

NSS PRESIDENT OFFERS LORD LONGFORD A HELPING HAND

When he recently took part in radio and television programmes Lord Longford claimed that the commission he has set up to enquire into pornography is widely representative. He was replying to criticism by the Rev Paul Oestreicher who had referred to "a marked absence" of people known for their liberal views on the subject. Oestreicher went on to say that for a long time the Christian Church had distorted biblical teachings about sexual values, and this resulted in many people identifying the word "sex" with "sin". Those who worked to make society healthy should not do so in a censorial way or they would find allies among dictatorial and potentially fascist-minded people. Paul Johnson, Lord Longford's fellow Catholic, also said he was not happy about the way in which the commission had been selected on the "old-boy" network. It has been announced that the commission will include Malcolm Muggeridge, Cliff Richard, David Holbrook and Peregrine Worsthorne. David Tribe, president of the National Secular Society and one of those who hold the "liberal views" referred to by Paul Oestreicher, has written to Lord Longford to offer his services. The text of his letter is published below.

Dear Lord Longford . . .

I hope you will not think it impertinent of me to write to you expressing disappointment that I was not invited to join your very large committee of inquiry into pornography. Publicly you have stated that you were looking for people who would give this subject their serious attention. As president of the National Secular Society, whose submissions to the Arts Council Working Party on the Obscenity Laws were published as Appendix E.x of its report, one of the sponsors of the Defence of Literature and the Arts Society, a member of the committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties for ten years, lecturer in current affairs, author of forthcoming books on ethics and on censorship and a frequent contributor—probably unknown to you but known to the Dowager Lady Birdwood and Mrs Mary Whitehouse—to the Press on these subjects, I had nourished the illusion that I might be asked to serve. Perhaps however (and this conclusion may well be drawn from the names of the committee you have published) you were instead looking for telepersonalities and/or people who had already declared frenetic hostility to what the Bishop of Coventry has called "a tidal-wave of obscenity and pornography", and who would merely endorse views you have yourself expressed in the House of Lords on 21 April and in other places. If this is not so, may I look forward to a belated invitation?

Such an arrangement would, I believe, be symbiotic. I could offer considerable experience in both committee practice and research procedures. For my book on censorship to be published by George Allen and Unwin I have made a close study of prosecuted material in many fields, including pornography, and I hope to give evidence for the defence in the impending trial of the SCHOOL KIDS Oz. It occurs to me however that, though I live near Soho, I have never been to a strip show or a blue film basement, and I was not invited to the Press preview of Dr Martin Cole's sex education film *Growing Up*, though I have since seen it. All of these pleasures have, I gather, come your way

and, if I am not mistaken, on many occasions. (I refer to the strippers and the skinflicks, in the context of statements that have been attributed to you.) One of the things—apart from no overwhelming personal interest and the pressure of activities which I have hitherto regarded, perhaps mistakenly, as more important—that have deterred my visits to these establishments is the cost of admission, which is reputedly high. Another disincentive is the fear that a joint may be raided, with all the unpleasantness that entails, during one's research. It occurs to me that your Lordship's committee may be able to acquire complimentary tickets or at least block bookings, which would remove or reduce the expense and provide an alibi of water-tight respectability. This I regard as a major bonus for those fortunate enough to have gained your selection.

In a state of breathless expectation.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

DAVID TRIBE.

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THE CHURCHES AND CONSERVATION

PAT SLOAN

When Dr Robinson, as Bishop of Woolwich, shocked many of his co-religionists with *Honest to God* he made the point that "the moral teaching of Jesus" was "entirely inadequate as a code... It says nothing whatever, for instance, about how man is... to be a good citizen and a positive and useful member of society". *Honest to God* was written before European Conservation Year. On conservation, too, Jesus had practically nothing to say, and set, if anything, a distinctly negative example. Indeed Jesus was fairly neutral about animal life. He cited "sparrows two a penny" as an example of God's boundless love: "Without your Father's leave not one of them can fall to the ground". (Matthew, 10 : 29.)

