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Editorial

Two Reports

TWO IMPORTANT official Church of England reports have appeared recently, and both of them merit close study. First, *Church and State*, CIO, 129 pp., £0.60. This is a divided report of those appointed to investigate modifications in Church-State relationships especially in the light of the ecumenical situation. Three members dissented and, with minor variations, argued for disestablishment. Their plea is that this would free the Church for mission, a view which is refuted by the majority and particularly by Appendix D where sociological researchers produce evidence of various degrees of diffused support for the Church in the community. The majority recommend small modifications in the present relationship; they disagree among themselves as to how exactly an advisory committee to appoint bishops should operate, and one member states that the time is not ripe for a break between General Synod and Parliament. It is not our intention to discuss the report fully here since this number of *The Churchman* contains two articles by eminent contributors on the subject, but here we simply underline that the question of Church and State is a very important issue, not a non-event as one prominent Christian who ought to have known better said in our presence. It is important because behind the close link between Church and State lies the vital question as to whether England is to remain a Christian country. To listen to some Christians talk, one might imagine that there is virtue in turning the national church into a denomination, uninterested in its national mission, inward-looking, and dismissing the rest of the nation as heathen or baptised pagans. This may sound convincing superficially, but it is very short sighted. If England continues its drift from Christian standards, our Christian heritage may last a while, but the time will come when the capital will run out, and then evangelistic outreach may be a lot harder than some now think. A break with Parliament, when divorced from disestablishment, may sound a small issue, but it is an important step in the secularising of the State, and the present dangerous trend for political leaders and parties to opt out of moral

responsibility alleging this to be a private matter is disturbing. There is the further question as to whether the new General Synod, where earlier checks and balances have been removed, has yet proved itself responsible enough to speak for the Church of England in major legislative changes.

It is the merit of *Church and Nation*, a recently published Marcham study guide, based on the above-mentioned report, that it presses behind the report to the basic question of Christian mission in the nation. The study guide which costs 8p a copy, with reductions on quantity, covers the actual recommendations, but also asks whether establishment really helps the Church and the State, and what alternatives there are. The guide should be useful for local and deanery discussions in lifting them to an informed level.

Obscenity

THE second report is a much slighter affair, but opens up a vast subject: *Obscene Publications; Law and Practice*, CIO, 15 pp., £0.12½. It limits itself to the legal aspect, provides invaluable factual information, and generally approves the present law. Christians who are concerned about obscenity need to know what the problems are, and a major problem is first definition and then finding an enforceable law that is both fair and workable. Even if we allow for some hamfisted prosecutions, the necessity to prove depravity has involved courts in great practical difficulties. The clear admission of a literary merit defence in the 1959 Act has meant in practice that court cases descend into seminars with avant garde dons, literary critics and ecclesiastics on one side which says some truly astounding things in evidence, because it is plain they are engaged in a crusade for a cause just as much as giving neutral evidence, and on the other side the prosecution has to search desperately to find anyone who will speak for it, and all credit to Sir Basil Blackwell and Bishop David Sheppard for having the courage to admit that a work like *Last Exit to Brooklyn* actually did deprave them.

Christians ought to read the Board of Social Responsibility's pamphlet so that they know what they are up against. Ignorant denunciation of permissiveness will not help. In fact it may actually hinder, for it may have a soporific effect on Christians who feel they have made their protest, whilst in practice others, like the Arts Council with their proposals to go Danish, get on with proposing actual new legislation.

A number of helpful analytical books on pornography have appeared in the last few years. Charles Rembar's *The End of Obscenity*, Deutsch, 528 pp., £3.15, takes the reader through the various trials of *Lady Chatterley*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and *Fanny Hill* mainly in America but also in England. Rembar was the defence lawyer in all the American trials, and he plainly considers that he has conducted a crusade for literary freedom and won. His book describes the law in history, then

the bulk of it goes through the trials and the appeals, and his case is that whatever the content of a book, if it has literary merit, it is acceptable. That has some force, and he believes that he has finally ended literary censorship. It should be added that Mr. Rembar is not an unprincipled libertine, but a respected and respectable lawyer, even if his case is wrong.

