell for ever; that a band of naughty angels were turfed out of heaven; that Mary was a virgin, Jesus divine, and everyone else a miserable sinner. Today the modern, radical Christian (the mrc) will have little or none of this. God is depersonalised; heaven and hell do not exist as places; and Mary was probably a bit mischievous like the rest of us. In addition to these two positions there are many others; some institutionalised, some not; some supported by secular governments, some not; some extremely nasty, some relatively harmless. There are several hundred Christian sects. Are they all entitled to call themselves Christian? Is only one so entitled? Or none?

There are several ways of arriving at a definition of "The Christian". One, and perhaps the most obvious, is that the Christian is a follower of Christ, believing in Jesus's teachings as recorded in the New Testament and the less favoured gospels. Or the Christian may simply be a member of an institutionalised church which may or may not follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. A further possibility is that the Christian belongs to what is recognised to be a consistent (though evolving) historical Christian tradition which may or may not be institutionalised and which may or may not be connected with the teachings of Jesus. A fourth possibility is that one believes in a Central Doctrine or Creed, partly derived from Jesus, partly represented by Churches, and partly found in the historical tradition. Another possibility is that one calls oneself a Christian because the word sounds nice. To what extent does the mrc fit any of these definitions? To what extent can he be so accommodated that he is rationally entitled to call himself a Christian? Let us consider the definitions in turn.

## Follower of Christ

In common with his historical counterparts the mrc believes some of the things that Jesus said and rejects

others. He believes in charity and devotion, but he is not too keen on turning the other cheek (some mrc's forget themselves to the extent of supporting armed revolt—as for instance in Latin America). And to Jesus's supernatural beliefs the mrc is quite unsympathetic and is not prepared to accept heavens, hells, damnations, angels and the rest. In fact he only subscribes to a few of Jesus's beliefs, to no more than does the humanist, the communist or the flat-earther. Clearly the mrc cannot be termed a Christian by virtue of his subscribing to all (or most) of Christ's beliefs.

## Member of an institutionalised Church

To be a true member of an institutionalised Church certain conditions have to be fulfilled. One of the most important of these is the acceptance of at least the majority of the Church's dogmas and beliefs. And the same point can be made here as we made above. The mrc rejects the majority of the teachings of all the institutionalised Churches. That the Bishop of Woolwich remains a bishop does not mean that his membership of the Church of England is valid. He rejects quite enough of the teaching of the C of E to justify his expulsion. That the hierarchy will not take this step does not validate his membership. Consider a more obvious example: if a Jehovah's Witness came to believe that God did not exist, that Jesus was a decaying old lecher, and that the Bible was poppycock—and if such a Witness stayed within the movement to propagate his views—one would conclude that he was not a true Witness. In such circumstances he would probably be expelled, but if he were not—through the confusion or weakness of the leaders—it would not make him any more a true Witness. Hence the mrc cannot claim to be a Christian by virtue of his membership of an institutionalised Church.

## Participant in the evolving tradition

Evolution can sometimes go far enough to cause the abandonment of words, categories and definitions formally employed—as with the larva turning into a dragonfly. To be "true" to a tradition means maintaining, despite fringe changes, certain central attitudes or doctrines which people outside the tradition do not share. Here again the mrc falls far short. Despite his linguistic gymnastics there is little of importance in his position that can also be detected in historical Christianity which cannot also be found in other religions and philosophies. There comes a point when, in a persistent and remorseless evolution, one effectively cuts oneself off from the tradition roots. The mrc passed this point some time ago.

## The eclectic view

Nor can enough be salvaged from the Christ, Church and tradition strands to make a Christian amalgam. The mrc accepts a few of Christ's teachings; his membership of a Church, where such membership exists, is only nominal; and he has cut himself off from the tradition. There are not enough ingredients to bake the cake.

## The word sounds right

To many people the word "Christian" sounds nice and they may wish to call themselves Christians on that account alone. Here "Christian" means being "good" and "loving", "kind" and "generous", etc. But this sort of redefinition just will not do. The admired qualities have characterised some pagans and atheists throughout history, before and

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## THEATRE REVIEW

LUCY DANSIE

**RENT** The Unity Theatre, 1 Goldington Street, London, NW1. (Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, 7.45 p.m. till December 20.) WITH A MASTERLY use of satire Theodore Roszak, the author of *Rent*, has created a damning and very compelling indictment of the United States and its social set-up. Indirectly he seems to be jibing at, not necessarily capitalism, but any form of government—authoritarian, totalitarian, democratic yet removed from the people—which enables one section of the population to suffocate another. Taking the concept of rent as his yardstick he shows what destruction can be wrought by one man who has too much power over another.