The lesson would seem to be that the Supreme Conservationist can be left to do his job. But I recently read the Church Information Office pamphlet, *Man In His Living Environment*, which emphasises throughout the obligations of man in relation to conservation, and twice refers to these sparrows. We have few details in the Gospels about Jesus' attitude to nature. He blasted a barren fig tree (for not bearing fruit out of season) so that "it withered away at once" (Matthew 21 : 19) and caused a whole herd of pigs to drown just because of evil spirits in two human beings: "The whole herd rushed over the edge into the lake, and perished in the water" (Matthew 8 : 8). These incidents show Jesus as a vandal regarding trees, as cruel to animals, and as having no regard for water conservation.

As to other animals, Jesus clearly disliked dogs, wolves and snakes. The only non-human creatures which he positively liked appear to have been sheep and doves. He—as Good Shepherd—frequently likened men to sheep—in a friendly sense—and once preached in favour of rescuing a sheep "which fell into a ditch on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12 : 2). And that is about all. So it is not surprising that the Churches for Conservation Year have had to scrape the barrel of more recent history for precedents.

"The Same Origin as Ourselves"

We all know about St Francis. St Columban was about as good, "accompanied in his forest walks by wild birds and frisking squirrels" (*Man In His Living Environment*, p 55). Less well known to non-believers is the superhuman feat of St Kevin, who "could not fold his hands in prayer until the blackbirds nesting in his hands had hatched their young". It is dreadful to contemplate all the other things which St Kevin can't have done for weeks. And there was St Chrysostom who urged that kindness and gentleness should always be bestowed upon animals "since they are of the same origin as ourselves".

Coming down to English ecclesiastical history we find that Cranmer rationed the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to "six blackbirds at a meal" while ordinary bishops were limited to "four blackbirds or six skylarks". It almost suggests that in the original it may have been the bishops (or was it the larks?) who began to sing "when the pie was opened". But anyway, Cranmer evidently played some slight part in preserving our blackbird and skylark population.

These charming examples are apparently the best that the Church Assembly's Board for Social Responsibility can ferret out until the lay world began to take conservation seriously in the 1960s. Nevertheless, now they have

got down to it, they have said all the right things about "the acceptance of the world and of nature as they are"; "the fact that man is part of an ecological whole, an animal with animals". However—and here humanists will raise their eyebrows—his "superiority" is "his God-likeness".

The Board considers that "Christian views need fresh statement" on the basis that God's "self-revelation" lies "in the whole continuing evolutionary process". On this basis "man's exercise of power over the rest of creation should save him... from the crude pursuit of commercial purposes". But does it? "They temper man's pursuit of profit, his sporting practice and his use of knowledge." But do they?

Such *ex cathedra* assertions are, to say the least, irritating. No evidence at all is provided that Christians, from Jesus onwards, have ever shown more concern for conservation than non-Christians. And when advice is given to "the sensitive man" he might as well be an atheist as a Christian: "At the practical level... the sensitive man would be wise to treat animals as if they possessed rights of some kind".

Kindness to Animals

It is however gratifying to be reminded that the 1970 Church Assembly was "of the opinion that the practices of hare coursing, deer hunting and otter hunting are cruel, unjustifiable and degrading". Foxes are not mentioned. The Report takes a positive line on kindness to animals and the preservation of species; on the dangers of pesticides and pollution; on public attitudes to conservation, and ends on a sound humanist note. It recognises that its views "are doubtlessly shared by many people who do not share the religious convictions of its authors". And this fact is "greatly welcomed". But they do not note that, in fact, conservation was first put forward by materialists, to deal with a material world, and that the churches have simply taken up the banner at a late stage.

Again, smug references to some so-called "distinctive and powerful dynamic factor" allegedly provided by religion are going to irritate the non-religious conservationist, as will also the few pages of theologising which tell us, among other things, that the first three books of Genesis "provide the religious justification for both scientific enquiry and technological development", and that "all the processes of nature find their true interpretation in him"—presumably Jesus.

However, setting aside the theologising, the Church Information Office has come out fully in favour of material conservation. And it ends up with wise words: "The key to success is the participation of all... persons and organisations whose interests are involved". And some of these, of course, are Christians.

