

# Arthur Prior's nom de plume writings in *Tomorrow* and the *Otago Daily Times* 1935-1937

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## Abstract

Because of the constraints upon him as a philosophy and theology student in a small city (Dunedin) and small society (New Zealand), A.N. Prior wrote a series of letters and articles on religious and political matters for *Tomorrow* magazine and the *Otago Daily Times* under three nom de plumes: Richard Bramley, Independent Labour and (including, at least twice with Clare Prior) as John Everdean. This article discusses the content and context of these writings which enable us to gain a deeper and fuller insight into Prior's religious and political thought at this time of change in his life.

**Keywords:** A. N. Prior, *Tomorrow*, *Otago Daily Times*, religion, socialism, public intellectual, theosophy, communism, art.

## 1 The Brief Mention

In transcribing the letters (Grimshaw, 2018) from a young Arthur Prior to the New Zealand poet and Anglican laywoman Ursula Bethell<sup>1</sup>, I came

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<sup>1</sup> Ursula Bethell (1874-1945), English-born New Zealand poet. Of independent means, she was involved in Anglican social work throughout her life. An Anglo-Catholic with a particular interest in mysticism, Bethell was widely read in theology and philosophy and corresponded with a wide circle of New Zealand writers and

across a statement that in particular piqued my attention. On 24/12/36, Prior makes a passing mention to “those damned theosophies I was slashing at in “Tomorrow” last year. (I mentioned Hoskyns at the end of that article, incidentally.)” (Grimshaw 2018, p.106) While the Prior bibliography is constantly expanding<sup>2</sup>, this was the first reference I had come across to Prior contributing to the New Zealand left wing journal Tomorrow. Luckily, there is a superb Index to Tomorrow compiled by J.J. Herd (1962)<sup>3</sup>. When I examined this index there was no mention of Arthur Prior, but the article of Prior’s first wife, Clare Prior<sup>4</sup>, on Spanish refuges in France is noted (Clare Prior, 1939)<sup>5</sup>. However, this was an age where

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artists. It appears her correspondence with Prior arose from their mutual involvement in the Student Christian Movement. For her wider correspondence, see Peter Whiteford (ed.) *Vibrant with Words; The letters of Ursula Bethell* (Victoria University Press, 2005). These letters include five references to Prior, but none of her letters to Prior as Whiteford could not track any down. (Whiteford to Grimshaw, email, 26 November 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See the extensive bibliography in Copeland (1996/2020) and that to be found on the site for Prior Studies: <https://priorstudies.org/>

<sup>3</sup> J.J. ('Bunty') Herd was the wife of Professor Eric Herd, Professor of Modern Languages at Otago from 1956 and later Professor of German until his retirement in 1986. For more information on Bunty Herd see: <https://www.otago.ac.nz/otagomagazine/issue50/features/otago734675.html>

<sup>4</sup> Clare Prior (1917-2001). Born Clare Hunter in Riverton, Southland, New Zealand, she attended Canterbury University College 1934-1935 studying English, History, French and Economics but left without completing her degree. At Canterbury University College she was taught by Rhodes and Sinclair of *Tomorrow*, and her involvement in the debates of the Dialectic Society included those judged by Sinclair. In February 1936, she is reported to have taken up a position as a senior mistress at St John’s Girls’ School in Invercargill. By mid-1936 she was in Dunedin, working as a reporter for the *Otago Daily Times* and while never enrolled at Otago University is on record as having participated in at least one University Union debate in July 1936 (possibly via Prior). Prior meets her around early June 1936, by 26 July he informs Bethell that he and Clare are to be married at the end of the year and plan to leave for England to pursue freelance writing. Arthur withdraws from theological study in August 1936 and he and Clare marry 27 August 1936. The Priors leave for England in late January 1938 and stay there until 1940 when they return to New Zealand. The marriage unraveled by 1941; Clare ran off with Arthur’s younger cousin Norman Brailsford and after the divorce in 1942, Arthur married Mary Wilkinson in 1943 and Clare married Norman in Wellington also in 1943. Clare and Norman left for Russia in 1970 (Norman was a Russian orphan adopted by Arthur’s aunt and uncle Ruth and Norman Brailsford in Japan). In Russia they undertook English translations for various publications. Norman died 1998 or 1999 and Clare died in 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur also published his own report in the camps in the form of a letter to *The Student* (July 1939, vol.5, p.9). These articles arise from their time working for Aide aux Refugies Espagnols, Service Civil Volontaire International, based in Paris, in spring 1939. [In his letter Prior contrasts the issue of Jewish refugees arising from

the nom de plume was often used and I suspected this may have been the case. Thankfully, at least I knew the year (1935), a broad subject matter and that there would be some reference to Sir Edwyn Hoskyns<sup>6</sup>, the New Testament scholar and translator of Karl Barth's Commentary on Romans (1933). Hoskyns' combination of support of Barth and rejection of Theological liberalism meant he acted as a reputable and sympathetic influence for Prior, who mentions him often in his letters to Bethell (Grimshaw, 2018). Prior, as a young Barthian, was involved in constant battles within the New Zealand Student Christian Movement against both mainstream theological liberals and, in particular, the evangelicals of the Buchmanite Oxford Group<sup>7</sup> who he dismissed repeatedly in both his letters and writings (in the SCM journals *Open Windows* and *Student*), as "Groupery"<sup>8</sup>.

## 2 A short history of *Tomorrow* magazine

Created out of a "large yet cramped room" (Rhodes 1988, p.41)<sup>9</sup> at 81 Hereford Street, Christchurch, *Tomorrow* was a left-wing magazine of politics, society and (often overlooked), poetry and literature. *Tomorrow* was driven by the eclectic vision and editorship of cartoonist and artist Kennaway Henderson<sup>10</sup>, supported by his fellow editors Frederick

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antisemitism which "is essentially a religious phenomenon" with those of Spanish Republicans which is a "very straightforward case of political injustice & oppression"]. The Priors had earlier also lived in France and Italy, and travelled to Czechoslovakia and Austria before settling in London. For more on this period of what Jack Copeland (1996/2020) has termed Prior's Bohemian wanderings in Europe, see Grimshaw (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Sir Edward Hoskyns (1884-1937), leading British New Testament scholar and teacher between the world wars, Anglican theologian, Dean of Chapel of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge 1919-1937.

<sup>7</sup> Known as the Buchmanites after the founder, American protestant missionary Dr. Frank Buchman (1878-1961), it was also known, from 1931, as the Oxford Group. Renamed Moral Rearmament (1938) it was an influential revivalist and non-denominationalist movement based in calls for a moral and spiritual awakening arising from a call to surrender one's life to God. Prior, as a Barthian, was opposed to what he perceived as The Oxford Group's anti-intellectualism and moral pietism.

<sup>8</sup> This was most fully expressed in his discussion on "Prayer" in issues 2-5 of *The Student* in 1936. See also letters and discussion in Grimshaw (2018): letters 2, 6, 7 (and fn27 in this letter for Prior and prayer precis), 18, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Rhodes (1988) notes "...there was no desk with drawers and pigeon holes, no telephone, no typewriter, no filing cabinet, indeed none of the usual and indispensable amenities of an editorial office." p.41.