Mr Press has a cottage to rent and an advertisement produces as a tenant a young virtually penniless artist, Carlo Timorian. Amazing scenes take place as Press, prior to accepting the young man as a tenant, accuses him of every 'evil' he can think of, evil in Press's warped mind constituting such things as being Jewish or 'queer'. Finally in this scene he robs him of what little money he has, and gets Timorian in a half-nelson, threatening to break his painting arm when the unfortunate man tries to get his money back. The first hint of satire comes when Timorian accepts this, instead of walking out and returning with a policeman. From then on he is subjected to every conceivable humiliation as Press part-patronises part-uses him. He is dressed in ridiculous clothes, while Press gradually tames him to do anything he commands. He graduates from sitting meekly on the floor massaging the ogre's feet to sleeping and even taking baths with him. (These last two off-stage!)

The plot revolves round these two characters, but Press also has a wife, who passively panders to every manifestation of his insanity. (Having equated Press with the USA, is it over-imaginative to connect his wife with a certain large island not far north of France?) The plot develops to include an old friend of Timorian's who runs an art gallery, a policeman savagely criticised for being too timid and Italian, by Press, himself an ex-policeman proud of having been thrown out of more forces than any other policeman, and finally the attractive wife of a rich businessman. All these contribute to the underlying theme, particularly the last-mentioned. She is a patroness of the arts, anxious to encourage Timorian, whose work she considers very promising. The outcome revolves around her artful handling of Press and her subsequent shocking discovery, which reveals the bitter point of the play.

Much tribute must go to Stuart Eames, for a magnificent portrayal of Press, an exceptionally difficult part because of the necessary unnaturalness of the character. Aided by effective make-up he managed to personify all that is sick and rotten about American society, and this play makes clear just how appallingly rotten it is. Carlo Timorian was played by Bill Franklin—another excellent performance, this time of the artistic underdog who is battered by society into the shape it wants him. The pathetic acceptance of Press's superiority which appeared on Timorian's face as he asks Press querulously and humbly, "That's right, isn't it?" was enough to make an emotional art lover weep.

This is altogether a most interesting play, on which others may place a different interpretation, or prefer not to place one at all. It is undoubtedly entertainment, if not more—farical at times, yet intriguing. The distinctive atmosphere of this small theatre, which was once a chapel (progress!), and an exhibition of paintings by three of the actors in *Rent* combine to support the play in making an outing to the Unity most enjoyable.

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after Christ. If the mrc bases his Christianity on "niceness" alone then the subterfuge is transparent. He cannot be a Christian by virtue of this alone.

We must conclude that the mrc is not a Christian and, apart from his hypocrisy and diffidence, he is much nicer for it. The Roman Catholics are still the most genuine Christians (in one or two senses) alive and kicking today—and by virtue of their genuine religiosity, are still amongst the most doctrinaire, superstitious and socially insensitive. The mrc is decent and mature to the extent that he has shed his Christianity and adopted the humanist garb.

Let us therefore help him to admit the truth—that he is no longer a Christian, and let us expose thereby the hypocritical attempt to hang the old religious jargon on to a secular view of the world.

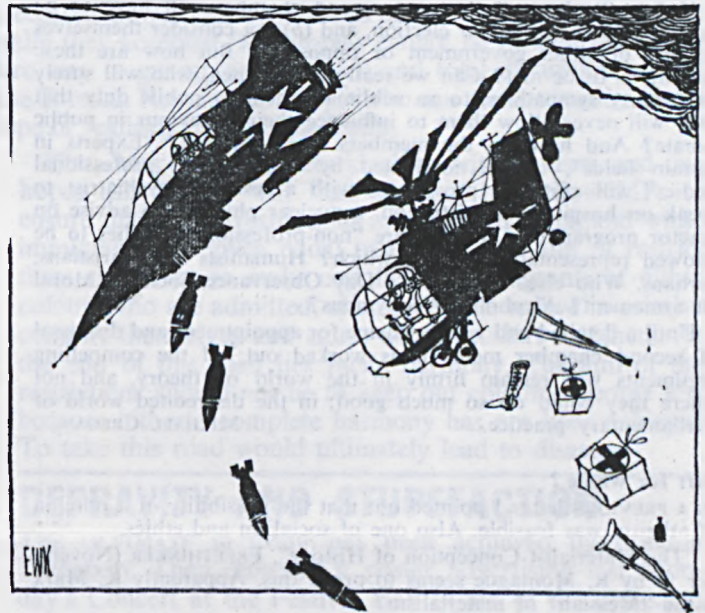
## BOOK REVIEW

KIERAN DALY

**VERDICTS ON VIETNAM**, edited Abu (Pemberton, 9/6).

'THE AMERICANS' assumption of total righteousness decided them to preserve the Vietnamese soul from Communism . . ." so writes James Cameron in his introduction to this book.

