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THE MARRIAGE MYTH

THE SUCCESS of the Divorce Reform Bill in its third reading in the House of Commons represents not only an advance for those men and women whose marriages break up, but, in a broader and more significant context, an advance for the forces of reason over those of superstition.

The institution of marriage has, of course many advantages, economic and social, not least of which is the security it supplies to children as they grow up. It is evident however, that a large proportion of marriages do not work. Some of these end in divorce or separation, while many continue to exist as an empty mockery of what they set out to be.

A happy marriage, in which both partners are devoted to one another and in which true harmony exists and has been proved to exist by the passage of time, is, of course, a beautiful concept and in many instances a reality. To criticise marriage when there are a number of people who are sublimely happy in their experience of it, is not unlike criticising religion when there are a number of people whose lives are greatly enhanced by their belief in it. For marriage in its legal sense is essentially as irrational as religion. If a man and a woman can spend their lives together in harmonious bliss, why should such a relationship need the seal of legality? While if a man and a woman at one point in time consider that they wish to spend the rest of their lives in each other's company, but some time later find each other unbearable why should they not be able to part without going through an involved legal procedure?

To the first question there is no answer. To the second there are many, all of them economic but one—children. Yet the commonly held view that parents must stick together where there are children is demonstrably fallacious. For it cannot be beneficial for a child to be brought up in an atmosphere of hostility and distrust, even if he has to forgo the presence of a father in his home. And the younger a woman is when she is set free from her husband, the more likely she is to remarry and to provide her children with the conventional secure loving background.

Thus, it is clear that marriage as a legal proposition is a product of irrationality of a religious nature, and it would not be overstating the case to say that those whose minds are free from religion and who get married do so only out of expediency and the necessity to conform. This is not to say however, that lasting relationships between men and women are irrational, nor that a relationship between a man and a woman cannot be strengthened by their children. But in a situation where nothing, not even children, can keep alive the natural successors to the mutual feelings which originally brought the couple together, it is ludicrous that anything should prevent a complete separation. The financial obstacles to breaking a relationship are merely a product of society as it is at the moment, and, though highly complex, must be overcome as soon as possible. The legal obstacles are no more than an anachronism surviving from centuries of religious unreason, and are fast being done away with.

It may be objected that the breaking down of the sanctity of the institution of marriage, will produce an insecure

INSIDE: VOLTAIRE AS HISTORIAN BY MARTIN PAGE

Also read of the startling activities of two young humanists in Rome, the holy city.

promiscuous society, in which children will have no proper home and adults will be hardened creatures lacking in emotion. Social change is always slow, and it is to this fact that we must look to appreciate that in the long run the erosion of marriage as it is today will be socially advantageous rather than disadvantageous. For marriage at present, despite its undenied success in individual cases, is surely a grave burden on society when looked at in its generality. The principle that one man *must* love one woman and no other creates a situation where the majority of the members of society exalt one individual above all others. A hypothetical example of the evil of this would be the man, who has the opportunity of saving either his wife, or a scientist whose work is beneficial to the human race as a whole, from a fire. Of course in society as it is at present no man would be human who could repress the inclination to exalt his personal loved one above all others, nor would a man be human who did not save his wife in preference to a stranger whatever the stranger's qualifications. Nevertheless, this does not mean that, taking into account the slowness of social change, steps towards the abolition of what is an illogical anachronism, and steps towards the day when humans are all brothers and sisters with no special distinctions made between them, cannot now be made and considered to be triumphs of reason.

THE PROCEEDS OF UNITY

THE LATEST REPORTS on the progress of the Anglicans and Methodists towards their mutual union might be considered the most boring news of the week and therefore unworthy of comment. And indeed all the talk of the 'Service of

(Continued overleaf)

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(Continued from previous page)

Reconciliation' and the struggles within the Anglican Convocation, the Methodist Conference and the various lay bodies involved, though quite as frivolous as the Pope's pitiful exertions to discover the truth about birth control, are also of far less real import for the future of mankind.

The objectives of the unity scheme can be said to fall into three categories, Christian, furthering public relations, and financial—Christian because brotherhood is the Christian ideal; furthering public relations because the new image of the combined churches might be said to be a more saleable commodity; financial because the link-up will in the long run enable several churches to be closed and in administration the economies of size will come into effect.

Should the unity scheme eventually succeed the Christian motive, naturally, will affect only those Christians whose souls will gain in spiritual peace from the knowledge that one of Christendom's barriers has been removed. It is also possible that the combined church will acquire a reputation for being revolutionary and prepared to move with the times, and thereby prevent some of its members leaving who would otherwise have given up organised religion as too antiquated. But it must be remembered when assessing the significance of this that regular church-goers already form a very small percentage of the population and that therefore the number of people whose adherence will be retained will be infinitesimal and will very probably not

COMING EVENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding requests 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.

INDOOR

Bristol Humanist Group: 45 Fernbank Road, Redland: Saturday, June 28, 6.30 p.m.: Mid-Summer Family Party.

Luton Humanist Group: Carnegie Room, Central Library, Luton: Friday, July 4, 8 p.m.: Social Evening (Members and Friends).

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, June 29, 11 a.m.: "Rembrandt—An Exemplary Life—Third Centenary", Dr Helen Rosnau.