<sup>10</sup> Henderson (1879-1960) born in London, emigrated to New Zealand 1885. A cartoonist and illustrator, he was imprisoned for two years for his pacifism in 1918.

Sinclair<sup>11</sup>, Professor of English at Canterbury University College (also an ex-Unitarian minister and past leader in Sydney of the Free Religious Fellowship<sup>12</sup>) and the young Marxist, H. Winston Rhodes<sup>13</sup>, the Canterbury University College literary scholar and past pupil of Sinclair. If Henderson was an 'Edwardian radical', and Rhodes possessed strongly Marxist politics, Sinclair was "the voice of an uncompromising liberal". (Rhodes, 1988 p.116) They were soon joined in 1935 by poet and printer Denis Glover<sup>14</sup> and, as business manager, the leftist Bruce Souter of The Public Trust Office. Glover, in typical epigrammatic fashion, described Souter as possessing a "mausoleum (Red Square) mind." (Cutler 1989, p.25)<sup>15</sup>

*Tomorrow* has been mainly relegated to the brief aside, the paragraph, the footnote or the thesis, with perhaps more discussion in literary<sup>16</sup> and

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He worked as a cartoonist and illustrator in Sydney 1925-31 and he also met Sinclair in Melbourne. Returning to New Zealand he set about planning a weekly journal that was to become *Tomorrow*. Henderson was probably the least political of the founding committee, described by Rhodes (1988) as "vaguely...a humanitarian with a radical bias" (p.15); and "an armchair socialist" (p.17).

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Sinclair (1881-1954), born in New Zealand and educated at Auckland University, he converted to Unitarianism and studied in England to become a Unitarian minister. A Unitarian minister in Melbourne 1907-11, he was also a Fabian socialist opposed to dogmatic Marxism but also influenced by the theories of Douglas Credit. A noted social and literary intellectual in Melbourne, he then taught at the University of Western Australia 1929-31. In 1932 he returned to New Zealand, as Professor of English at Canterbury University College, Christchurch. Sinclair was a communicant member of the Anglican Church from the early 1930s.

<sup>12</sup> The Free Religious fellowship combined pacifism, opposition to conscription, 'undogmatic religion' and interest in social and literary criticism. It folded into a club in 1924. See: Chris Wade, "Practical idealists: the Free Religious Fellowship, the Great War and Conscription",

<https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/La-Trobe-Journal-99-Chris-Wade.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> H. Winston Rhodes (1905-1987), Australian born and educated, his life-long interests were literature and socialism. Following study at Melbourne University and occasional work tutoring, in 1933 he was appointed lecturer in English at Canterbury University College, under Sinclair. Rhodes and Sinclair had known each other in Melbourne radical circles. A humanist Marxist, Rhodes was, as well as lecturing and *Tomorrow*, involved in Popular Front activities in the 1930s and helped establish New Zealand Left Book clubs. In 1960 he co-founded the socialist journal *The New Zealand Monthly Review*, which he edited until 1968.

<sup>14</sup> Denis Glover, (1912-1980), poet, typographer, printer and publisher. Co-founder and printer of The Caxton Press, Christchurch. Glover was a central figure in New Zealand literary and cultural life.

<sup>15</sup> Source [in Cutler 1989]: Glover to Fairburn, 24 February 1939, MS1128, Folder 13, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>16</sup> As Glover (1940) noted of New Zealand literature in the 1930s: "among the political thistles of *Tomorrow* it has taken root".

cultural studies of the 1930s, yet it sought and had an overt political impact upon New Zealand in the 1930s, with a distinct editorial position described by Rhodes as a “radical and antifascist policy” (Rhodes 1960, p.180). *Tomorrow's* constant attacks upon the coalition government, against bourgeois institutions such as Rotary, and especially its campaign against the Catholic Church over the Spanish Civil War tended to put it at odds with the more conservative bastions of New Zealand opinion. Denis Glover's typically provocative and celebratory eulogy in *Rostrum* enthusiastically stated that *Tomorrow*

...hurled itself, an infuriated pom, on the hindquarters of the hippopotamus press, the chimpanzee coalition, the rhinoceros Rotary, and a whole host of zoological specimens. It attacked institutions because institutions become persecutions. It attacked everything in which it saw the real or fancied shadow of a threat to freedom.

(Glover 1940, p.29)

As the poet and later founder and editor of the literary journal *Landfall* Charles Brasch<sup>17</sup> recalled, “*Tomorrow* had so many good contributors that one could no longer think of New Zealand as being socially and politically unconscious, without a mind and voice of its own.” (Brasch 1980, p.314)

*Tomorrow's* writers tended, like Prior, to view themselves as members of the left-wing intelligentsia, including public officials, Labour Members of Parliament and government advisors<sup>18</sup>. However the climate of the

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s, Brasch would publish Prior's articles, reviews and letters in his journal *Landfall* - and became a friend of Arthur and Mary Prior. Brasch's cousin Elespie married Arthur's half-brother Ian Prior. Arthur Prior and Brasch also shared friendships with many in the small New Zealand literary, cultural and artistic communities, most importantly friendships with Ursula Bethell, Rodney Kennedy, Toss Woollaston and Colin McCahon.

<sup>18</sup> Glover (1940) lists the Labour MPs as Walter Nash, Clyde Carr, Morgan Williams, John A. Lee, C.F. Skinner, James O'Brien, W.E. Barnard, A.H. Nordmeyer and F.L. Frost. The Professors who contributed are listed as T.A. Hunter, F. Sinclair, James Shelley, G.W. von Zedlitz, R. Lawson. A. Sewell, J.W.G. White and R.M. Algie. (p.30). Others noted by Barrowman include the public servants W.B. Sutch, (Economic Advisor to the Minister of Finance) Harold Innes (Personal Secretary to the Minister of Customs and Government Advisor on Marketing) and the lawyer, assistant parliamentary draughtsman and later New Zealand ambassador to Japan J.S. Reid. (pp. 31-2).

time meant many did so under bare initials or pseudonyms, for participation could affect employment or study depending in the views expressed or debated; or even perhaps, merely association with a critical, left-wing journal. Prior, writing as a theological student, would have been keenly aware of such concerns. Even the noted poet Allen Curnow felt forced to contribute some verse under the pseudonyms "Julian"<sup>19</sup> and "Amen" in an attempt to cover his association from his employers on the Christchurch Press. (Murray p.261, fn72)

It is primarily as a journal of opinion (and as noted, of literature<sup>20</sup>) that *Tomorrow* was influential in New Zealand intellectual and political life in the 1930s. Andrew Cutler notes that while subscription was always around 1000 copies, it was to be found in libraries and often lent around. Prior's fellow editor on the Otago University paper *Critic*<sup>21</sup> – and later Labour MP– Martyn Finlay, himself a contributor to *Tomorrow*, in a 1988 interview with Cutler estimated a readership of between ten to twenty thousand. (Cutler 1989, p.42, fn69)<sup>22</sup> While Charles Brasch stated "As a journal of opinion, *Tomorrow* was probably more influential than any New Zealand periodical before or since." (Brasch 1980, p.313)

Many in Prior's circle of what can be broadly termed Christian socialists, leftists, artists and poets (often overlapping categories) also contributed to *Tomorrow*: J.A. Brailsford (his uncle)<sup>23</sup> ; Willis Airey, Toss

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<sup>19</sup> The use of the name of the Roman apostate Emperor signals Curnow's own retreat from Christian belief and a dismissal of his time as a theological student at St. John's Theological College in Auckland. Poetically, this move is signaled in the collection *The Valley of Decision* (Phoenix miscellany: Auckland University College Students' Association Press, 1933).