THE COST OF CHURCH SCHOOLS

By DAVID TRIBE

Foreword: MARGARET KNIGHT

20p (plus 2½p postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

PHALLIC SURVIVALS

During the first world war, the Italian Prime Minister shocked one of our leading statesmen by producing a model of the complete male genitalia, which he carried as an amulet to assist in winning the war. Thomas Inman tells of an Indian fakir "who was endeavouring to make himself acceptable to the Creator by a contrivance which should augment the proportions of his emblem. As he dragged a stone painfully along, a European clergyman placed his foot upon the latter. The act was construed into a deliberate insult to religion, and the bystanders threatened his life". These are two of the more obvious survivals of the anciently widespread worship of the Prime Generator, typified by the organs used in the generative process.

Some modern remains of phallicism are so discreetly veiled that their true significance is all but lost. It is doubtful if many of our maypole dancers, or the clergy who usually direct the festivities, have any inkling of what it is they are celebrating. The Puritans knew, though, and they had a particular hatred for the maypole. Philip Stubbes, in his *Anatomy of Abuses*, called it a "stinking idol", and complained that the people "leap and dance about, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idols, whereof this is a perfect pattern, or rather the thing itself". The "thing" was the phallus, of which representations, often of enormous size, were carried in religious processions and lodged in the temples. Since a god's virtues were thought to reside in his symbol, phallic amulets were worn by men, women and even children.

Much of the sex worship in ancient religion passed into Christianity. The cross, for instance, though a solar symbol, was also phallic, and so notorious that the early Church fathers forbade its use among Christians. Some pagan crosses were made up from four models of the complete male organs, and we can see in our churches today crosses whose original meaning is very thinly disguised. In early Christian sculpture Christ is often shown upon the tau or T cross, in the pagan world symbolic of the threefold male genitalia, the prototype of the Holy Trinity. The female organ was typified by an oval, and the two were combined in the ankh or crux ansata, the most popular of all crosses in Egypt and the ideogram for "life". As late as the sixteenth century the crux ansata was being worn by Catholic confessors as a vestment, with the head thrust through a collar formed by the oval. Today we sometimes see the ankh, appropriately enough, surmounting the pole bearing the banner of the Mothers' Union.

Gods and Goddesses

There were generative goddesses as well as gods, the two sexes sometimes combined in one deity, so the female organ was also revered. Seldom openly portrayed in religion, it was typified by objects similar in shape, such as the almond, the barleycorn and some kinds of shell. Shells were once worn by Catholic pilgrims in honour of the Virgin Mary, and even today the Virgin is depicted in an oval frame called the vesica piscis or fish bladder, anciently a female emblem from its shape. The oval is constantly found on old coins and sculpture in association with goddesses, and may still be seen as a decoration in church architecture. The horseshoe, as a lucky charm, is an oval and therefore a symbol of the female organ. Before horses wore shoes, the generative parts of mares and

cows were hung up, as those of camels still are in desert countries. Curved objects also suggested the feminine, a favourite example being the crescent moon associated with Isis and Mary, and whose 28-day period further connected it with the female principle.

The Roman equivalent of the Greek ithyphallic god Priapus was called Fascinus—hence our word "fascinate"—and his most prominent member, worn as an amulet, was supposed to protect the wearer from evil influences. There is evidence that the fascinum, as the emblem was called, was worshipped by medieval Christians, for there are Church ordinances against the practice. One of the eighth century imposed a penance of bread and water during three Lents for performing "incantation to the fascinum". In 1247 the Synod of Mans enjoined a similar punishment for him "who has sinned to the fascinum". Despite official strictures, priapic fertility rites were sometimes performed in Scotland, the parish priest leading the indecent dances.