Thomas Paine Society and Norwich Public Library: Central Library, Bethel Street, Norwich: Until July 5: Exhibition in commemoration of the 175th anniversary of the publication in Great Britain of *The Age of Reason*.

exceed the numbers of the fanatic sectarians who will leave the combined church as a result of the unification.

Thus, it is only the financial aspect of the scheme that is of any real importance, because the question must be asked "What are they going to do with the money?" Already the Church of England's use of its £200 million is coming under criticism not just from non-believers but from Christians. The increased income will obviously not be spent on new churches, since it is largely to be derived from the redundancy of old ones and the resulting saving on overheads. Some of the money will doubtless be spent improving the remaining churches, but obviously not all of it. There are also many channels into which the church pours its money at present and presumably some of these will benefit from the proceeds of unity. But in a situation where the churches cannot be said to be anything but declining, there will obviously be a lot of money to spare. And money means resources. In a society which is predominantly secular it is surely time that the government took a stronger hold on the church's wealth, which was initially gained at a time when the church had a strong, albeit compulsory, following and played a substantial part in both ordinary people's lives and the governing of the country. Now that both these roles have virtually lapsed it becomes more monstrous as the church's wealth increases, that the people of the land which gave it to them should not gain more benefit from resources, which if put to good use could achieve a great deal by way of social improvement.

TILL... US DO PART

A RATHER QUIANT result of the now soon expected relaxation of the divorce laws has been the proposal by the Bishop of Wakefield, Dr Treacy, that innocent parties in divorce cases be permitted to remarry in church. In the July edition of his diocesan magazine Dr Treacy said that every year many sincere church people who have suffered through the breakdown of their marriage are denied the benefit of Christian marriage. "This is a situation that is going to occur a good deal more frequently under the provisions of the suggested new divorce law, when a woman may be divorced without her consent after five years' desertion by her husband." Considering the amount of hypocrisy that already surrounds the Christian marriage service, manifested in the number of brides who arrive at the altar pregnant and the number of people whose marriage is one of the three occasions that they go to church in their lives, it is in keeping with the up-dated image of the church to relax yet another of their original laws. However, one wonders both how 'innocent parties' are to be determined, and further whether the traditional marriage service with its 'till death us do part' might not be a little ironical in the circumstances. Of this last anomaly Dr Treacy suggests that the service could not include a repetition of the aforementioned vow but said that he would be "opposed to such a service being without music, flowers and the usual frills which accompany a wedding. I would not wish such a wedding to give the impression of being something second-best".

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RUSSELL'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

G. L. SIMONS

SIXTH OF NINE ARTICLES

CONSIDERING Russell's strong moral views it is surprising that he did not spend more time on ethical philosophy. On page 233 of *An Outline of Philosophy* he suggests a reason. Of ethics he remarks: "I hardly think myself that it ought to be included in the domain of philosophy, but to prove this would take as long as to discuss the subject itself, and would be less interesting". Russell *does* discuss ethics in a number of books, but without the detail that characterises his mathematical and epistemological work. Russell may be a great moral teacher but I cannot feel he will be remembered as a great ethical philosopher.

At the time of *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) Russell was under the influence of G. E. Moore and his *Principia Ethica*. At that time Russell believed that "good" was an indefinable notion and that *a priori* knowledge was possible in ethical matters. Russell later came to abandon this view, partly, he says, by Santayana's *Winds of Doctrine*. In 1927 Russell wrote "I now think that good and bad are derivative from desire". In 1937 he wrote in a way that resembled what Ayer had to say on ethics in Chapter 6 of *Language, Truth and Logic* (quote from *Religion and Science*, pp. 236-237):

"If I say 'all Chinese are Buddhists', I can be refuted by the production of a Chinese Christian or Mohammedan. If I say 'I believe that all Chinese are Buddhists', I cannot be refuted by any evidence from China, but only by evidence that I do not believe what I say; for what I am asserting is only something about my own state of mind. If, now, a philosopher says 'Beauty is god', I may interpret him as meaning either 'Would that everybody loved the beautiful' (which corresponds to 'all Chinese are Buddhists') or 'I wish that everybody loved the beautiful' (which corresponds to 'I believe that all Chinese are Buddhists')."

And Russell stresses the key point in this analysis (which, of course, applies equally to ethical judgements):

"The first of these makes no assertion, but expresses a wish; since it affirms nothing it is logically impossible that there should be evidence for or against it, or for it to possess either truth or falsehood. The second sentence . . . does make a statement, but it is one about the philosopher's state of mind . . . This second sentence does not belong to ethics, but to psychology or biography."

The inescapable conclusion is that "ethics . . . consists of desires of a certain general kind . . .". Similarly in *An Outline of Philosophy* Russell writes that "we call something 'good' when we desire it, and 'bad' when we have an aversion from it". But the position is slightly more complicated than it may appear. In his 'Replies to Criticism' at the end of the edited *Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* (1944), Russell observes: "I do not think that an ethical judgement *merely* expresses a desire; I agree with Kant that it must have a degree of universality. I should interpret "A is good" as "Would that all men desired A". This *expresses* a wish, but does not *assert* one except by implication". (Italics in original.)