Donald Thomas' *A Long Time Burning*, RKP, 546 pp., £4.00, is an excellent historical outline of Literary Censorship in Britain complete with many items in the appendices. In early days, up to 1695, control was exercised by a system of pre-publication licensing—the Crown, the Privy Council, then the Stationers Company—but the system broke down through the sheer volume of books. The aim was mainly political control, but also theological orthodoxy. Licensing did at least avoid prosecutions, inadvertently through legal technicalities.

Political censorship continued to be an issue through the eighteenth century. Some men pleaded for liberty, but others saw the threat of anarchy in the French Revolution, and there remained the ever-present fear of Jacobinism. Then came the Victorian era so crucial to understanding our own. J. S. Mill pleaded with eloquence for complete liberty, but few really wanted that. J. A. Froude added the restraint of public taste, while T. H. Green wanted to substitute something more positive for a mere license to do anything. Even T. H. Huxley would not have absolute individualism, describing it as a return to the jungle. Politics and morality remained the two main areas of concern, but control was exercised in other ways than by law. The publisher had some control, and so did the book trade and the librarians, and finally the authors themselves. W. H. Smith from a Methodist background and Charles Mudie with his lending library played a notable part in encouraging good reading and discouraging bad books. The former acquired a monopoly of certain railway bookstalls and turned them from gutter booksellers into something much more reputable, no mean feat.

The Victorians developed a clear distinction (though a few publishers contrived to work both sides of the fence) between books for the drawing room and those for the library. They extended this idea into producing edited versions of the classics suitable for study in schools. The reason was twofold, their belief in the edifying power of the good or great book, and their concern to keep out the odd passage in lower moral taste, so they 'mistranslated and expurgated so that Great Books might live and—more than that—so that there might be a flow of culture from the library to the drawing room and the schoolroom' (p. 247). The real battleground was whether the novelist was free to depict nature as it was or through the conventions of the time according to which it was felt proper for young people to see it. That issue is very much with us today. In 1857 Lord Campbell's *Obscene Publications Act* was passed. In introducing his bill Campbell had gone out of his way to show that he was not wanting to persecute literature,

even if he profoundly disapproved of its contents, and he waved such a library book of which personally he disapproved to demonstrate his case. But later the courts were to forget Campbell's intention. Under the Act the police and the National Vigilance Association (in which evangelicals were prominent) reduced London pornography and drove some of it overseas. The famous 1868 Hicklin Judgment defined: 'The test of obscenity is whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort might fall.'

The issue of depravity remains the basis for control of obscenity, and as Thomas points out, it is not the subject that makes something pornographic but rather the handling, the tone of the writing and the whole motive behind it, and he cites two passages. One comes from *Midshipman Easy* and describes the difference between flogging and caning in the navy. The other describes a prostitute's use of the cane (euphemistically passed off as a governess). Contrary to popular belief the Victorians were not obsessed with flagellant aspects. Rather they based their pornography round incestuous relations in family life. If it was not incest, it was the gentleman and the maid, or the lady and the stable hand. And this shows us one of the main aims of pornography, to ridicule, mock and titillate against a background of established moral values. Once a moral practice changes, the pornographic attack on it becomes just a curiosity or a bore. The Victorian pornographers' attack on family life shows how strong Victorian family life was in moral fibre.