Objects of Devotion

There were minor gods in the pagan world whose functions were to protect various parts of the body. With the rise of Christianity their roles were taken over by saints nominated or invented for the purpose. As befitted their importance, the sexual organs were the special province of a large number of saints, those in France alone being SS Guerlichon, Gilles, Reni, Regnaud, Arnaud and Guignole. Even after the Reformation France introduced St Foutin into the Christian calendar, to whom offerings were made by the barren and the impotent. At St Foutin's Chapel in Varailles, waxen images of the generative parts of both sexes were presented by sufferers and hung from the ceiling in the manner of cardinal's hats. In the draughty chapel the curious movements and juxtapositionings of these objects of devotion relieved the tedium of many a long service.

Up to the end of the eighteenth century ex-votos of wax, mainly models of the male genitalia, were offered to SS Cosmo and Damien at Isernia, near Naples, baskets of them being on sale in the streets on the saints' day. In the church, those suffering from any infirmity in the loins or adjacent parts could have them anointed and blessed by the priest.

From the foregoing we can readily understand the veneration which used to be paid to a relic of very especial sanctity in a church in Paris—the Pudendum of the Virgin Mary. How the reverend fathers obtained this priceless treasure, and what has become of it, the present writer has been unable to ascertain.

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editor: WILLIAM McILROY

103 Borough High Street,
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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 St., London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

EVENTS

Humanist Holidays. Summer Centre in the Lake District is now full. Youth Camp being planned for 24 July until 1 August in Salop. Details: Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey (telephone 642 8796).

Humanist Housing Association, Blackham House, 35 Worple Road, London, SW19 (near Wimbledon station), Sunday, 27 June, 3 p.m. Garden Party. "Freethinker" readers welcome. Independent Adoption Society. The Post Graduate Centre, Royal Northern Hospital, Holloway Road, London, N7, Saturday, 19 June, 2.45 p.m. Annual General Meeting. Speaker: Lois Raynor, Director of "Adoption of Non-white Children". London Young Humanists, 5 Kew Gardens Road, Richmond, Surrey, Saturday, 19 June, 8 p.m., Garden Party. Details: telephone 940 3794.

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1, Sunday, 13 June, 11 a.m. Richard Clements: "The Wellsian Vision".

Nottingham Women's Liberation Movement. The Meadows Community Centre Kirkwhite Street, Nottingham, Wednesday, 23 June, 7.30 p.m. Speaker: Ronald Bramer, Regional Secretary of the Family Planning Association. Also WLM Panel.

SEX EDUCATION — THE ERRONEOUS ZONE

MAURICE HILL and
MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

Foreword: BRIGID BROPHY

25p (plus 3p postage)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1

NEWS

THE PAWNS

The claim still advanced by some Christian apologists that Christianity was responsible for the introduction of a more loving and considerate attitude towards children is as groundless as the claim that it was responsible for the abolition of slavery or pioneering mass education. In fact, throughout history religious fanatics—particularly Jesuits—have endeavoured to involve children in their activities, sometimes with tragic consequences. The churches have never disguised their aim to exert their influence in school, even at the expense of the rest of the community, and prevented a State system of education for many years in this country.

With the decline of religious belief and participation in acts of worship in the adult population it is not surprising that there is a corresponding decline in Sunday School attendance and the popularity of the more "churchy" youth organisations. Most Protestant churches seemed to be resigned to this, although some of them try to entice teenagers with pop services and other gimmicks. They may be undignified, but they are harmless compared to those used by the anti-abortion crusaders. This unsavoury bunch of Romanists and crypto moral rearmers have been involving children in their work for some time. There have been processions and petitions, and in the Midlands the Birmingham Anti-Abortion Campaign has been formed. It appears to be a front organisation for the RC Young Christian Workers, and their chaplain is Father Edward Quin.

Their latest antic is a competition among Birmingham schools for anti-abortion slogans and posters. Those who have protested include Raymond Carter, MP (Lab., Northfields), who said it was quite wrong to involve children in a campaign of this kind. He declared: "Many of them are not old enough to understand what abortion is all about. If a child comes to the conclusion that abortion is wrong after discussing all aspects of contraception and abortion in sex education classes, that's fine. I suspect that the people behind this campaign are those opposed to adequate sex instruction in schools". He can say that again!