At the same time Russell has written that he has come across no ethical theory that satisfies him, and some of his unhappiness over a purely *subjective* ethic can, I think, be detected in part of the dialogue he had with Copleston on the existence of God. They are discussing the Moral Argument for God's existence. Copleston says: "Then you'd say that there's no criterion outside feeling that will enable one to distinguish between the behaviour of the Commandant of Belsen and the behaviour, say, of Sir Stafford Cripps

or the Archbishop of Canterbury". Here, in line with Russell's general ethical beliefs, the answer would seem to be a positive affirmative—but he seems to prefer to hedge: "The feeling is a little too simplified. You've got to take into account the effects of actions and your feelings towards those effects . . ." Copleston remarks that he cannot see what ground Russell can have for not approving of the actions of the Belsen Commandant, and in justification Russell persists with an analogy with colour blindness: ". . . there are people suffering from jaundice, and I don't agree with the people. I can't agree that the things are not yellow, there isn't any proof, but most people agree with me that they're not yellow, and most people agree with me that the Commandant of Belsen was making mistakes". Copleston asks "Well, do you think that the word 'ought' simply has an emotional connotation?" and Russell replies, "No, I don't think that, because you see, as I was saying a moment ago, one has to take into account of the effects . . ." Clearly one *has* to take into account the effects of actions, but any estimate of these effects can only be on a basis of feeling. Such a view is quite consistent with Russell's ethical philosophy and I do not know why he was not prepared openly to admit this consequence in debate with Copleston. It seems to me that there *is* no way outside *feeling* of judging between different acts which have ethical significance.

In *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954) Russell again looks for something in addition to emotion in the making of ethical judgements. In the chapter 'Is There Ethical Knowledge', he asks (p. 113): "If we say 'pleasure is good and pain is bad', do we mean anything more than 'we like pleasure and dislike pain'?" and he observes "It seems as if we must mean something more than this, but this is certainly a part of what we mean". But despite the search for "something more", he feels obliged to close the chapter with:

"And the appeal upon which we depend for the acceptance of our ethical theory is not the appeal to the facts of perception, but to the emotions and feelings which have given rise to the concepts of 'rights' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad'."

Thus our moral beliefs, however passionately held, cannot be proved as can propositions in science or mathematics.

Some people have wondered how Russell can propagate his moral views with such enthusiasm if they lack, as Russell would urge, a *factual basis*. One such person is J. Buchler and Russell's reply to him in the *Philosophy of Bertrand Russell* is illuminating: "I am quite at a loss to understand why any one should be surprised at my expressing vehement ethical judgements. By my own theory, I am, in doing so, expressing vehement desires as to the desires of mankind; I feel such desires so why not express them?" And Russell fully recognises that ethical persuasion must be emotive rather than factual:

"Persuasion in ethical questions is necessarily different from persuasion in scientific matters . . . the person who judges that A is good is wishing others to feel certain desires. He will therefore . . . try to rouse these desires in other people. . . . This is the purpose of preaching, and it was my purpose in the various books in which I have expressed ethical opinions. The art of presenting one's desires persuasively is totally different from that of logical demonstration, but it is equally legitimate."

And what moral views does Russell preach? There are a number of central attitudes that can be found in many

(Continued on page 206)

VOLTAIRE AS HISTORIAN

MARTIN PAGE

TOWARDS THE END of 1751 there appeared under the name of "M. de Francheville" a major historical work called *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*. The author was none other than François Marie Arouet de Voltaire. First conceived about twenty years previously, Voltaire's *The Age of Louis XIV* was the result of immense documentation and painstaking research; and it remains one of the classic histories of European civilisation in the seventeenth century.

At the outset at least, Voltaire apparently had two inter-related yet distant aims in preparing this work. The first aim was to trace the development of the arts during a period in which they reached one of their greatest heights. As he wrote to his friend and former tutor at Louis-le-Grand, l'Abbé d'Olivet, in August 1735: "take away the arts and intellectual achievements of the age of Louis XIV, and you will find nothing remarkable left to attract the attention of posterity".

Voltaire's second aim was decidedly political: for he envisaged *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* as a kind of counterpart to *Lettres Philosophiques*, which he was preparing at about the same time. These Letters, ostensibly addressed by Voltaire to a personal friend, drew such invidious comparisons between the bigotry and petty tyranny of the 'ancien régime' under Louis XV and the supposed tolerance and enlightenment of contemporary England that the work received its baptism of fire at the hands of the Paris hangman (a genuine proto-Nazi in his taste for books!). *The Age of Louis XIV* was to serve a similar propogandist purpose by highlighting the achievements of Louis's reign at the expense of France's artistic decadence and political inertia under his successor, Louis XV.

To this end Voltaire decided that a thematic approach would be more effective than a purely chronological one: first would come the political and military triumphs of the age; next, social, economic, legal and ecclesiastical developments; and last, but by no means least, an account of the artistic achievements which, for Voltaire, merited five or six chapters being devoted to them. It seems clear that Voltaire originally planned his work on a symphonic basis, with a final, triumphant crescendo. This plan could hardly have been furthered by concentration on a chronological approach, for the closing years of Louis XIV's reign were marked by relative artistic anaemia, famine, military defeat and mounting despotism.