<sup>20</sup> Jones (2003, p.47) states: " A little primarily political magazine with between 300-1000 subscribers, assembled on a piano-top desk and run on a shoestring, *Tomorrow* was nevertheless of great importance to New Zealand literature."

<sup>21</sup> Prior was assistant editor of *Critic* in 1935. Prior heavily involved himself in journalism as student, editing the SCM journal *Open Windows*, contributing often to its successor *Student*, also writing for the *Otago University Review*.

<sup>22</sup> Kennaway destroyed all *Tomorrow*'s files after the suppression. The population of New Zealand in the 1930s rose to 1,500,000 by 1940.

<sup>23</sup> In discussing *Tomorrow*, Barrowman quotes Brailsford: "Many feel there is a tremendous need for free critical reviews of world affairs, written in New Zealand from the New Zealand point of view. 'Tomorrow' aims to give one such review. It will not claim to speak with divine omniscience. But it will speak with freedom." (p.39) [orig. John A. Brailsford, 'All Peoples', *Tomorrow* vol.1 no.1 1934, p12.] We can safely conjecture that Brailsford, himself a noted journalist, was a strong influence on his nephew's journalistic forays and endeavours and encouraged his writing for *Tomorrow*.

Woollaston, James Bertram, Basil Dowling, John Harris, Hypathia Johnson, Rodney Kennedy, Lex Miller, Alun Richards, Max Riske, Fred Robertson and Ron Scarlett<sup>24</sup>. As noted, these are drawn from two groups that also overlapped: radicals from Dunedin and Otago University and members of the Student Christian Movement (SCM). What makes Prior's contribution distinctive compared to the others in his circle is that he undertook his contributions under a nom de plume.

### **3 Establishing “Richard Bramley” was Arthur Prior**

As noted, Prior provided sufficient clues to be able to track down his article. However, it actually appeared on February 12, 1936 as “The Myth of the Mystic East” under the nom de plume “Richard Bramley” (Prior 1936a). While Prior in the letter to Bethell states it occurred “last year”, a number of things help clarify that Prior is writing about this particular article and that he is using ‘Richard Bramley’ as his nom de plume. Firstly, while the letter to Bethell is headed ‘24/12/1936’ it is clear from the postscript that this date was when Prior started writing the letter, not when it was completed and/or sent. The postscript states; “P.S. I’m afraid I’m a bit late getting this sent off. C[lare].& I drove down to W[ellington] the day before yesterday...” (Grimshaw 2018, p.107). The letter therefore is begun on Christmas Eve, but not completed nor sent on that date. December 25 is Christmas (a Friday in 1936), so they may have traveled to Wellington on the Saturday as December 26 (Boxing Day) is also a public holiday. If so, then the letter was sent (at the very earliest) on December 28 and given it had to travel from the small town of Masterton to Wellington, then across Cook Strait and down to Christchurch over the Christmas period it could easily take up to a week to arrive. Prior could therefore reasonably expect that a letter written and sent at this time in 1936 would not reach Bethell until the new year. Secondly, as became clear when transcribing Prior's letters to Bethell (Grimshaw 2018) Prior was in the habit of starting letters on one day and finishing them over subsequent days, revising as he went. Such revision and breaks in writing are usually shown with sentences crossed out and the start of a new period of writing signaled by use of ellipsis. Both of these are employed in the letter before he turns to the section in which his

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<sup>24</sup> For more details on Prior's circle, both those mentioned here and others, see Mike Grimshaw (2018).

Tomorrow article is raised. Prior first mentions receiving a letter from Basil Dowling<sup>25</sup> who is in England taking lectures in New Testament Ethics and Theology from Sir Edward Hoskyns. (Grimshaw 2018, p.106) This sets Prior on his train of thought regarding his *Tomorrow* article and its concluding reference to Hoskyns.

To track down this article I read all the issues of *Tomorrow* published in 1935 and then into 1936, looking for any containing references to theosophy and associated views and also concluding with reference to Hoskyns. There was only one article that did so: "The Myth of the Mystic East" under the nom de plume "Richard Bramley". Using the *Index to Tomorrow* I was able to track down the other "Richard Bramley" articles and letters and then, using the papers past<sup>26</sup> search engine, was able to locate "Richard Bramley" letters and articles written to the *Otago Daily Times*, Prior's local newspaper. Another circumstantial reference was the use of "Richard Bramley" as author for a play "John Harlan" submitted in 1931 for a competition held by the Masterton WEA reading circle<sup>27</sup>. The judges' comments on this play were "The plot is rather cloudy and, though perhaps the matureist effort, it is not quite a success." Given what we already know of Prior's literary efforts in 1931 (Jakobsen, Øhrstrøm, Prior and Rini [Eds.] 2021), this seems too much of a coincidence to be anyone but Prior; especially as John Harlan (1833-1911) was an American Supreme Court Justice (and Calvinist Presbyterian) known as 'The Great Dissenter', who transitioned from slave owner to champion of civil rights. I therefore believe it is clear given this direct link to the Tomorrow article, the content and style and focus of the other "Richard Bramley" writings in Tomorrow and the ODT (that also stopped when Prior departed for Europe) and the first use of "Richard Bramley" in Masterton in 1931, that Prior did indeed use "Richard Bramley" as a nom de plume.

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<sup>25</sup> Basil Dowling, (1910-2000), clergyman, pacifist, poet, teacher. He took his MA Canterbury University College 1932, then studied at the Theological Hall, Dunedin 1934-36; then post-graduate study Westminster College Cambridge 1936-38. Dowling was Minister, Seatoun Presbyterian Church Wellington 1938-1941 and Chaplain Scots College, Wellington 1939-41. A Pacifist and conscientious objector, he resigned from the ministry and was jailed for sedition in Mt. Crawford prison for three and half months in 1941; then he was 'manpowered' by the Government to work to a market garden near Christchurch. Dowling renounced his Christian faith and post-war trained as librarian and worked in the Hocken Library Dunedin 1947-1951. Then in 1951, he went to England and taught in schools 1952-1975.

<sup>26</sup> <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers>

<sup>27</sup> [https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WDT19320412.2.62?items\\_per\\_page=10&phrase=2&query=%22Richard+Bramley%22&snippet=true](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WDT19320412.2.62?items_per_page=10&phrase=2&query=%22Richard+Bramley%22&snippet=true)



## 4 The “Richard Bramley” articles and letters in Tomorrow.

In “The Myth of the Mystic East” (Prior 1936a) Prior begins by identifying his target as “those who fancy themselves ‘advanced’ and ‘broadminded’” who believe that the religions in particular of Hindus and Buddhists are “quite as good as Christianity” (Prior 1936a, p.18) and that rather than missionaries trying to convert peoples to Christianity, the West should be trying to learn from these religions. This position he identifies as aligned with theosophy and he observes it “widely passes for modernity and broadmindedness” (Prior 1936a, p.18) having been popularised both by Gandhi and Gandhi’s friend, the Anglican missionary C.F. Andrews<sup>28</sup>. Prior extends his attack by stating “Women and devotees of Douglas Credit appear to find it particularly attractive” (Prior 1936a, p.18) without providing any justification for this claim. His attention then turns first to an antiwar pamphlet from the No More War Movement <sup>29</sup> that, as Prior notes, “contrasts the way of war with ‘the Christian way of love and peace’”, but in doing supports it with “a quotation from Gautama Buddha!” (Prior 1936a, p.18) Prior then states

It is hard to see what can be said for a point of view which regards Christianity and Buddhism as ‘much of a muchness’ (though there is a little to be said for regarding Mohammedanism as a form, albeit a grossly perverted form, of Christianity. For Dante himself, in the *Inferno*, places Mohammed with the heretics and not with the heathen).

