

## THE CHOPPING BLOCK

by Jens Andersen

I quote from Lenny Bruce's book *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*:

*I do not doubt for a moment that if Christ were to come down ... he would go immediately to headquarters and ask the pope, "What are you doing wearing that big ring? What are those gold cups encrusted with diamonds and other jewels for? Don't you know that people are starving all over the world? At this very moment a poor pregnant Negress is standing with swollen ankles in the back of a bus in Biloxi."*



The scenario is unconvincing for a couple of reasons. Consider, for instance the matter of Jesus' appearance: as usually portrayed he is reminiscent of some scrawny throwback to the psychedelic era (the picture on p. 15 of *Quaecumque Vera*, the chaplain's tabloid which you probably saw during registration week, is a fairly typical example). Indeed, in my whole life I have seen only one depiction that differs from this anemic standard.

The exception is the magnificent crucifix on the St. Sebalduskirche in Nuremberg. Instead of the customary puny figure, the statue has a robust build that would put Arnold Schwarzenegger to shame. Graven in bronze, now completely blackened, Jesus' body does not droop listlessly like the *Quaecumque Vera* figure, but arches in agony, head thrown back, hands clutching at the nails. The expression on his face is truly alarming. One feels an overwhelming urge to call an ambulance and get him down as quickly as possible.

But imagine the more typical Jesus, hairy, skinny and draped in a bedsheet, trying to enter the Vatican to lecture the pope. Not only would he fail to get an audience, the Swiss Guard would throw him out on his ear.

But Lenny Bruce's scenario is improbable even assuming it could actually happen. For in an encounter between Jesus and the pope (or almost any other Christian clergyman) it would not be Jesus who occupied the holier-than-thou position.

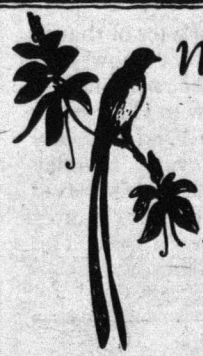
Rather, when one considers that Jesus' handout philosophy undermines self-sufficiency, that his presumption of "demons" and "unclean spirits" was ignorant, and that by spouting fire and brimstone against his detractors he was showing symptoms of messianic delusion; then, one can only conclude that Jesus was morally on all fours with the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Today's Christian leaders, even at their worst, are never quite as bad as this. None, for example, would put a curse on a fig tree if it failed to produce fruit instantaneously on demand (as Jesus did). Few believe that epilepsy is caused by exorcisable spirits, as Jesus taught (although Billy Graham once stated that Hitler could only be explained by the presence of demons). Most churchmen pay at least lip service to religious freedom, and not a few are functional agnostics. Only the most foolish of them would attempt to quell a hurricane, fix a nuclear reactor leak, or damp inflation by prayer.

In all these things they deviate from Jesus' teachings.

What Lenny Bruce failed to realize with his sentimental and idealistic view of Christianity is that by abandoning Jesus' more ridiculous ideas and practices our Christian leaders have become better, not worse, than their idol.

At the Second Coming it will be Jesus who has some explaining to do.



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