Indeed, as his researches deepened, Voltaire became increasingly conscious of the Sun King's defects and limitations. His interest in the arts of the period became increasingly tempered by a growing awareness of the restraints on intellectual freedom and enlightenment in seventeenth century France. He learned how the century was darkened by theological disputes. The age of Jansenism and of the repeal of the Edict of Nantes was hardly an ideal "golden age" for an eighteenth century 'philosophe' to admire. Voltaire therefore modified his earlier plan; and the 1751 edition of *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* contained only two chapters on the arts, not five or six, and they no longer concluded the work. Their place had been taken by the chapters on ecclesiastical affairs, which had been expanded from two chapters to five. The book now ended not with an apotheosis of the human intellect, but with a satirical attack on religious stupidity. This finale, in relation to the rest of the published work, is almost as incongruous as Winwood Reade's conclusion to *The Martyrdom of Man*.

But although Voltaire became more critical in his attitude towards Louis XIV and his age, he never abandoned his belief that, in many respects, the age was vastly superior to many others. In his opening chapter, Voltaire maintained that there had so far been four great epochs in human history: under Philip and Alexander; under Caesar and Augustus; under the Medicis; and under Louis XIV. His criterion was the state of the arts. For him, the arts were



the flower of civilisation, and their growth and success, presupposing a certain level of material prosperity and social peace, were, in his four great ages, the direct result of an enlightened despotism. Authoritarian rulers like Augustus and Louis XIV therefore made for human progress—in Voltaire's eyes, at least.

In a letter of October 1738 to the abbé Dubos, Voltaire called the age of Louis XIV "the century that does the human spirit most credit". Thirteen years later, in his book on the subject, he had not changed his mind: "It is perhaps the one of the four ages that comes closest to perfection. Enriched by the discoveries of the other three, it has achieved more in certain fields than the three put together". Voltaire evidently appeared to believe that, for all the stagnation and turbulence on the sea of human affairs, the waves of civilisation rose higher and higher with each successive tide.

In his other great historical work, the immensely influential *Essai sur les Moeurs et l'Esprit des Nations* (which was begun in 1740, though not published in its definitive form until 1769), Voltaire admitted, in a phrase anticipating a famous Gibbonian formula, that history was little more than "a jumble of crimes, follies and misfortunes". Even so, *Essai sur les Moeurs* was imbued with his belief in progress—a belief that was assured schematic expression and theoretical continuation by Voltaire's admirer and biographer, Condorcet, the noble mathematician. Voltaire, indeed, gave the 'Essai' an undeniably optimistic conclusion: "It is legitimate to conclude from our survey of

Europe, from the time of Charlemagne to the present day that this part of the world is undoubtedly more populous, more civilised, more prosperous and more enlightened than it was in Charlemagne's day".

Voltaire set out, in *Essai sur les Moeurs* to compose a history of mankind, tracing the course of civilisation, the origins and manifestations of culture, the ways in which peoples had passed from primitive ignorance and rusticity to relative enlightenment and refinement—over more than eight centuries. "I see virtually nothing but the histories of kings; I want a history of men", Voltaire exclaimed. Such a scheme, in itself, marked a great advance in historiography. His predecessor Bossuet had said scarcely anything about the Arabs and had completely ignored the Indians and the Chinese. Voltaire, however, did his best to devote adequate space to Oriental peoples, mainly because of the undoubted importance of their ancient civilisations, though also because of his antipathy to the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

This antipathy found expression in his presentation of the incalculable misery and demoralisation wrought by the Crusades, though Christian writers like his predecessor the abbé Fleury and his successor Sir George Cox were at least as critical as Voltaire in this respect. He gave a finely balanced evaluation of monasticism. Not unsympathetic towards some individual popes, he regarded the Papacy, as such, as an immense force making for violence and brutality in human affairs. He saw mainly decadence in the centuries of transition from Roman paganism to medieval Christendom.

The deist Voltaire rejected Bossuet's belief that the course of history was determined by the hand of God. What, then, were the motive forces of history? It is true that Voltaire was often tempted to stress the role of "chance" in human affairs—although he particularly appealed to "chance" when he wished to vent his indignation at a phenomenon that offended his rationalism or his humanity. It is also true that, notably in *The Age of Louis XIV*, he was attracted by the 'great man' theory of history

—and his attraction to this theory may be said to have found expression in his belief in Jesus as the personal founder of Christianity. But the writer who was apparently the first to use the term "philosophy of history" may also be said to have paved the way for Buckle and Marx in his intuitive glimpses of the vital role of economic, climatic and ideological forces in historical causation.

Voltaire lent his weight to the 'homo faber' thesis when he declared: "Blacksmiths, carpenters, masons and labourers were necessary before there was one man who had leisure enough for meditation. All the manual arts doubtless preceded metaphysics by several centuries". That was in his introduction to the 'Essai' and in his conclusion to the same work he showed appreciable acumen (pace Freud!) when he stated: "Three things exert a constant influence on men's minds, climate, government and religion: that is the only way to explain the enigma of this world".

Voltaire received the censure of Carlyle, who said of him: "History is for him a poor wearisome debating-club dispute, spun through ten centuries, between the Encyclopédie and the Sorbonne". But Carlyle did less than justice to Voltaire's achievement as a historian. He introduced a new scientific spirit into historical research. He conceived of history as a reflection and an expression of the totality of human life. He applied his judgment independently to facts from original sources which had been largely ignored. He gave new life to historiography with his wonderfully lucid works of popularisation. His 'Essai' won high praise from Buckle, Gray and Horace Walpole; and Michelet believed its most marked characteristic to be *le sens humain*. It was doubtless this very quality of human sympathy that prompted Voltaire to declare: "the great men I speak to you about have prepared pure and lasting pleasure for men yet to be born. A canal lock uniting two seas, a painting by Poussin, a beautiful tragedy, a newly discovered truth—these are things a thousand times more precious than all the annals of the court or all the accounts of military campaigns. You know that, with me, great men come first and heroes last".