Mrs Phyllis Bowman, Press officer of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, commented: "The competition was just a little, inoffensive, campaign triggered off by all the people who are saying that abortion was a good thing". Five winning posters in Mrs Bowman's "little, inoffensive campaign" will be carried as banners in a procession through the streets of Birmingham on 20 June. Some of them show daggers and hands dripping with blood. One can only hazard a guess as to the kind of indoctrination children who produced such posters were subjected to.

Alderman Sydney Dawes, chairman of Birmingham Education Committee, said he was surprised that children are spending their time in the classroom designing anti-abortion posters, but he would not be taking any action. But Alderman Dawes can be a man of action; he recently advised Birmingham schools not to display birth control posters supplied by the local Brook Advisory Centre.

AND NOTES

DRUGS AND THE LAW

The reaction to an announcement by the transport authorities that restrictions on smoking in train compartments are to be increased has, understandably, been very mild. One reason for this is probably that a large number of smokers intend to continue ignoring the "No Smoking" signs, and inflict on non-smoking travellers the effects of a habit which should be indulged in by consenting adults in private. Tobacco, and alcohol, are socially acceptable drugs, and addicts know that short of urinating through the letterbox of a police station or stubbing out a fag-end in the vicar's ear trumpet, they can be as anti-social and inconsiderate as they please.

Barbiturates (which are being increasingly used by older people) are often powerful drugs which may create a state of dependence, and many deaths are caused through overdose. In his book *The Strange Case of Pot*, Michael Schofield says: "The most typical drug addict in this country is a woman of about 50 who is taking sleeping pills every night and tranquillisers every day".

There is a considerable difference in the attitude of the authorities towards those who are addicted to tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and the (mainly younger) people who smoke cannabis, better known as pot. Schofield served on the Wootton Committee which reported in 1969 after nearly two years of study. The Wootton report found that most of the fears about cannabis were groundless, and that it was inappropriate to make it subject to the same penalties as heroin under the Dangerous Drug Act. It was wrong to send people to prison for the possession of a small amount.

But the present position is that legislation is being introduced which brackets cannabis with hard drugs and raises the maximum penalties to 14 years imprisonment. Arbitrary powers have been given the police to search premises and individuals, and they have not hesitated to use these powers to humiliate and intimidate those whose behaviour or appearance offend police tastes.

The situation has arisen whereby more people are convicted for using cannabis than any other drug. Although the majority have no other criminal record, many are being sent to prison. Those imprisoned are often first offenders, or were found guilty of possessing small amounts of cannabis.

The smoking of cannabis may well be harmful, although careful investigations would have to be made to establish this. But it is certain that sending young people to overcrowded prisons is more harmful to them and society than smoking pot. During the last 20 years irrational and inhuman laws on suicide, abortion and homosexuality have been swept away. Perhaps Reginald Maudling may yet prove to be more sensible and humane than his Labour predecessor on question of cannabis.

Correction. In the article, "The BHA and Broadcasting" (*Freethinker*, 5 June), we referred to the "Central Reform Advisory Committee". This should have read the "Central Religious Advisory Committee". Our apologies to all concerned.

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BOOKS

THE PARIS COMMUNE OF 1871

by Frank Jellinek. Gollancz, £3.

This year marks the centenary of the Paris Commune which lasted from March until May 1871. This historic event is adequately and eruditely recorded by Frank Jellinek in his book, *The Paris Commune*, one of the more permanent works published by the pre-war Left Book Club, is now reissued by Gollancz. It is perhaps still the most authentic and best documented account in the English language of the Paris rising a century ago. Most of the relevant facts relating to the Commune are to be found here, and an exhaustive bibliography whets the appetite of the reader who wishes to undertake a still more exhaustive study.

In an informative preface, Jellinek outlines the historic role of the Paris Commune. He writes:

To some historians the Paris Commune was a large scale riot following the end of the siege of Paris in the Franco-Prussian war, or else the last of the convulsions of the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848. To many others, and not only historians, the "Red Spring" of Paris, a term coined long before May, 1968 (an illusion to the revolt of that year—F.A.R.) was the start of modern revolutions, the forerunner of the Russian of 1917.