(Prior 1936a, p.18)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> C.F. Andrews (1871-1940). English Anglican priest, missionary and social reformer in India. Close friend of Mahatma Gandhi and supporter of Indian Independence movement. Andrews visited New Zealand University Colleges in 1936 as representative of the Indian S.C.M.

<sup>29</sup> The New Zealand pacifist organization, founded in the 1920s. By this time it was being supplanted by both the Peace Pledge Union and the Christian Pacifist Society of New Zealand.

<sup>30</sup> Prior rarely writes on what could be termed comparative religion, a subject incidentally not offered in New Zealand universities at this time. In his letters to Bethell however, he does include a detailed discussion of his impressions of the

Prior then turns to discussing a recent address, described as “by a Congregational minister on ‘The Modern Challenge to the Ministry’, or something to that effect.” (Prior 1936a, p.18) What drew Prior’s attention, apart from a failure by the clergyman, in response to a question, to distinguish admiration for Christ by those outside the church from “faith in Christ” (Prior 1936a, p.18)<sup>31</sup> was the statement that because Christ was an “Oriental” it was easier for non-Europeans to understand Christ. Prior attacks this not because it lacks originality but as a failure of logic even less sane and reasonable than “all the racialist bunkum put forward by our friends in Germany” (Prior 1936a, p.18) for the diversity between “The Indian, Hebrew and Chinese minds” (Prior 1936a, p.18) can’t be covered by calling them “Oriental”. For, as he notes, Indians are more closely related to Europeans than either Indians or Europeans are to Hebrews and this is why he is also “very suspicious of people who turn from the Bible to some sort of crypto-Hinduism and then pride themselves on their Open-mindedness”. (Prior 1936a, p.18) His argument is drawn from logic: no race has any greater capacity than another to understand Christ, nor for Prior, has anyone really yet done so. But if such questions are to be discussed then, in Prior’s view, a German rejection of Christianity as “not Aryan” is actually “far more discerning here than those devout souls in our own midst who maintain that Christianity is native to the mystical Eastern mind.” (Prior 1936a, p.18) Here it must be noted that Prior, via his Barthianism, was a consistent opponent of the Nazi-aligned German Christians.

Prior then turns to a discussion of Missions and Imperialism, noting that those seeking to oppose these often articulate an Indian Christ as “a sort of Mahatma” who is “very different to the Christ of the New Testament” (Prior 1936a, p.19) and this is also taken up by those who argue for a kind of syncretism that is actually similar to that put forward by Kipling. Furthermore, he wonders “if a religion sponsored by Indian Nationalism has much more to be said for it on that account than one sponsored by British Imperialism” (Prior 1936a, p.19). His concerns deepen when he notes that demands for a Christ of India’s own are very similar to the demands put forward for a Christ of Germany’s own,

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various religions encountered in the stop-over of their boat at Columbo, Ceylon. Here he grounds his views in Barth’s ‘Doctrine of the Word of God’. See Grimshaw (2018) letter 25, 18/2/38, pp.144-147.

<sup>31</sup> It would seem that it was Prior who asked the question not answered to Prior’s satisfaction

further observing that the philosopher and mystic Count Keyserling has praised Hitler (see Feutchter, p.109) as “the Gandhi of Germany” which Prior finds a very apt comparison, for both Gandhi and Hitler share a “native mysticism” (Prior 1936a, p.19). As critiqued by Prior, whether Christ is regarded “as a sort of Mahatma” or “a sort of Fuhrer”, or whether an “auxiliary bible” is made out of the Vedas and Upanishads or the legends of Odin and Thor, “neither of them is Christianity” (Prior 1936a, p.19). Prior’s solution is to turn for instruction to the Church Father Irenaeus’ rejection of Gnosticism, or to the refutation of “the nebulous spirituality” (Prior 1936a, p.19) in Congregationalism by the Scottish Covenantor Samuel Rutherford<sup>32</sup>, or to recent New Testament Criticism such as that in Hoskyns and Davey’s *The Riddle of the New Testament* (1931).

What can we make of this piece? It sits within a series of wider discussions within *Tomorrow* as to ‘the what and the why’ of religion and the wider issues as to how Gandhi is viewed, the rise of the German Christians and Hitler, and also the possibilities and problems of what can be turned the early New Age. Prior challenges all of these, both from his position of Barthian Christianity and from the lack of reason and logic applied in the discussion. In his mind there is rational religion as expressed in New Testament Christianity and an irrational religion of essences, “blood and soil” mysticisms, and national Christs.

On March 4 1936, Prior replies to critics of his article, again under the nom de plume of Richard Bramley (Prior 1936b). Here he makes clear what he was attempting to state in his article, namely that: “the heathenisms of the East are really very much the same as the heathenisms of the West (whereof the “neo-paganism” favored by the Nazis is the most open and glaring example) and both are equally removed from the Christian revelation”. [italics in original](Prior 1936b) Prior explains his ‘aside’ regarding Douglas Credit in terms of what is “quite commonly observed”; that is, theosophists and Douglasites seem to share some form of “psychological connexion”(Prior 1936b) that makes each more open to the other’s beliefs than other peoples are. Prior then discusses how Douglas Credit is often attempted to be explained, in the end becoming a type of theosophical claim of ‘true understanding’ which makes it a cult

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<sup>32</sup> Prior’s discussion, at length, of Samuel Rutherford in *Faith, Unbelief and Evil* (2012) together with his general interest in the Scottish Covenantors (see Grimshaw 2018) is another clue to “Bramley” being Prior.

and like theosophy displays “a certain affinity with fascism”. (Prior 1936b)

Prior’s response failed to calm those who attacked his article on various fronts – whether theosophist or Douglas Crediters. So Prior wrote another letter of rebuttal and explanation, again under “Richard Bramley”, concentrating on answering three points made by a theosophist. Prior first emphasizes that theosophy seeks to make Christianity compatible with Hinduism and Christ a type of Eastern Mahatma, noting that such moves to ‘orientalise’ Christianity also occur “in the vaguer religiosities of our time”. (Prior 1936d) Secondly, Prior reinforces the links and similarities between theosophy, fascism, Douglas Credit and Indian Nationalism, for all share “mystical idolatry” (Prior 1936d). Prior concludes by stating – in distinction to theosophy – that “complete ‘freedom from tradition and authority (in thought)’ is not humanly possible” noting “an unconscious thralldom to a spiritual atmosphere may ultimately prove to be in quite palpable ways a worse bondage than a humble yet not uncritical recognition of the ‘authorities’ and ‘traditions’ that God has placed around us in life and thought” (Prior 1936d)<sup>33</sup>.