RI AND OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

THE LCC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION syllabus for 1947 proclaimed: "The Christian religion is a historical religion; it is based on the fact that certain events happened".

Today we hear less and less from Christians about the "historical" basis of their beliefs. This is because if we apply historical criteria to the 'evidence' that they put forward for their case, we find that it is a jumble of absurdities, contradictions and forgeries. What genuine evidence there is, suggests that Jesus never existed at all, let alone that he was born of a virgin, performed many miracles, was crucified and rose from the dead.

Christian 'spokesmen' now justify their religious beliefs on the grounds of faith not of history. For this reason it is surprising that compulsory RI in schools is being increasingly justified on historical grounds. What is even more surprising is to find humanists siding with the Christians in this argument: "Pupils need to be taught about the Christian religion, as part of their cultural history". (*Religious and Moral Education*, a Christian-Humanist pamphlet.)

Even if it were true that our culture is determined by Christian beliefs, this would be no justification for making

religious education compulsory. But, of course, it is not true, and the people who put forward this argument must know that it is not true—if they do believe it then they are incredibly naive.

No one can deny that Christianity has played a large part in influencing our history; the existence of Christianity is a fact and has historical relevance. This is what one will learn in any good history lesson, but it is no justification for RI lessons. So how do Christians make this illogical progression?

They say that children cannot understand the historical and cultural relevance of Christian beliefs unless they know what those beliefs are. This is true. But for historical purposes these beliefs could be adequately summarised on one side of foolscap. It does not need a lesson a week for ten years.

In any case why should Christianity be picked out for special treatment in this way? Christianity is only one of the many belief systems that have influenced our culture:

"Then it is argued that Christianity is an integral part of our culture. But so is the Greek 'cradle of civilisation'. We do not

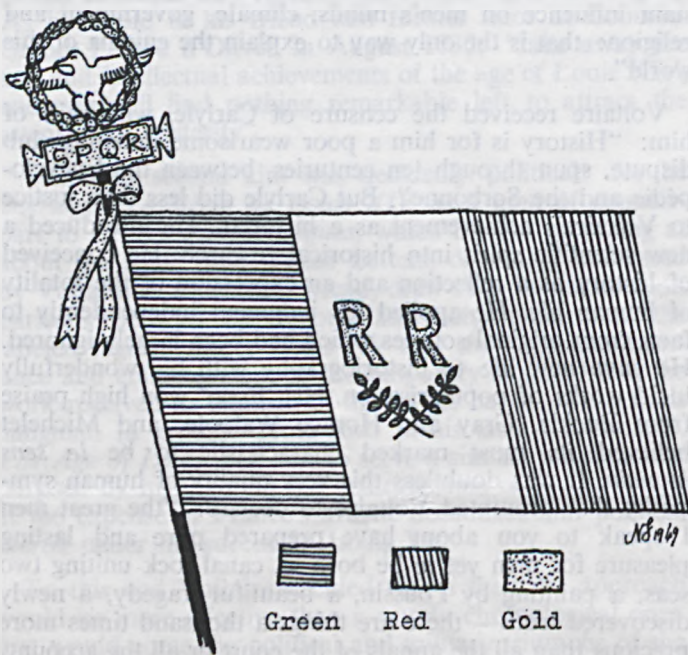
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NSS TRIBUTE LAID AT THE BRUNO STATUE

OUR ROME CORRESPONDENT

IN THE Piazza Campo dei Fiori at Rome stands a monument, erected in 1889, to the memory of Giordano Bruno, who was burned to death there by the Holy Inquisition on February 17, 1660.

Bruno was born near Naples in 1548 and became a Dominican monk. But as a result of reading Copernicus he came to hold advanced views on philosophy and in 1576 threw off the monastic robe and fled from Rome to avoid a charge of heresy. For sixteen years he wandered through Switzerland, France, England and Germany, lecturing and debating on religion, philosophy and astronomy. Bruno was a gifted writer: his prose works include *The signs of*



Battle Flag of the Roman Republic (after a contemporary water colour by L. Pirolì in the archives of the Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento, Rome).

the times, *The shadows of ideas* (1582), *On heroic enthusiasm*, *The expulsion of the triumphant beast* (dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney), and *The immeasurable and the countless worlds*. His poems include *De immenso* and a satire, dedicated to the Pope, *Noah's Ark* (1570). In 1582 he published a comedy, *Il candelaio*.

In 1592 Bruno was arrested by the Inquisition in Venice, and returned to Rome. He was finally condemned for his advocacy of Pantheism; for teaching that the Universe is infinite, and that there are other worlds besides our own. He refused to recant and "when, in his last agony, a crucifix was held before his eyes, it is said that he turned away".¹

Recently, two members of the London Young Humanists, Christine Osborne and Nigel Sinnott, visited Rome, and on June 9 Nigel Sinnott laid a bunch of white gladioli and pink carnations at the Bruno memorial, together with a card in Latin, Italian and English, on behalf of the Executive Committee of the National Secular Society. Mr Sinnott is writing a novel about the 1840 Siege of Rome when Pope Pius IX fled the city, and the people, under Mazzini and Garibaldi declared a Republic.