He goes on to say:

Lenin's body in the Red Square is wrapped in a flag of the Paris Commune, and when the first three man team of Soviet cosmonauts went up in the Vozkod in 1964, they took with them a ribbon from a Commune flag. The decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party concerning the great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of August 8th, 1966, specifically mentioned the method of electing the Commune as an example to be imitated.

The author clearly indicates that the revolutionary Commune in Paris was not merely an event in the annals of Paris or even France; it was a major event in world history.

The Paris Commune of 1871 may be regarded as a step in France's political evolution which, during the nineteenth century was positively strewn with revolutions, of which those of 1830 and 1848 are the best known. In July 1830, Paris workers overthrew the *ancien régime* typified by the Bourbon dynasty who had "learned nothing and forgotten nothing" since the French Revolution, and had been restored by the bayonets of Wellington's army after Waterloo. In February 1848 they overthrew the regime of King Louis Phillipe, touching off en route the European Revolution of that year. When considered as a specific French phenomenon, the Paris Commune can be regarded as the continuation and conclusion of the revolution of 1870 that resulted in the overthrow of Napoleon III after his defeat and capture by the Prussians at Sedan. It represented the first French proletarian revolution which attempted to overthrow the discredited ruling class.

The Commune was also an international phenomenon; the forerunner of the successful 1917 Russian Revolution and and the whole chain of twentieth century social revolutions of which the Chinese is so far the most important. Though it is now customary in Communist circles to denigrate Trotsky as the unfortunate result of bygone inter-party disputes, his famous theory of "permanent revolution" undoubtedly represents a logical deduction both from Marxist theory and from the evolution of revolution itself.

FREETHINKER

It is this dual and universal character that gives the Paris Commune a significance for exceeding its contemporary importance as a military event. Indeed, only a miracle could have saved the Commune from ultimate military defeat: even if Thiers and the French bourgeoisie had failed to crush it Bismarck and the Prussian army (still on French soil after their victory) would have done the job for them in the interest of law and order. Where class interests are concerned the bourgeoisie is always international in outlook. For example, when the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) met General Gallifet, the butcher of the Communards, he embraced him warmly with the salutation, "Our saviour!"

Frank Jellinek quotes the eloquent eulogy of the Paris Commune by Karl Marx in his famous pamphlet *Civil War in France*. The Commune owed much of its fame and permanence to the propaganda of the Marxists, but the actual influence of Marx on the composition and brief course of the Commune has probably been exaggerated in Communist inspired literature, and even perhaps in the book under review. Very few of the Communards were Marxists, and by far the most influential revolutionary to inspire the Commune was August Blanqui. He was, unlike Marx, primarily a man of action, who spent half his life in prison, and the Government of Thiers refused to exchange Blanqui, then in prison, for any number of hostages including the Archbishop of Paris—surely one of the finest tributes ever paid to a revolutionary leader. Blanqui ended his extraordinary life by extending the "eternal recurrence" of his prison sentences to life beyond the grave in *Eternity Under the Stars*, one of the strangest books in modern literature. Two other cosmopolitan revolutionaries also had many disciples in the Commune: Bakunin, Lenin's anarchist predecessor, and the (by then dead) Frenchman Proudhon.

Despite its brief course and ferocious suppression the Paris Commune represented a major event in world history. It was not the first revolutionary movement to be led by the industrial workers. That honour must be accorded to the earlier Charists in England, "the cradle of the Industrial Revolution" (a phrase incidentally, coined by Blanqui). Frank Jellinek's definitive work on the Commune merits the widest circulation amongst radicals of every shade of opinion.

F. A. RIDLEY

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BERTRAND RUSSELL

Preface DAVID TRIBE

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R REVIEWS

ENGLISH HISTORY: A SURVEY

by Sir George Clark. Oxford University Press, £2.

DIALECTICAL CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN MATERIALISM

Oxford University Press, 90p.