The correspondence on this issue was closed with the publication of another letter by Prior under “Richard Bramley” (Prior 1936e). Here Prior explains that his critique of theosophy arose from reading “an authoritative article on Theosophy by a Theosophist” (Prior 1936e) and that from this he identified the theosophical origin of German neo-pagan faith. To understand Prior’s concern, we need to note both his Barthian Christianity and Barth’s central distinction between Christianity as a divine revelation and religion as human activity and creation. Therefore, there is only one Christ in which God has revealed himself. Barth’s opposition to Nazi ideology and the neo-pagan German Christians are also clear influences upon Prior’s attack on theosophy and idealism and on the theosophical propensity to fall under the sway of demagogues.

As well as these writings on theosophy, Prior – under the name of Bramley – also offered other opinions in Tomorrow. His first contribution to Tomorrow is a letter in 1935 where he notes his lack of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union’s repressive policy which does little “to

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<sup>33</sup> In the correspondence on these issues, ‘Richard Bramley’ is included in the discussion between A.M.R. and Eric Cook. While A.M.R. quite possibly could have known who “Richard Bramley” was as they moved in the same radical Christian Presbyterian circles, Eric Cook who was older, as a teacher, communist, and later journalist, did not have any connections to Prior.

raise Communism in my or anybody's estimation." (Prior 1935a) He follows this up with another letter on the same topic in which he notes that both communism and fascism claim to supersede both capitalism and Christianity and so for the Christian both forms are problematic (Prior 1935b). For Prior, out of a "critical reading of the New Testament", the common claim that communism is identical with "true" Christianity is unfounded and here Prior is not afraid to use such terms as "sheer idolatry and worship of Antichrist" in reference to communism. (Prior 1935b) Prior admits being more open on the question of "the relationship between Christianity and socialism generally" but emphasizes that idolatry of whatever form is wrong not only because it is idolatry but also "wrong because it always means the sacrifice of truth and honesty, and human sacrifice too." (Prior 1935b) For Prior, communism is a false messianic religion of idolatry that "bears fruit in human sacrifice" (Prior 1935b). These letters are important for they signal that at this time Prior (like his theological mentor Lex Miller) is a Barthian Christian open to the possibilities of a relationship with socialism, but he is an anti-communist. This also makes us reconsider the politics of Clare Hunter who he was to marry the next year, for it seems clear that she must have – at most – been a socialist at this time, but not a communist as she later became<sup>34</sup>; because it seems impossible that Prior would have married a communist given his own beliefs. It also may signal a possible contributing factor to their later marriage break-down and divorce, given Clare was to later become a communist and eventually end up in the Soviet Union.

In the letters to *Tomorrow* Prior continued to state his beliefs, in many ways building towards his later stated aim of becoming a religious journalist<sup>35</sup>. But we can also understand his activities in light of his membership at this time of a small radical Christian group: The Army of Reconciliation. Prior was secretary of this organization, led by his friend and mentor Lex Miller. Aiming for radical Christian life and action,

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<sup>34</sup> The question of Clare's politics is open to further discussion as in a short memoir [n.d.] John Summers remembered how in 1937 Clare had sent him "Marxist pamphlets" and how he then ventured south to Dunedin "to help Clare and her ilk rid the West of Capitalism, a venture in which we all patently failed." John Summers, [n.d.] 'The Summers McCahon Syndrome' p 1, typescript ms Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury [MB 2292/10.6]

<sup>35</sup> Prior states this to Bethell in a letter 26/7/ 1936 in which he announces that he and Clare are going to marry by the end of the year and then leave for Britain to "earn our living as best we may by free-lance writing." In a footnote he adds: "I have hopes of ending up eventually as the editor of a religious periodical". See: Grimshaw (2018) Letter 10, p.93.

aligned within the SCM, little is known of this group except for a one-page manifesto that seems to arise from 1933, following a SCM conference in Christchurch, calling for an anti-capitalist Christian socialism<sup>36</sup> and a follow-up article in *Open Windows* (Burton 1933). This overview article (like the manifesto) notes that the headquarters of the movement are in Knox College, Dunedin with Lex Miller as Chairman and Arthur Prior as secretary. It also had branches in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

The manifesto stated the Army of Reconciliation was “To operate with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Peace Army.”<sup>37</sup> Of note for Prior’s activities in Tomorrow is the call in the manifesto, under the heading Propaganda “to undertake use of all available periodicals by articles and letters.” Lex Miller could do so under his own name as by 1935 he was SCM General Secretary, located in Christchurch; Prior, as either a philosophy student in 1935 or then, a first-year theology student in 1936, could do so under his own name when he wrote in the SCM magazine the Student – or earlier in *Open Windows*. But to write in Tomorrow required a nom de plume – as did writing for the Otago Daily Times. This is not to say that Prior’s circle could not have known who “Richard Bramley” was, but it offered him as degree of anonymity within a wider stated radical Christian agenda; while Prior as “Richard Bramley” did self-identify as one of the “Christian contributors” to Tomorrow. (Prior 1936c) Therefore, at this time, Prior the public intellectual was Prior the radical Christian socialist public intellectual, even if it is in briefer statements such as one letter wherein he outlined how to think about God: “ ‘God-in-general’ I don’t know, don’t believe in, and don’t worship. ‘God in Christ’ is a different matter”; and he endorses the Scots Confession of Faith of 1560 as providing what he

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<sup>36</sup> It seems to have arisen as a national movement at an SCM summer conference camp in Christchurch in March 1933. See: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TS19330320.2.35?phrase=2&query=%22Army+of+reconciliation%22&snippet=true>

However, Lex Miller seems to have organised an earlier Auckland group of the same name.

<sup>37</sup> For a history of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (established 1914) see: <https://www.ifor.org/#history> The Peace Army was established by the suffragette, preacher and peace activist Maude Royden in 1932. See: Thomas Weber, “From Maude Royden’s Peace Army to the Gulf Peace Team: An Assessment of Unarmed Interpositionary Peace Forces” *Journal of Peace Research*, Feb., 1993, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb., 1993), pp. 45-64.

means by “the main drift of the bible” while acknowledging “though of course even the Scots Confession is not perfect.”<sup>38</sup>(Prior 1936c)

In another letter he critiques fascist Spain and the Spanish Catholic church, noting “It is somewhat painful to observe the extent to which your allegedly radical contributors have given way to humanity’s unhallowed hankerings after human infallibilities” for “we are hardly in a position to judge the Spaniards for submerging conscience in the passions of war; but we are at least in a position to guard ourselves against falling into the same virulent, unthinking, unqualified partisanship.”(Prior 1936g)

Prior as Bramley made two final contributions in letters to Tomorrow in 1937; these are interesting primarily for his expression in them of how one ought to think. In the first he states “the accurate analysis of social phenomena demands the use, and often the invention, of a precise technical language”(Prior 1937c); while in the second he critiques “the conception of ‘relative truth’ – a conception which, I would suggest, is meaningless.”(Prior 1937i) It is then worth quoting the rest of the letter in full as this is Prior acting first as philosopher of logic and then, at the end, as theologian - and throughout as public intellectual. In reference to the argument put forward by contributor “X.Y.Z.” in an article on ‘communism and religion’, Prior responds [ the “He” referred to being “X.Y.Z”]:

He says, for instance, that “the square root of  $A^2$  is either  $A$  or  $-A$ , i.e. two contradictories are both true.” This, to say the least, is a confused way of stating the facts. The facts are that if we have arrived at the quantity “ $A^2$ ” by the operation of squaring another quantity, then that other quantity is either “ $A$ ” or “ $-A$ ”. There is nothing in this to suggest that the different quantities “ $A$ ” and “ $-A$ ” are the same quantity.