Garibaldi (a staunch freethinker) and his wife Anita, are commemorated by statues on the Janiculum hill. Not far away is the Cimitero Acattolico, where Keats and Shelley

are buried. Shelley's essay, *The necessity of atheism* (for which he was expelled from Oxford University) has recently been republished by the NSS.

All told, the Eternal City, has, despite its being the heart of the Catholic faith, a surprising number of associations with rationalism, humanism and free thought.

¹ Riehl, A. (1905). *Giordano Bruno*, translated from the German by Agnes Fry. Edinburgh and London: Foulis (p. 104).

RUSSELL'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY—continued

of his books. He hates hypocrisy, callousness, cruelty perpetrated in the name of ideology, and any activity that needlessly restricts human happiness, intellectual development and 'spiritual' insight. His approach to human society can be summed up in a phrase which he has seen fit to put into a number of his books: *The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge*. This is a simple and direct statement, and its represents a simplicity and directness that is uniquely Bertrand Russell.

RI AND OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE—continued

insist that in order to understand references to the sword of Damocles and Achilles' heel, all children should study Greek legends for ten years." (Maurice Hill: *Religion in Schools*.)

Of course this does not stop with Christianity and the Greek legends—there is cultural justification for studying Islam, Mithraism, Gnosticism, Manicheism, and so on . . .

Reference to the Agreed Syllabuses, however, exposes this pretence of relating religious instruction to cultural understanding. Unless maps of the journeys of Paul, or the ancient and often disgusting customs of primitive Eastern tribes are supposed to have some mysterious relevance to everyday life.

The extraordinary thing is that not only do Christians try to justify RI on the grounds of cultural understanding, but they also use this as an argument for the 'act of corporate worship':

"West European culture is in all its main roots firmly committed to established religious and moral concepts and in particular to those of Christianity, and without something more than a mere intellectual acquaintance¹ with them no young man or woman can understand himself or his fellow men." (Peter Mason: "A Defence of the Act", *Times Educational Supplement*).

This is the sort of glib statement of which the defenders of compulsory religion are very fond. The fact that it is so much nonsense does not seem to worry them.

The truth is that all this talk about "our Christian heritage" is, like all the other excuses for RI, just a red herring to distract us from the real purpose of compulsory religion in schools—deliberate indoctrination.

¹ My italics.

CAXTON HALL, CAXTON ST., LONDON, SW1
Wednesday, 2nd July, 7.30 p.m.

ROGER MANVELL

introduces

HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

Directed by ALAIN RESNAIS

Presented by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

REVIEW

MAURICE HILL

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: WHAT THE PEOPLE WANT, a report on a National Opinion Poll (British Humanist Association, 1969; 33 pp., 21 tables; 5s. post free).

THE SURVEY is in two sections. One is a clear test of the knowledge of respondents about legal requirements in school subjects. Results show that even declared unbelievers are largely ignorant of the law: 72 per cent of them did not know that there is a compulsory daily act of worship. This was a factual question, forming a sharp contrast with such meaningless enquires as "Do you think of Britain as a Christian country?" which occurred in a survey reported on by Dr Goldman in 1965. Two conclusions to be drawn from the present results might be that the people need a crash course on education before they are asked to decide anything about it, and that a very small proportion of the population can be aware of their right to withdraw their children from daily indoctrination.

The other section asks for opinions. It gives a wide range of alternatives to choose from, unlike some earlier polls, which, incompetent, biased, or irrelevant, have been seized upon by the Minister of Education and other Christians as ammunition from behind their barricades. This asks what is most important in secondary education, and provides eight possible answers. Unfortunately, some of the prime aims of education are not included. Nevertheless, the answers give some idea of the relative importance in the public mind of various aspects of education.

What People Want

The answers repay detailed study, but in general the conclusion is that, for boys, training for a career is considered most important, help in becoming an adult with a sense of right and wrong is second, help in becoming a convinced Christian is a bad sixth, and comparative religion is seventh. Combining figures for first and second choice, we find that 67 per cent of these votes are for "a sense of right and wrong" and "a kind and helpful nature" (that is, moral education with no necessary religious connections), and only 12 per cent of votes are for any form of religious education. Corresponding figures for girls are 87 per cent and 16 per cent. This would confirm criticisms made of earlier surveys, where no such alternatives were offered, and the predictions of Humanists that moral education would be more in demand than indoctrination in a faith.

Even comparative religion is unpopular, being considered only slightly less unimportant than Christianity. Perhaps we should reconsider those schemes that aim to replace Christian indoctrination with a study of all the religions. To replace religion with religions is a slight advance, but what is needed is positive, non-religious moral education, and this survey indicates that this is, on the whole, what people want.

"Atheists"

All the answers are categorised according to age, sex, class, politics, religion, etc. This leads to some interesting subsidiary discoveries: games and P.E., for example, are right at the bottom of the list for both boys and girls; in this kind of activity, too, it seems, the children should be given a free choice. It is also striking to find that of the "systematic probability" sample of the population involved, 47 per cent said they would vote Conservative, and 53 per cent claimed to be members of the Church of England. The results can hardly be accused of bias on the side of progressive atheists.