In history *political* censorship and control has been more prominent than moral or theological control, though today, despite the odd D notice dispute, the discussion centres almost entirely round sex. Some Christians are rather defensive about sex (e.g. the end of the CIO report) and others rather too anxious to condemn indiscriminately anything that they can label permissive. A good example of this came to us recently over a church magazine cover depicting Eve. She was shown behind some stylised bushes or foliage, her breasts were visible though drawn with dignity and without a hint of suggestiveness. Several letters were received describing the cover in vague terms as pornography, another objected to female nudity at all, and several accused us of pandering to permissive standards. In fact the picture came from Autun Cathedral, twelfth century! This correspondence encouraged us to go to the library and check through classical Christian pictures of Eve. Almost all of them showed her nude whether the style was classical dignity or something like Dürer's crude but effective Teuton rusticity. Breasts were almost always visible, so we were scarcely convinced that Autun Cathedral was pandering to modern pornography. But the incident does show how easily well-meaning Christians can protest unthinkingly and uncritically.

Why then should Christians oppose pornography and what should they oppose? Pornography, at least in the sexual realm, is that which stimulates and titivates to unworthy, misplaced and base desires. It is wrong for Christians, as for all men, because as Paul told the Philipians they ought to train their minds on what is good, lovely, upright, honest, and noble; and also because it takes the spiritual side out of sex, reducing woman to a male plaything and stimulant, and because it intrudes into the privacy of people's lives.

What Christians need to do today is to think out clearly what is wrong, immoral, permissive and pornographic, exactly why it is so, and then try to join with all men of goodwill to find a law that will enshrine noble standards. Clear thinking is essential. It is not enough to condemn all nudity in art, or to brand the miniskirt immoral because the office secretary's pants are visible when she stoops to pick up her rubber, or to condemn a book just because it treats sex with a certain frankness or mentions perversions. The context, the whole handling and above all the motives and suggestiveness are what make for corrupting pornography, from which middle aged and elderly men need protecting just as much as young people. There is a case for treating the printed word separately, and for finding a way of avoiding a prosecution of a book just because of its subject matter (the degradation of *Last Exit to Brooklyn*) or because of certain incidents (*Lady Chatterley*), but equally not allowing literary merit to become a cloak for any filth provided that the author has a fine turn of phrase.

Media involving movement—films, plays, TV, etc.—require different criteria, for movement makes suggestiveness easy. The still visual, as in adverts, also requires different criteria. We cannot provide all the answers here in one editorial. Our concern is rather to suggest lines of approach, show some of the problems and urge Christians to inform themselves on the subject and think it out. There is pressing need of large scale Christian writing on the subject, but in its absence Professor Anderson's Marcham study guide *Man's World?* give some ideas in popular form to start you thinking about permissiveness and a Christian answer.

NT Exposition

IT is not often in these days of inflation that a major publisher will risk a series of loosely related essays all of which have appeared somewhere before, and yet it is a measure of the stature of Harald Riesenfeld that Blackwells have done this, and a very worthwhile volume results.* The first essay shows just how romantic is the very widespread notion that the four evangelists selected from a very wide and free range of oral tradition, and so in effect were more original than Jesus. Riesenfeld demonstrates how fanciful is the fashionable notion that Christian missionaries evolved their own miracle stories to compete with the contemporary wonderworkers. What has gone wrong with so much

allegedly objective research? Well, evangelicals have for some time suspected and said that it has quite a bit to do with presuppositions, but most of them have said that on doctrinal grounds. Yet Riesenfeld, who is not an evangelical, and says certain things in this book of which no evangelical would approve, writes (p. 51) 'it is inevitable that the innumerable contributions to Gospel research are stamped to a greater or lesser degree by the attitude of the writer in question toward the person and character of Jesus. The fatal thing is that there actually is no such thing as research without presuppositions. The more emancipated a scholar thinks he is, the less he is in actual fact.' Riesenfeld and most evangelicals have reached the same conclusion though by very different routes. The rest of the book contains NT studies from the Gospels and the Epistles, all of them illustrating the learning, the immense grasp of NT and especially Jewish background, and also a reverent Christian scholarship, which is too often lacking in continental biblical study.

* *The Gospel Tradition*. H. Riesenfeld. 214 pp. £3.75.