He says, again, that the one true thing of which we may be certain is that “truer truths” have yet to be discovered. On the contrary, this is one of the few things which is quite certainly false. One truth may be more important than another, or it may be more clearly stated; but it cannot be “truer”. “Truth” and “falsehood” do not admit of comparison, though of course the extent and clarity of our

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<sup>38</sup> This emphasis on the Scots Confession is yet another clue to “Bramley” being Prior given Prior’s focus on the Scots Covenantors (see Grimshaw 2018).

knowledge does. A statement, once its meaning is fixed, is either true or not true; it cannot be “truer” or “less true.” In illustration of the same conception, “X.Y.Z.” says that the fact of religions being contradictory does not preclude the possibility of their all being true. It certainly does not preclude the possibility of their all containing other beliefs which are true; but at the points where the contradictions occur they cannot all be true (and I would observe in passing that as a matter of fact the contradictions occur at the most important points). The belief, or instance, that God became man in Jesus Christ is either true, as Christians assert, or false, as non-Christians assert; it cannot be both. Nor can it ever become “truer” or “less true”; though we may discover evidence that makes it easier or harder to believe.

(Prior 1937i)

## 5 Prior as “Richard Bramley” in the *Otago Daily Times*

Prior also undertook writing under Richard Bramley for the *Otago Daily Times*. This began with an article on “The Rediscovery of Calvin” (Prior 1936f) to mark the 400th anniversary of the publication of Calvin’s “Institutes of Christian Religion”.<sup>39</sup> Calvin is offered as “a ‘way out’ beyond the barren narrowness of Fundamentalism and the equally barren shallowness of Modernism”, with Prior noting Calvin is also used as political force in Germany by the anti-Nazi Confessing Church. Furthermore, the return to Calvin is situated in a pan-Christian turn to pre-modern theologians including Aquinas, the Anglican divines of the 16th and 17th centuries and Luther. Prior situates these “as more up to date for our generation” (Prior 1936f) than the Protestant liberal theologians Schleiermacher, Harnack and Troeltsch. Prior’s rejection of these is unsurprising because here he is following in the footsteps of Karl Barth’s rejection of Protestant liberalism. Prior concludes this short article by lauding Barth and Barth’s Church Dogmatics.

In a similar appeal to the past, Calvin is invoked in a letter contrasting old Presbyterianism and new; Prior opposing both rigid

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<sup>39</sup> Prior also won 3rd prize in the *Otago University Review* essay competition in 1936 with his essay “John Calvin and Religious Movements since the Reformation”, published in the October 1936 issue, pp.25-27. For Prior and Calvin see Grimshaw “Arthur Prior: Calvinist?” (forthcoming).



sabbatarianism and alcoholic abstinence as more recent introductions compared to the Sunday bowls of Calvin in Geneva and Luther's and Calvin's consumption of alcohol. (Prior 1937j) Prior builds on this in another letter in which the drunken behavior at a cricket match in Presbyterian Dunedin – which a local Presbyterian minister compared unfavorably to sober behaviour in Australia – is for Prior not surprising given the Presbyterian attitude to alcohol: “Once convey the idea that any drinking is absolutely wrong and there will be plenty of drinkers to argue that if it is wrong anyway one might as well make a thorough hog of oneself.”(Prior 1937l)

Prior's concern with the situation of the church in Nazi Germany continues in a letter in which he declares that if “there is no divine law above human convention, which that convention may express and may equally well deny, then we have no ultimate grounds on which convention may be criticised” and this result can be seen “in Germany, as the Nazi treatment of the Confessional Church bears witness.”(Prior 1937b) In a further letter he calls on Dunedin churches – because “Dunedin is supposed to be a Christian city” – to send a protest to the German consul regarding the imprisonment of pastors of the German confessional church.(Prior 1937k)

Prior as Bramley also defends the film *Green Pastures* (1936) in which Biblical stories were played out by an all-black cast in rural America. Prior defends the importance of being “confronted with the Christianity of people utterly different from ourselves; as correction of “our own subtle heathenisms”. (Prior 1937e)

These ‘Richard Bramley’ ventures of Prior as public intellectual can be seen to arise from the call of the Army of Reconciliation to act as propagandist. What is interesting is that although they arose under ‘Richard Bramley’ as the writings of a theological student, they continue when he has withdrawn from theological study and relocated to philosophy, so the nom de plume obviously acted as more than a protective cover.

## **6: Prior as “Independent Labour” in the Otago Daily Times**

A different, more explicitly political undertaking of Prior as public intellectual also occurred in July 1937 in 4 letters to the *Otago Daily Times*.

Kenny (1970, p.322) states these are from August 1937 but, as is demonstrated, they were actually all published in July 1937. They were written under the by-line "Independent Labour"<sup>40</sup>, a nom-de-plume signaling a positioning more socialist than that of the first government (1935-1949) of the New Zealand Labour Party, emphasizing as it does the explicitly socialist ethos and politics of the British Independent Labour party<sup>41</sup>. Such a nom-de-plume also occurs against a background of the first time Dunedin had a Labour party controlled city council (1935-1938), a council even then split between the Labour party and the conservative Citizens Association. As is evident in these letters, Prior was writing at this time explicitly as a socialist, choosing yet again to write under nom-de-plume. By using 'Independent Labour' in a Dunedin newspaper, Prior is also situating himself to the left of both local body and national Labour party politics.

The first letter (Prior 1937d) is in many ways Prior the budding logician and philosopher seeking to ensure there is "clarity and accuracy of definition" and "that in these discussions there is a great need for people to have some fairly precise idea of what they are talking about" when using such terms as 'capitalism', 'democracy' and 'Socialism'. Prior rejects the use of Bernard Shaw as the basis of any definitions (as Shaw was used by the correspondent "Junius" he is responding to), and in the process Prior appears to align himself as a 'revolutionary socialist'. This is supported by his appeal to "the authority of Rosa Luxemburg", arguing for a socialism where the workers "group together to organise and undertake their own enterprise".

Prior's positioning drew criticism from correspondents and he answers these in a second letter (Prior 1937f) where he begins by acknowledging "I was fully aware that I was likely to evoke criticism from fellow Socialists and thereby to reveal differences within Socialist ranks." His concern is again with clarity of terms and expressions, dismissing as "a little vague and in some ways misleading" statements criticizing his position; he also questions, in response to offered definitions of socialism "the precise meaning" of words such as "the

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<sup>40</sup>The Prior Collection, box 11 at The Bodleian Library, Oxford. Researchers can see the scrapbook in the password protected 'The Virtual Lab for Prior Studies', document 1522 Black Scrapbook no.1 nr 12 and Prior has hand annotated the first two (A.N.P): see:

<https://research.prior.aau.dk/cms/uploads/images/jpg/20170116185902.jpg>

<sup>41</sup> see <https://www.independentlabour.org.uk/history/>

State”, “the public” and “society”. We also get an expression of Prior’s socialist pacifism: “An inter-State war is a particularly horrible intrusion of the forces of capital into the private lives of common men.”