An oddity of the sample is that agnostics and atheists are listed under "Religion", while there is a separate category for those who have no religion! The numbers are: agnostics, 10; atheists, 10; no religion, 270. It seems that the majority of people who do not believe in gods are neither for, nor against, nor suspending judgment. Perhaps it will be necessary to coin a new category; apatheists. Although this is still not as bad as being addicted to theism ("A morbid condition characterised by headache, sleeplessness and palpitation of the heart . . ."—*Shorter Oxford*, Theism 2), it is clear that the rationalist movement in this country has a long way to go.

Congratulations to the BHA on arranging this survey. Of course we still cannot base action in matters of faith and conscience on mass votes; but these results may serve to reduce the confusion in Mr Short's mind, and moderate the absurdity of his fanfaronades in favour of compulsory religion in schools.

[Reprinted from *The Ethical Record—Journal of The South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.*]

FILM REVIEW

LUCY DANSIE

OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR (Paramount Cinema, Lower Regent Street, London).

THIS IS A FILM which all must see, for it can beyond exaggeration be described as the greatest film made by the British Film Industry this decade. This is not just because its cast list contains the majority of Britain's foremost actors. Sir John Gielgud, Sir Lawrence Olivier, Sir Michael Redgrave, John Mills, Kenneth More and Maggie Smith are only the first that spring to mind. Despite the excellent casting and superlative acting, the film would have been a success without its talented roll-call. For the fundamental idea behind *Oh What A Lovely War* is a brilliant one, and it is this coupled with the direction of Richard Attenborough that ensures that the film provides a truly exhilarating and at the same time thought-provoking experience.

In essence the film is a tragi-comedy and as such gives rise to both mirth and sorrow. The sorrow however, prevails and one leaves the cinema depressed, but simultaneously decidedly impressed. You may say, 'I don't want to go to the cinema to be depressed'. In which case cinema-going is not for you. There is an excess of what you want on the television.

For those who treat entertainment not merely as an escape from reality, but also as a moving and, dare I say, educative experience, Attenborough's *Oh What A Lovely War* will render the quintessence of that which they seek. It is an anti-war film. Its venom is directed primarily at the British high command during the First World War. But it points as no film has pointed before, at the mad paradox of war—the paradox of a man trying to kill another man against whom he feels no personal remorse. The situation of every man, who has ever tried to kill another man and not broken a law in doing so, is encapsulated and illumined in all its inverted psychology. Skilfully utilising the very songs which originated and proliferated in the trenches, Attenborough shows the awakening of the awareness of the common soldier, who joined up because his conscience was manipulated by devious appeals to his innate patriotism and thirst for glory, but who soon appreciated the wretchedness both of his own situation and the task which nevertheless could not be avoided.

The more particularised attack which *Oh What A Lovely War* instigates against Haig, French and the rest of them, is less important but equally cleverly handled. Here satire and symbolism are used extensively and appear in jarring contrast to the realism of the scenes at the front. The bumbling of French (Olivier) and the mismanagement of Haig (Mills) are portrayed to a point where though both appear ridiculous, their behaviour is nonetheless plausible. Perhaps the greatest scene in a great film is that where a female music-hall singer (Maggie Smith) is used as a symbol for the British recruiting machine. For sheer ecstasy of cinematic execution this scene alone is worth at least half a weeks wages, especially when one knows beforehand, as you will do if you read to the end of this sentence, that the film, though long, has no interval and thus you will not be tempted to buy one of those ice-creams which somebody should take round to the Prices and Incomes Board.

Oh What A Lovely War will unleash upon you supreme entertainment and for those to whom the expression appeals, a stirring experience. Please now reread the first sentence of this piece.

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LETTERS

Free Speech

MR G. L. SIMONS trots out a miscellaneous series of quotations from books on trade union history. He does this to refute something I never even said, "that early trade unionists were not militant". What I said was that the vast majority of their leaders were anything but militant. Of course the early history of trade unions contains plenty of examples of strife and violence. But the significant leadership of the unions was rational, seeking to achieve its ends by persuasion and argument and by using the rights of freedom of speech and assembly which Mr Simons despises so much.

Mr Simons' reference to "the London Dock Strike (led by Marxists) in 1889" provides a suitable opportunity to show the shallowness and fallacy of his whole approach. The demonstrations by the dockers were so peaceful and sensibly organised that the dock employers "issued a furious attack on the police". But "Burns had wisely kept carefully on the right side of the Metropolitan Police" and "Superintendent Forster's helmet next to Burns's white straw at the head of the marches was an infuriating spectacle to the company directors". And, "on September 5, under pressure from a mediating committee headed by the Lord Mayor, they began at last to yield". Burns described the dockers' victory as "the Lucknow of Labour" and said "I myself, looking to the horizon, can see a silver gleam—not of bayonets to be imbrued in a brother's blood, but the gleam of the full round orb of the dockers' tanner".

The so-called "marxist" Burns was later to declare that "I am getting tired of working-class boots, working-class brains, working-class houses and working-class margarine—I believe the time has arrived when we should not be prisoners to class prejudice". He subsequently became a Liberal Minister.

