

ARTHUR PRIOR

— A 'Young Progressive' —

Letters to Ursula Bethell

*and to*

Hugh Teague

1936–1941

*Edited by*

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etc. You'll probably be able to help in many ways far more than we have been done - we're closer to him in age & have more of a common background; but you have a more 'Catholic' mind, & will help him to develop his 'mysticism' instead of quenching it (or simply producing a mood of rebellion), as my dry Barthian dogmatism possibly tends to do.

18/2/39

We have just had a very bitter disappointment. We applied a few weeks ago for a job-of joint job of 'tutor-&-mother-superior' at a Hostel for about a dozen Austrian Jewish Christian children refugees in the East End. Last week Friday we met the committee responsible, & also Father Paul Levertoff,<sup>6</sup> whose first had the idea of the Hostel, & who got the visa for the students, etc., but is not himself on the Committee. The said Committee consists of an appallingly stodgy & in the most narrow sense 'English', collection of parsons & ladies, most of them never having seen the Hostel before they came to interview us. I was informed that although Father Levertoff was a very 'wonderful' man, he had a mind that could ~~meet~~ be most kindly described as ~~warden~~ Eastern; that he thought himself the Warden of the Hostel, but that I (if appointed) was to be the real Warden, tho', I was to be careful to describe myself as a 'Bursar' for Levertoff's benefit, & was to do my best to keep on the right side of this most difficult Israelite. Later we met Father Levertoff, spent over an hour with him, & got on swimmingly ~~He was very keen for us to get the job~~ (without any of the exhausting exercises of fact that the Committee appeared to think necessary). He was very keen for us to get the job, precisely because we were so young, a fact which obviously was very worrying to the committee.<sup>7</sup>

Levertoff certainly is a 'wonderful man'. I dare say you've heard of him - he knows Berdyaev & all those fellows, edits a quarterly called 'The Church & the Jews',<sup>8</sup> & has produced a special liturgy in Hebrew & English for Jewish Christians. He has services on Sundays at Holy Trinity Church, Shoreditch (above the Hostel), & on Saturday mornings at St. George's, Bloomsbury, followed by a common meal. At his invitation we went to St. George's last Saturday, the day after our interview. I've never ~~found~~ taken to any church service in London quite so much - less because of his liturgy ~~than~~ than because it was possible to have such a real consciousness of being one of the congregation & not just a unit in a crowd that had come to hear a ~~famous~~ ~~prea~~ some preacher or other. Perhaps in these days that's only possible among

refugees! Father Levertoff is robed in vestments of various colours according to the part of the Church yet year (it was purple last Saturday, & golden this morning), with a black & white affair on top that has a very Israelitish 'gabardine'-like appearance. I ~~can~~ found my memory of Hebrew<sup>9</sup> sufficient to follow where Levertoff had got to in the service (& the responses being given in English made that still easier), & was very much impressed with the beauty of Hebrew as an intoned language - words like 'Barech' & 'Shalom' in the blessing, etc. ~~The~~ Ikons above the altar & the intoning of the whole service reminded me of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Orthodox emphasis on the final transfiguration of the whole of creation was also noticeable in his sermon last ~~Sunday~~ Saturday, but mingled with other elements - something very 'Hebraic', a deep understanding of the Old Testament & its relation to the New (on Saturdays, by the way, he reads the same O.T. passages as is read in the Jewish synagogue), ~~an~~ a Pascalian stress on Revelation & the Living God as contrasted with 'the God of the Philosophers', a keen consciousness that the 'election' both of Israel & of the Church is not for Israel's or the Church's own sake but for the whole world's, & a strong social-political undertone. Heaps of meat in the sermons, & withal simple - perhaps not quite the pure milk of K. Barth, but I've heard no sermons so really & impressively G & simply Christian. Vaguely reminiscent of the thought of Kae Hursthouse. It has been a new & good experience to find a Church in London to which I can 'belong'.

It was after service this morning that Father Levertoff, & one of the students, told me that we hadn't got the job. The news would have been considerably less bitter had we been able to feel that, whatever happened to us, the students & Father Levertoff were getting a fair deal. But they're not. ~~The~~ Instead of having Clare to make their place more of a home, they're going to 'get a woman in' to do their cooking & cleaning as before. (They said last Saturday that they were particularly anxious about their meals, & Clare has spent the whole week eagerly planning how to give them the best meals possible on their allowance of 10/- a week each.) The daily cook they had in was actually appropriating part of their miserable allowance for herself. On Sundays Mrs Levertoff used to cook for them with food left over for the purpose, & once came along & found nothing but a few potatoes & a bone!). The laddie who is [to] take my place has been selected on account of ingenuity in inventing parlour games ~~to keep the~~ to keep the students at home at nights, & his capacity to turn them into respectable & orthodox Englishmen. The whole business has, in fact, been most dismally illuminating on what