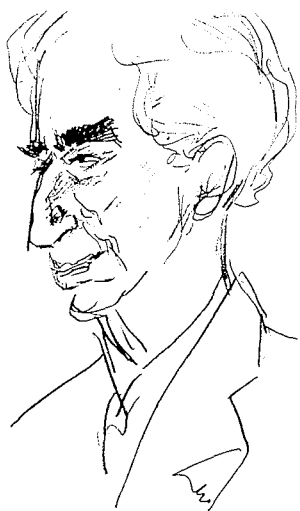


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ification," a complete theological capitulation to the era's emerging consumerist ethos. Ministers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick eagerly applied the latest business principles to the management of churches and the advancement of Progressive social reform. Ultimately, mainline Protestants were left "with the reputation that they had no faith stronger than what lay in the collection plate."

Only in his last two pages does Moore reveal his ultimate criticism. A commercialized church, he warns, cannot alert Americans to the dangers of needless consumerism—the real meaning of Adam and Eve's story, he says—and to the resulting environmental apocalypse he foresees. If that is so, it would take another book to prove it.

**BERTRAND RUSSELL: A Life.** By *Caroline Moorehead*. Viking. 596 pp. \$30



In 1961, an 89-year-old Bertrand Russell was sent to jail for protesting the nuclear policies of the British government. He had been the object of controversy before. In 1940, the New York court that overturned his appointment to City College denounced his logic lectures as lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomaniac,

aphrodisiac, irreverent, and narrow-minded. No easy man to live with, he married four times, often wreaking emotional havoc on his wives and children.

Bertrand Russell was also a Nobel Prize-winning philosopher who wrote 83 books, including *Principia Mathematica* (1910), and set the shape of philosophy in the English-speaking world. Though the contrast was rather extreme, both Russells were Russell.

As Moorehead relates in her engaging biography, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) did not know how to be dull. He brought a philos-

opher's insights to issues ranging from nuclear warfare to the use of cosmetics by schoolteachers, and did so with a literary skill that leaves most other writers green with envy. Even his technical philosophy is full of vivid touches. Moorehead, a British journalist, wisely skirts the impossible task of explaining the foundations of mathematics. Instead, she sticks to what drove Russell to study such things—a longing for the timeless and absolute truth about the world, which he thought lay in logic. She also explains how he abandoned his first and highest love. Ludwig Wittgenstein, his one-time protégé, persuaded him that logic was no more than a matter of human convention; after civilized Europe plunged into World War I, Russell lowered his sights and looked to politics, education, social reform, and more enlightened attitudes toward sex and marriage as the route to human happiness.

Russell's childhood was a gloomy one. His radical parents died when he was a small child, and he was brought up by his elderly grandmother and assorted governesses. Lady Russell tried to keep Bertie pure. She failed. He met and after many battles married Alys Pearsall Smith—like his fourth and last wife, a daughter of Philadelphia and Bryn Mawr. This all fueled his later passion for sexual enlightenment. Paradoxically, Lady Ottoline Morrell, who became his mistress in 1910 and effected his liberation, did not much care for sex with Bertie; it was his mind she fell in love with.

He was amazingly clever and loved Cambridge, but he could never be confined to the academy. He ran for Parliament in 1907 as a women's suffrage candidate, fighting for a seat he could not win in order to stick up for an unpopular cause. In 1916 he threw away his Cambridge career to campaign against the war. Trinity College dismissed him from his lectureship, and in 1918 he was jailed for insulting an ally. (He said the U.S. Army would stay on in Europe after the war to shoot striking workers.)

In the 1920s and '30s he wrote important essays on socialism, the fate of the Soviet Union, appeasement, and the nature of power, but emotional discord bulked larger. In 1921 he married Dora Black, had two children, and opened a school—Beacon Hill. Its finances demanded constant lecture tours in the United States and short

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articles for the Hearst newspapers ("Going to the Cinema," "Should Philosophers Smoke Cigars?," "Who May Wear Lipstick?"). The marriage broke up in the early 1930s. He then married Peter Spence, a woman 30 years younger than he. She left him in 1949. Finally, in 1952 he married Edith Finch and experienced 17 years of quiet bliss: an interesting but not edifying record. Moorehead only occasionally raises an eyebrow at the discrepancy between Russell's mastery of logic and his weak grasp of the realities of other people's lives.

The post-1945 Russell is the one Americans remember. This Russell fought for the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, wrote to John Foster Dulles and Nikita Khrushchev to demand nuclear disarmament, lectured John Kennedy on Cuba, and led a last, bitter campaign against the Vietnam War. Moorehead is pained by the way Russell was taken over by Ralph Schoenman during this final crusade. Schoenman was a left-wing graduate student at the London School of Economics who came to see Russell in 1960; he stayed to tea, then to manage Russell's affairs for the next eight years. He destroyed innumerable old friendships, wasted large amounts of money, hampered every good cause with which he was involved, and made Russell look ridiculous. Moorehead shares the universal relief that almost the last thing Russell did was break with Schoenman and write a memorandum explaining why. Can we decently say that a rip-roaring atheist like Russell redeemed himself? We can certainly rejoice that he died as clear-headed as he had lived.

**BLASPHEMY: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred, From Moses to Salman Rushdie.** By Leonard W. Levy. Knopf. 688 pp. \$35

The question of blasphemy—what it is, what harm it does, whether it can even be a crime in a secular or pluralistic society—calls forth strong yet foggy views from across the political spectrum. Unlike obscenity, it doesn't belong to that category of things you know when you see; the many authorities, religious and otherwise, who have tried to construe it as such have only added to the confusion. As Levy shows in his history

of blasphemy trials, political persecutions, and other related oddities, the charge—no matter who brings it—tends to blur with astonishing speed into related offenses and semioffenses such as heresy, impiety, sacrilege, apostasy, idolatry, and, as the early Catholic Church described the Arian heresy, "pestilential error."

Levy's story wends its way from the original, strict Judaic definition of blasphemy as "reviling God by name" (which, the Name being unknown and unpronounceable, presented insuperable difficulties of prosecution) through the uncontrollable political bloating of the concept in early Christianity up through the age of religious wars and the later struggles to distinguish between blasphemy and obscenity in English common law. The excitement mounts with the great 19th-century blasphemy trials that advanced freedom of the press in England, including those that made a martyr of the printer Richard Carlile, jailed for distributing Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. These trials in turn led to such legal landmarks as the Trinity Act of 1813, which decriminalized questioning the doctrine of the Trinity.

Levy's own views about the boundaries of blasphemy are obvious from the book's dust jacket, which shows the notorious "Piss Christ" photograph by Andrés Serrano in giant closeup. Levy thus implicitly rejects the view, an important one in the recent art wars, that the context in which such an image is shown or the use to which it is put has no effect on whether it is offensive. Exactly how the author, a professor emeritus of history at Claremont Graduate School, arrives at his conclusion that the charge of blasphemy is meaningless in a secular society remains murky. But there's so much material here that the argument can be treated as secondary, especially since it's clear that, on this subject at least, people are more interested in ammunition than in new ideas.

### *Contemporary Affairs*

**THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FREE SPEECH AND IT'S A GOOD THING, TOO.** By Stanley Fish. Oxford Univ. Press. 332 pp. \$25

While the current impulse in the so-called