The "marxist" Ben Tillett, another leader of the Dock Strike, expressed his view of marxist "militants" as "hare-brained chatterers and magpies of continental revolutionists".

My quotations are from Cole and Postgate's *The Common People*, also cited by Mr Simons.

Mr Simons tried to make a point in an earlier contribution about the withdrawal of free milk to secondary school pupils. He called it "stopping free milk to poor children in schools" which is, of course, nonsense. Having taught in secondary schools, I can assure Mr Simons that the children there are not "poor" and do not really need free milk. He now tries to make out that this means that I "regard the welfare of poor children as 'beside the point'" and adds "we know what sort of a socialist he is". This is typical of the silly sneering which, all too often Mr Simons uses as a substitute for argument.

He also asks if "I really think that dividend returns are unrelated to gross trading profits". In point of fact, there is frequently very little relation between them as any intelligent study of the accounts of the leading companies would show. To equate them is as silly and ignorant as it would be to equate the income of a company with its wages bill.

National leadership of trade unions dates from the 1860s and it is to men like Robert Applegarth, William Allen and George Odger that we must look to evaluate the quality of that early leadership. They were men of moderation, concerned to use such democratic and civil rights as the workers had to the full and to extend and strengthen those rights. Neither "marxism" nor thoughts of "militancy" and violence entered their minds.

The social and political progress which the Labour Movement has since made is the product of evolutionary development in a free society in which freedom of speech and assembly and rational discussion have been the chief vehicles of change.

Finally, to try and explain away the blind hatred of the ruling classes for Harold Wilson by the bland assurance that they "prefer a government they did not need to exert themselves to push around" is almost the limit in shutting your eyes to the facts of life. The Tories and big business hate Wilson because they know he is the only serious political threat to their interests. For Mr Simons, and those who think as he does, they couldn't care less. Indeed they have not even noticed their existence.

J. STEWART COOK.

RI in Independent Schools

I AM SURE that the campaign to abolish the indoctrination of children in State Schools with Christianity will succeed eventually, but unfortunately will have little effect on those pillars of the Establishment, the Independent Schools. I am in the Sixth Form of one of these mediaeval relics, and have to endure not only assemblies and RI classes, but also all the paraphernalia and ritual of Chapel Services.

In spite of all efforts to indoctrinate us thoroughly with Christianity, there are a good many atheists, agnostics, and 'don't knows' in the Sixth Form—even the carefully selected Head Girl is an agnostic!

Most of us are prepared to put up with the boredom of assemblies and Chapel Services, which some may think hypocritical; but it is not easy to 'opt out' in a stronghold of the faithful. A friend of mine attempted to leave RI classes, but was informed that her 'generally unco-operative attitude' would be mentioned on her references, perhaps damaging her chances of a University place! The School knows that we will require good references, and is not too scrupulous about how they enforce at least outward conformity. This school is also considering the exclusion of all who will not join in the religious ceremonies, i.e. Jews and Catholics as well as atheists will find it increasingly difficult to enter.

The Independent Schools will unfortunately continue to stifle freedom of thought long after the State Schools have discarded Christianity and all its trappings.

If you print any part of my letter in your magazine, please don't mention my name, as I am still in a position to be got at by the school authorities!

ANONYMOUS SCHOOLGIRL.

Christ-Helios

I HOPE TO REPLY to Martin Page's extremely interesting and very thorough letter (7.6.69) on the subject of the historicity of Jesus shortly, but as regards the last sentence of his letter regarding the picture now known as Christ-Helios (my spelling was incorrect) in the former Roman cemetery beneath St Peter's, my information obtained from two books dealing with the excavation published about twelve years ago is as follows.

The picture, part of which is missing, is in mosaic in what was originally the tomb of the pagan family of the Julii, built probably towards the close of the second century AD. Either the Julii became Christian, or a new Christian family obtained possession of the tomb, as it was redecorated and paintings of a Christian character such as the Good Shepherd and Jonah and the whale were executed on the walls.

The Helios picture (I have two plates of it) "portrays Helios on his chariot of the sun, drawn by white steeds. His right hand (now lost) must have been raised as a sign for the journey to start, his mantle flutters in the breeze. The god stands erect in the chariot. His left hand holds the world orb and his head is encircled by a nimbus of light rays. The lower rays are quite markedly fashioned into a T Cross, unknown in earlier pagan examples of this type" (quoted from *The Tombs of St Peter and St Paul* by Engelbert Kirschbaum, SJ, translated from the German by John Murray, SJ, 1959).

The writer two pages ahead continues: "All this substantiates the explicitly Christian character of the entire mosaic adornment of the mausoleum. The only doubt might be raised by the picture of Helios. . . . It has long been proved from early Christian literature that the sun symbolism of antiquity was transferred to Christ during the first Christian centuries".

The writer dates the Helios picture as mid-third century (AD 250). It was discovered about 1940, I believe.

I hope that this answers Mr Page's enquiry.

EDGAR M. KINGSTON.

Treating the whole patient

AFTER a fall resulting in cracked elbow bones and severe general bruising my 90-year-old mother became aware of someone bending over her hospital bed so, opening the functional eye, she slightly raised her head. A young white-coated man took one horrified look at her mangled features and exclaimed—"Oh God! I thought you were an arm". Without further comment he hurriedly left and she's not seen him again since.

ISOBEL GRAHAME.

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