Bearing this theme in mind, we can travel through this outstanding collection of cartoons and obtain assurance that not all eyes are comfortably turned the other way—Vietnam, at present, appears to mean nothing more to the everyday citizen than a vision of hairy students wasting their breath in scuffles and arguments, or an occasional column in a daily newspaper quoting American and Vietcong losses—an appalling thought! Surely, what better revelation for those not aware, than a book of cartoons drawn by those who certainly are!



The collection portrays vividly the advantage of the artist over the writer, in making a strong statement with one object and one purpose—where print, when dealing with a controversy of such magnitude, wanders off into a stuttering mass of ambiguity! It also seems to me far more expressive to draw pictures of futility, terror and suffering as appearance immediately conveys a visual image, which claims a little more retention than mere words.

The cartoons all contain that deserving Vietnam trademark . . . President Johnson's problem beaten countenance and drooping sausage nose, together with a pair of escalated eyebrows, holding back his hidden powers of thought! The pragmatic American soldier looms over the withered Vietnamese offering a doubtful form of security until the bullets fly, while a jet roars overhead dropping bombs followed by a helicopter hurriedly dumping crutches and medical kits. These are but a few examples of the brilliant satire, used to convey the suffering of people alike in every way to our own comfortable selves. The artists, in drawing these cartoons, appear to use a thinner line for the small peasant and, a broad 'uniform' stroke for the towering soldier—an interesting equation.

I would recommend this collection as an excellent source of impression in relation to the history of the Vietnam war. . . . We now await Mr Nixon's action in this tedious game of 'Yes and No'.

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plished, it will mean the end of all churches and religions. Only war and wholesale destruction could give them a chance of survival.

A third possibility to account for the Encyclical, though rather far-fetched, has been suggested. The encyclical has boosted the pill to an extent which no ordinary publicity could have achieved. The psychological fact that a prohibition invariably creates a desire for the forbidden stuff may have induced the Pope to resort to this indirect method to deal with the problem of over-population.

And who knows if the Vatican is not financially interested, through its "Banco de Santo Spirito" in the laboratories which manufacture the pill?

## LETTERS

### Second House

WHILE YOUR comments on Lords' reform were sensible and moderate, I feel that it should be regarded as desirable that members of this reformed body should feel completely free to impartially examine and criticise measures sent up from the Commons, so that flaws and fallacies played down by the government will be ruthlessly exposed by this second chamber, which can thus act as a valuable informant and guide to the subject under discussion, if they are free from such muting pressures as appeals for party unity—*vide* the experiences of the Labour left—and the necessity of pandering to the illusions and prejudices of our adult voting population.

Hence members of the new second chamber will have to be (a) not subject to popular election, and (b) not consider themselves as part of either government or opposition. But how are these conditions to be met? Can we really expect men, who will surely have party sympathies, to so sublimate them to public duty that they will never allow them to influence their behaviour in public debate? And how are the members to be selected? "Experts in certain fields", to be nominated by "appropriate professional bodies" will certainly provide us with a resident psychiatrist to speak on hospital administration, a nuclear physicist to advise on reactor programmes, etc. But are "non-professional" bodies to be allowed representation? If so, which? Humanists and Christians, perhaps. Who else? The Lord's Day Observance Society? Moral Re-armament? Alcoholics Anonymous?

Until a detailed and viable scheme for appointment and dismissal of second chamber members is worked out, all the compelling arguments will remain firmly in the world of theory, and not where they could do so much good; in the discredited world of Parliamentary practice.

MICHAEL CREGAN.

### Part for whole?

IN A PREVIOUS letter I pointed out that the possibility of a religion of atheism was feasible. Also one of socialism and ethics.

"The Materialist Conception of History", FREETHINKER (November 9) by R. Montague seems to prove this. Apparently K. Marx is the "Messiah" of materialism?