Professor Zaehner has been Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford since 1952, a chair first occupied by Radhakrishnan. He has written probably the best modern book on Hinduism by a non-Hindu—and modern Hinduism, disintegrating like most other religious traditions, is most faithfully described by a sympathetic outsider. But he is a Christian, a convert to Roman Catholicism I believe. Lately, he has been showing a particular interest in mystical evolutionary religious thinking (Marx and Engels, Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo), and these Riddell Memorial Lectures follow up this interest by concentrating on the materialistic and dialectic characteristics of Christianity.

There is a sense in which mysticism is a Christian heresy, mysticism of the Platonic sort which separates itself with horror from material embodiment, from the "world" and the "flesh" as from the devil. Zaehner regards that Christian hero Augustine as the villain of the piece who has led Christians astray down the centuries. An ex-Manichean, his conversion never reconciled him to God's natural creation. But the materialists are right and the evolutionists are right, irresistibly right; and only the religious thinkers who have taken to heart and espoused this teaching of modern science can bring forth new doctrine worthy of serious consideration. Professor Zaehner is fascinated by the humane social goal of Marxism and by the dialectical evolutionary thinking of Engels. The world must be taken seriously by religious thinkers, both as a social task in the achievement of justice and as a material order following natural laws of development. This much is "given" for any religious interpretation that would go beyond the empirical. At this point mysticism comes back, but in the Christian case not the mysticism of the East and not the mysticism of Plato and his followers. Rather, it is a sacramental mysticism: not separation from the material organisations, but use of them as pointing beyond themselves, as metaphors of life.

Certainly, Professor Zaehner is justified in picking on this character as distinctive of Christianity, for it is centrally embodied in the eucharist. But of course he gives no reasons for thinking it is true. He is remodelling a tradition, not propagating the gospel; but remodelling the tradition in a way that makes it more plausible and more congenial to the modern mind. He has probably chosen a better line, and one closer to the genius of Christianity, than Tillich and other theological reformers who have tried to commend Christianity to sceptical contemporaries. It is odd that Tillich, a German socialist, should have turned Christianity practically into a sect of Hinduism, and Zaehner, a specialist in Eastern religion, should be restoring Christianity to its social and material bonds with the world. But perhaps nothing can be really odd when a man follows the devices and desires of his own temperamental and speculative bents.

"The trouble about the present", a Frechman remarked, "is that the future is not what it was." As the future is seen to get bleaker, Englishmen look persistently to their past and cling to the theme of continuity in their history. As an historian specially interested in the seventeenth century, Sir George Clark is a man who might have been expected to display a sense of the discontinuities in history. After all, the English revolution did precede the American and the French. But these sweeping outlines, from the earliest days till 1945, move through 535 pages in such a well-written if slightly breathless style, that the reader is bemused with the idea of a seamless fabric no one ever dared to try and tear apart. This idea also suits Sir George's belief that England is in essence a social and political "community". Of course it is—in some respects. Yet a less old-fashioned historian, fully aware of the other social science impinging on his own craft, would have considered the elements of weakness as well as strength in the concept of one national community and contrasted, now and again, those three nations, the rich, the comfortable and the poor. At page 444 we do eventually reach Disraeli's two nations as he saw them in 1845. "The rich and the poor", Sir George reminds us, "were separated not only by the primary material differences in diet, clothing, housing, and so forth; they lived in segregated systems of knowledge and ideas".

Yes, indeed; and if this was so in the middle of the nineteenth century, would the comparison be very different for each of the earlier centuries? The industrial revolution which divided "the community" more deeply into rich and poor classes, gets only six pages before we are swept on to the insanity in which George III ended his long reign.

In spite of some effort to keep a balance between political facts and social factors, Sir George, like most Oxford historians, is at heart more concerned about wars and the fate of kings than about bread, butter and who got cake as well. Although some introductory pages reject the racial theory of history and even recognise that human nature does change, the theory of a community of interests has deeply influenced the whole composition. Yet the author is fair enough to concede that "in so far as judgements of human nature are involved, the historians' statements are not purely historical. The reader, even if he has made no study of psychology in clinics or in books, has his own view of human nature and he has every right to bring it to bear. The conditions on which he is entitled to disagree with the historian are the same as those on which he is entitled to disagree with his next-door neighbour about current affairs".