New Dictionary

PROFESSOR S. G. F. Brandon has edited *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 704 pp., £5.50) with sectional editors T. O. Ling, Ninian Smart, J. Robson, and D. Howard Smith, all of them from northern England universities. The idea of a dictionary of comparative religion in one volume is excellent, and the production is clear and easy to follow. Whether the choice of editor was right is a matter of opinion, for Brandon, Professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester University, has himself covered a large percentage of the articles on ancient Near East religion, Greek and Roman religion, and Christianity. Many of these are admirable, but Brandon does hold some strange views about early Christianity. Here are two of his comments in the Dictionary: under *Christianity*

'So far as evidence goes, Jesus was concerned only with preparing Israel for coming of Kingdom of God. His crucifixion by the Romans for sedition would prob. have ended movement, as the deaths of the claimants ended other Messianic movements between CE 6 and 66; that it did not was due to conviction of certain disciples that Jesus had risen from death. Inspired by this conviction, the movement revived in new form: . . . The conversion of Paul led to transformation of this orig. Jew. Christ. gospel . . . Paul explained Crucifixion not as martyrdom for Israel, but as God-planned event to save mankind from enslavement to daemonic forces, which ruled world, by a pre-existent divine being incarnated in person of Jesus (1 Cor. 2: 6). Paul, accordingly, presented Christ as divine Saviour of mankind rather than as Messiah of Israel. The obliteration of Jew. Christ. community of Jerusalem in 70 ensured that Paul's gospel should form basis of Cath. Christianity.'

Or this on the *Resurrection*

'The nature of the N.T. records preclude reliable knowledge of orig. of belief in R. of Christ: the belief seems to have stemmed from conviction of certain disciples, preeminently Peter, that they had seen Jesus after his death; this orig. conviction was later elaborated in accounts stressing physical reality of his R. (e.g. Lk. 24: 37ff.; Jn. 20: 24ff.)'

We think those extracts, which should of course be read in complete context (space forbids that here), give an indication of Brandon's own contributions, and needless to say his books are in both bibliographies. Gordon Rupp provides an excellent article on the Reformation, Brandon has done a host of admirable small articles where his special lines do not appear, but bibliographies are not always balanced, tending too much to radical views, e.g. on the two articles cited above, and the omission of any mention of Leon Morris' major work on *Propitiation*. We are not competent to judge the contributions on other religions, but readers will at least get an inkling into what to expect in the Christian sections.

Ten years in South Africa

THIS summer the South African Republic is ten years old. It is not for us to speculate on the politics or to consider whether the Commonwealth which S. Africa left ten years ago is outmoded in the 1970s or an ideal worth preserving. But most non-S. African readers tend to see nothing but one-sided discussions of apartheid in their journals whenever S. Africa crops up. The arrest of the Dean of Johannesburg has received massive international publicity. If he has, as is alleged, indulged in subversion, then he deserves the full penalties of the law like any other citizen, for no one wants the odious clerical protectionism of the Middle Ages back. But the case must be proved first, and as it has not come up yet, we can comment no further. But the trial of another S. African dean (of Cape Town this time), has come to court, and the Very Rev. E. L. King had to pay libel damages against an MP. King publicly questioned the MP's integrity and called him a Nazi. The Judge said some strong things about a man in the Dean's position behaving thus. The MP tried through a lawyer to settle the matter by an apology from the Dean, who would have none of it, and when eventually he did decide to apologise, the Judge said, 'the belated so-called letter of apology seems to me to have little value. I can see in it no real regret or any withdrawal of the defamatory statement.' No doubt the Dean's action can be represented as part of a great Christian crusade against apartheid, but an impartial court has labelled it plain libel, and the Dean's subsequent behaviour as reported seems to us quite deplorable, not a hint of apology, humility to admit mistakes or penitence, just obstinacy. The court has made its decision, but it is an open question whether a church ought to allow such a man to continue in high office.