May I put forward a view of C. Cohen, "Materialism Restated" published 1938 (revised), to enlighten readers of his 'free-thinkers' attitude, or approach to the problem (p. 19, quote):

"To commence with, it is rather unfortunate that in general usage among many today and in popular newspaper jargon, philosophical and scientific materialism has come to be identified with Marxism.

"It is not within my present scope to deal with Marxism but one may be allowed to say it is unfortunate that the phrase 'The materialistic interpretation of history' should have been taken to signify what is actually an economic interpretation of society. I do not deny that the economic interpretation of Marx is a materialistic one, since it excludes everything in the nature of supernatural agencies and completely rejects all religion.

"But it is unfortunate that, useful enough as a form of propaganda, an economic theory should for so many stand for a complete science of man. The part, has been taken for the whole! It is as though one were to take the nebular theory as constituting the whole of astronomy."

Mr Montague mentions Engels, Marx, Lenin, Mao-tse-tung, Vico, Churchill and King Canute! I would have thought names like Darwin, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Lyell or Einstein would have been more appropriate.

Whilst pleading guilty to searching for a black cat in a very dark room—which is not there—I suspect Mr Montague has found one. May it bring him luck.

ALAN GREGORY.

### Active Argument

WITH regard to Peter Crommelin's letter (November 2): when the irrationality of religious belief is accepted by believers as a spiritual value, rational argument against such belief needs a new emphasis if it is to be kept alive.

The atheism of G. L. Simons, etc., does not preclude (as I understand it) the possibility of meaningful language about the causes and effects of religious belief. There is surely scope here for active argument—even within the pages of the FREETHINKER.

CHARLES BYASS.

### Scruffy demonstrators

AS A MEMBER of the white collar brigade and a fervent demonstrator I should like to know how the student demonstrators of the country are to afford to become the new style snappily dressed demonstrators of the future on a meagre grant of £300-£400 per annum. Further this is conforming to the wishes of the "apathetic majority" who will then scoff, 'Oh look. The mods are back'. Besides suits are impractical when carrying a banner or being jostled about in Grosvenor Square. Long hair on the other hand is natural and goes with youth and virility which most of the fogies who call the demonstrators 'the vast unwashed' are sadly lacking in themselves. Conforming with the masses in these respects will only make them assume that we are slowly coming over to their way of thinking and encourage them to reassert themselves even more. Forward to the revolution Comrades!

DAVID BRADLEY.

### Graveyard masonry

MAY I, too, pop in a word of praise for F. H. Snow's excellent article on decrepit graveyards and their often ghastly trappings. After reading his experiences, I took a stroll or two through our village "consecrated patch", and found much that is worth commenting upon, some of which, I am certain, will be "up Mr Snow's street"—his sense of humour, among other things, being similar to mine. A few years ago, a member of the community in this religion-strangled village—particularly by the Methodist Church—saw fit to draw attention to the decayed state of *one* outstanding monument, erected in our local churchyard, to commemorate an outbreak of asiatic cholera in 1832, which took a toll, in three months, of 23 men, 23 women, and 26 children, whose bodies were interred in one long grave. One public-spirited villager organised a cash collection. The vicar arranged to have the undecipherable headstone restored, and the following inscription came to light.

"In memory of 23 men, 23 women and 26 children interred within this enclosure who fell victims to that dreadful scourge, Asiatic cholera, with which is pleased the Almighty to visit this parish (my italics), 28th September to the 10th November, 1832—when, under the arm of a Benevolent Providence, the skill of medical men, and the donations of generous neighbours, it ceased. 'And He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague was stayed.'"

Has anyone ever seen such a blatant contradiction as the above? On the other side of the churchyard is yet another memorial—not restored, and so almost unreadable, to a further plague of Asiatic cholera, with the inscription:

"In memory of 14 women, 14 men, and 31 children who died of Asiatic cholera in a second visitation of this disease."

Readers may notice the more courteous placing of women first in the second memorial, as against the placing of men, on the first. Practically all of the other headstones in this yard are, as friend F. H. Snow puts it "in a state of rottenness, and standing all awry, like bad teeth in a huge mouth".

It makes you think—doesn't it?

JOHN SHEPHERD.

### OBITUARY

WE REGRET to announce the death at Knightswood Hospital, Glasgow, of Mr Robert Hamilton. He was aged 87. Mr Hamilton was a firm advocate of secularism and was President of Glasgow Secular Society for many years. He was a former director of Cowlairs Co-operative Society Ltd. Mr Harry McShane conducted the committal ceremony at Maryhill Crematorium, Glasgow. Our sympathy is extended to Mr Hamilton's son and two daughters.

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