The third letter (Prior 1937g) is a continuation of Prior’s positioning himself against older, more conservative socialists. He is willing to criticize both the actions of Russian Communism and those of the Labour Minister of Public Works, Robert Semple<sup>42</sup> which most resemble, for Prior, “Toryism at its worst”. He is here and earlier concerned with the British Incitement to Disaffection Act (1934)<sup>43</sup> which enables police confiscation of any books which, if distributed to the armed forces, might cause disaffection. Prior, as a revolutionary socialist (agreeing there can be no socialism without tears – and adding “and probably none without violence”) is arguing for the freedom of opinion and the free circulation and possession of material that might be considered revolutionary – or counter to any party line.

The final letter in this series (Prior 1937h) is his continuation of a number of points. Firstly, that evils attributed to socialism, “where they are real evils, may be more appropriately attributed to capitalism.” Secondly, an on-going rejection of capitalism and those who seeks to exist outside a moral code they try “to impose upon the wage earner”; and concluding with another call to take sides in the class war: “We must all fight either with the wage-earners for a society of wage-earners or with the profit-seekers for a society of profit-seekers.”

These four letters can also be seen as representing the influence of Clare Prior upon his thought and politics. This is not just Christian socialism but rather revolutionary socialism, reminiscent of the “Marxist pamphlets” John Summers remembers Clare Prior had recently sent him. Yet these four letters also need to be read alongside the letters he was writing to Ursula Bethell at this time where he writes as more a muted Christian socialist theological and philosophical thinker (see Grimshaw 2018). It is therefore suggested that these four letters are closer in

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<sup>42</sup> In this Prior is also aligning himself with *Tomorrow’s* consistent criticism “of the government’s socialist credentials in terms of both its policy and its conduct. (Barrowman p.41). Prior’s Semple reference would, for those who read *Tomorrow*, have invoked Henderson’ infamous “the Bobadolf” cartoon of 23 December 1936, comparing the authoritarian minister to Adolf Hitler: see: Andrew Cutler (1990), “Tomorrow Magazine and New Zealand Politics 1934 – 1940”, p.33 for the cartoon; *New Zealand Journal of History*, 04/1990, Volume 24, Issue 1 [http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1990/NZJH\\_24\\_1\\_04.pdf](http://www.nzjh.auckland.ac.nz/docs/1990/NZJH_24_1_04.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> see: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/24-25/56/introduction/1991-02-01>

expression and politics to those he sent to his communist cousin Hugh Teague (see Grimshaw 2018), where the more overtly political side of Prior's thought was given freer expression. Such selective expression of politics and ideas depending on audience was not unexpected; Prior was young man undergoing a swift and significant transition in circumstances and outlook – a change presented by his friend Dan Davin in his Otago University set novel *Not Here, Not Now* (1970) in the character Ralph Dawson.<sup>44</sup>

To understand why Prior used these nom de plumes we need to appreciate the personal, political and intellectual situation he found himself in. Prior was juggling theological and philosophical interests, Christian socialism and (via Clare) revolutionary socialism, and attempting, in pursuit of his desire to become a religious journalist (see Grimshaw 2018), to find outlets for his thinking and writing in a small city and a small society; hence his use of nom-de- plumes in this time of trial and experimentation. As a theological student, then in 1937 a paid employee of the University as assistant lecturer of philosophy, Prior wrote under his own name in religious (the Student) and university (*Critic, Otago University Review*) publications. It is when he enters the wider public realm that he adopts the nom de plumes in order to separate these writings from his church and university identities, roles and

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<sup>44</sup> This novel, a thinly fictionalized account of Davin's time at Otago University in the 1930s, follows the pursuit of the Davin-stand-in Martin Cody for a Rhodes Scholarship. The character Ralph Dawson is clearly modelled on Prior, who was a friend of Davin and a colleague on the editorial board of the university newspaper *Critic*. Dawson is first described as a candidate for Intellectual Rep on the Student Executive who will get the SCM and the Evangelical Union vote but is not well known enough to win against Cody (Davin, p.178) and "too young and too Knox College religious. A nice chap of course. But someone a bit more man of the world was needed." (Davin, p.180) Then a change occurs- as it did with Prior: "When he [Martin] first got to know him, after he joined the *Critic* staff, Ralph Dawson had still been reading theology, intending to become a minister and full of not unamusing stories of Wee Frees and Auld Lichts and things like that. Since those days he had taken a leftward turn and latterly was said to frequent Sandy Campbell's parties, Friends of the Soviet Union, Current Affairs Circles, and all that kind of things." (Davin, p.269) Dawson is also now a member of the Peace Pledge Union (Davin p.269). The Clare Hunter character is Hope Turner, described as "one of those not bad-looking but deliberately dowdy girls" who listened to the University Marxist [Sandy Campbell]. The Davin character facilitates the Prior and Clare characters to be able to share the night together at her boarding house: "No doubt about it, Ralph was discovering sex" (Davin p.269) As Martin/Davin reflects: "Ralph will drop theology for keeps now, and turn over to philosophy and politics. Another recruit for Sandy". (Davin p.270); and of Dawson: "it was well known he'd become a Red and was drinking too much." (p.304)

writings. This was not unusual. An examination of *Tomorrow* and of the newspapers of the time make it very clear that many different nom de plumes were in regular employment by other contributors. Many of these undertaken to enable freedom of expression separate from known identity, job and status. Therefore Prior's use of nom de plumes are in fact very normal practice at this time

While all these previous nom-de-plume writings had been Arthur writing as an individual, a change was soon to occur, as Arthur and Clare began writing together under the new nom de plume of 'John Everdean'.

## 7 The "John Everdean" writings in the Otago Daily Times

In a letter (from London) to Ursula Bethell (27/7/1938) Prior notes: "Some copies of the 'Otago Daily Times' for Saturday June 18, have just arrived, with our article 'Hitler Comes to the Tyrol' (under the pen-name of John Everdeane – we may want to go back there some time!) on p.4." (Grimshaw 2018, p.178)<sup>45</sup> What is interesting is this aside is the use of "our", because in writing of or referring to any of his other writings, Prior always used "my". Here I differ in my view of who wrote as "John Everdean" from Jack Copeland. He is of the view that this is primarily Clare using the pen-name and bases it primarily on the three letters (as discussed later) written from Europe under that name<sup>46</sup>. My view is that "John Everdean" is used as a pen-name first by Arthur and then, when in Europe, used with Clare for articles they wrote together<sup>47</sup>. While Clare was a reporter for the *Otago Daily Times* 1936-1937, there is no record of any articles or reports being published under her name<sup>48</sup>. This was common policy; most reports and articles appeared without a by-line name.

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<sup>45</sup> See: Mike Grimshaw (ed.), Arthur Prior, A 'Young Progressive', (Letter 32), p.178.