Sir George evidently wrote this book with one eye on the supposed needs of the student and the other on the ordinary man who enjoys reading the history of England. Both these unwary readers will, however, find their prejudices confirmed rather than corrected; and this is a pity. In these days historians like Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Edward Thompson, A. L. Morton and others are revising the conventional treatment of modern history so that the common people can take their rightful place in it. To rely on the older version is to carry on a tradition that gives more patriotic pleasure than sober truth.

ANGRY CHURCH

The recent BBC Television programme *Panorama* has, according to the Bishop of Leicester, left the Church of England "seething with anger". Although he had not seen the programme the bishop said he had "no doubt at all" that it was, for the most part, hostile to the Church. It had been based mainly on the diocese of Southwark "a centre of disillusion and defeatism in the Church of England". The programme was utterly biased and presented a wickedly unfair picture of the Church.

The Church Information Office said the film was "a caricature of the Church of England". It suffered from a lack of objectivity in that it showed either failure or some rather avante-garde experiments. The Bishops of Blackburn, Hereford, Lichfield, Truro and Wakefield also criticised the programme.

Several *Church Times* readers defended *Panorama* in the correspondence columns last week. One correspondent whose address was given as St Philip's Vicarage (Southwark) said that one "indisputable fact which *Panorama* highlighted . . . that there is widespread rejection of the institutional Church. It is, I suspect, the unpalatable truth that large sections of the community have, for the moment at any rate, decided against us, and the threat this brings to established religion, which makes us shout the louder in hurt protest. We thereby deceive no one but ourselves".

EDUCATION IN IRELAND

Bill Stephenson, secretary of the Irish Humanist Association, in an Open Letter to Eire's Minister of Education, accuses him of having "chosen to extend and intensify the system of clerical patronage which has stifled initiative and imagination, fostered moral infantilism in our people, and thereby lead until very recently to our having one of the more stagnant systems of education in the civilised world.

"Perhaps with your intimate knowledge of the system you agree that it is indeed far from perfect, but may feel that no alternative to your proposals is possible if a unified post-primary school system is to be developed. Let us seek, then, to put your case; you may say something like this: 'No school system stands a chance of being acceptable to the Irish people, the vast majority of whom are Catholics (at least in the Republic), unless it is acceptable to them as Catholics as well as in other respects. With only a few exceptions Catholics will not accept that any school is acceptable for their children unless it is under Catholic clerical control. Furthermore Catholic bishops are compelled in conscience to reject schools as acceptable to Catholics unless they are under clerical control, and to advise their flock accordingly. So, much as I would wish as a patriot to initiate post-primary schools which would be suitable for all Irish children without regard of creed, class or academic ability, and which, being run in a responsible way under community control, involving parents, teachers, students and others, would stimulate a relevant education for children, liberate the energies of the teachers, and help to create responsible self-reliant com-

munities, thereby undoing the effects of many generations of subservience; nevertheless I cannot find a politically feasible means of achieving it'".

Mr Stephenson outlines an alternative scheme which, he claims, would meet the needs of Catholics, Protestants and non-religionists, and would have a reasonable chance of acceptance. This would mainly involve the membership and function of school boards, on which the Catholic Church would be represented together with parents, teachers and senior students. Although Catholics would be in a majority on most boards, this may be preferable to the present system whereby the schools are regarded as an annexe of the local church.

The secretary of the Irish Humanist Association concludes his letter by posing what he describes as "the essential question", which is "whether the £51 million at present paid out of public funds on clerically controlled education should be under the patronage of the Church or the local communities"

SETBACK

The by-election result at Bromsgrove, where the Labour candidate converted a Conservative majority of over 10,000 to a Labour one of nearly 2,000, was a humiliating defeat for the Government and the local Tories. It was particularly galling for those Tories who also support Mary Whitehouse and the "cleaner-uppers", for the last MP for Bromsgrove, James Dance (whose death caused the election), was one the most implacable opponents of "permissiveness" at Westminster. The Bromsgrove result, together with the recent resounding defeat of Peter Mahon at Liverpool, may prompt some of the defenders of Christian morality to wonder if God is on their side after all.

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