<sup>46</sup> See Jack Copeland's "Introduction" to Grimshaw (2018) where he attributes a letter (pp.11-14) from "John Everdean" to the *Otago Daily Times* to Clare. Since that publication, as I have read through more "John Everdean" letters, I am convinced that, following the first article (and perhaps the second) they were actually joint efforts from Arthur and Clare, that began when they were living together in Dunedin.

<sup>47</sup> In Britain, Prior was working as a reviewer and religious journalist under his own name.

<sup>48</sup> Clare did publish under her own name at this time in the *Student* and in one article in *Tomorrow* in 1939.

The first “John Everdean” writing is an article “The Artist’s Creed”<sup>49</sup> (20 February 1937). This seems, from the content, to be Arthur trying out a new pen-name to express new ideas – especially those as signaled, of religious journalism – and to have arisen from the “regular discussion groups” the Priors hosted in their flat in McClaggan street in Dunedin (see Grimshaw 2018), beginning:

A favourite subject of debate and discussion among people interested in art and literature<sup>50</sup> is whether art is essentially “propaganda” or whether it should be pursued simply “for art’s sake.” A question of considerably more importance, however, though one which does not lend itself as readily to the exchange of amiable frivolities, is whether the artist, as artist, possesses an insight into ultimate realities which entitles him to formulate what might be called “The Artist’s Creed.” It is quite commonly supposed in artistic and literary circles that he has. Others, among whom the writer would include himself, are quite convinced that he has not<sup>51</sup>.

(Prior 1937 a)

Prior provides a brief overview of what he critiques as “this superstition” which is “particularly common in young countries” and results in “a widespread feeling that artistic people have, or ought to have, a religion of their own—a religion which consists of a somewhat vague and misty spirituality, a ‘getting in tune’ with beauty and wholeness, which hates dogmas and orthodoxy, and equally hates logic and vulgar materialism.” (Prior 1937a). In rejecting such a religion, he emphasizes that along with literature, the “best Christian music, architecture and painting have never been the expression of some sickly blend of a vague Christianity with the “Artist’s Creed,” but has expressed

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<sup>49</sup> A discussion of ‘Prior, art and artists’ by Grimshaw is forthcoming.

<sup>50</sup> As John Summers remembered them: “...gatherings of young artists and intellectuals and artists, medical students, student teachers, churchmen-to-be, trade union types, politicians, the odd philosopher, together with the odd-ball, such as the Chinese fruiterers’ boy and of course, exhibit (2) wild footloose J.S., all to thicken this Bohemian broth.” John Summers, [n.d.] ‘The Summers McCahon Syndrome’ p 1, typescript ms Macmillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury [MB 2292/10.6]

<sup>51</sup> The use of the singular ‘himself’ and ‘him’ signals that this is Prior writing alone, not as in the later co-authored John Everdean writings that use “our”.

some good, straightforward, definite form of the Christian faith itself. No one has brought this home mere forcibly than G. K. Chesterton did.” (Prior 1937a). He also rejects as a similar “Creed for the Cultured”<sup>52</sup> any attempt to formulate “the Scientists’ Creed”, seeing such creeds as “ a new slavery” seeking to oppose and dismiss the Christian belief in “personal immortality”.(Prior 1937a)

This is not the first time Prior had written on art and theology; in 1933 he wrote on “Art, Nature and Other Things” for the *New Zealand Journal of Theology* (Prior 1933)<sup>53</sup>, and in 1934, as noted by Anthony Kenny (Kenney p.332), Prior wrote on “Theology and Art” for the *Otago University Review*. At this time, Prior had begun a friendship with the artist and Christian Toss Woollaston, whose 1936 show in Dunedin deeply impressed the young artist, Colin McCahon who later drew heavily on Christian texts and themes. Prior was also a friend of Rodney Kennedy, an artist, pacifist and drama tutor who was a lover of Woollaston’s before Woollaston’s marriage in 1936.<sup>54</sup> Kennedy boarded with Prior’s uncle, John Brailsford in Dunedin; Colin McCahon was a next door neighbour to the Brailsford’s, and Kennedy introduced him to Woollaston. McCahon was also a member of the discussions Arthur and Clare hosted in their flat. McCahon, New Zealand’s foremost twentieth century painter, stated that Prior had “a terrific effect on me, absolutely terrific”. (Curnow, p.15)

Therefore, in this piece, it can reasonably be conjectured that Prior is giving voice to the type of opinion that he expressed in that “regular discussion group” and Prior’s call for the best Christian art to express “some good, straightforward, definite form of the Christian faith itself” (Prior 1937a), continued to influence McCahon, especially the later development of McCahon’s religious paintings. Like the Priors, in the 1930s, McCahon was, as he later observed to Woollaston “...when I met you, a real red. It was then very real Christianity in action...”(Curnow p.16) and in 1940, also writing to Woollaston, claiming “...true Communism means true Christianity and I believe by my painting I help bring it about.”(Curnow p16) Therefore, this article by (I would claim

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<sup>52</sup> This phrase is also an allusion to Schleiermacher’s “On Religion: Speeches to the Cultured amongst its Despisers”(1799). Prior, as a Barthian, is especially opposed to Schleiermacher who gave rise to 19<sup>th</sup> century theological liberalism.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of this, see: Michael Grimshaw, “The Prior Prior: Neglected Early Writings of Arthur N. Prior”, *The Heythrop Journal* XLIII (2002),pp.480-495; p. 484.

<sup>54</sup> See Grimshaw (2018) for Prior’s mentions of Woollaston and Kennedy, and more detail of the circle of friends.

largely or more likely, solely) Arthur Prior gives us not just an insight into the discussion groups the Priors hosted in Dunedin, but also a new way of thinking about the work of Colin McCahon.<sup>55</sup> Prior's 'religious journalism' was here a way for Prior the Philosophy student to express wider ideas to a wider audience.

The second appearance of "John Everdean" was a letter regarding Commercial radio and asking for more details regarding its establishment and implementation (Prior 1937 m). The reason for the nom-de-plume is that here Prior is supporting the questioning of the Labour Government by the opposition member for Motueka, Mr. K. J. Holyoake<sup>56</sup>, with the letter stating as its conclusion: "Is no honesty, liberty, or fairness to be expected from this Labour Government of ours? Those of us who expected anything have apparently expected too much." Here Prior as "Everdean" is aligning himself with the increasing criticism of the Labour government that was beginning to emerge in the pages of *Tomorrow*, as the progressive Left in New Zealand culture and politics found themselves increasingly disappointed. Yet in aligning himself with Holyoake he could not use his usual political nom de plume "Independent Labour".

The final three pieces by "John Everdean" were all published when Arthur and Clare had left New Zealand. The first piece from Europe is "Hitler Comes to the Tyrol" in June 1938 (Prior, A & Prior, C 1938)<sup>57</sup>. Written in the first person, it recounts the effects of the annexation of Austria into the German Reich (March 12, 1938), including the anti-Semitic policies. Having discussed various responses in Austria to the Anschluss, and noting that the economic reasons for supporting it "were indeed very weighty ones, and no New Zealander has a right to dismiss them with scorn; for the Austrians were incredibly poor in their tiny

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<sup>55</sup> As an aside: McCahon's son William, is noted to have observed similarities between the diagrams in Prior's books on modal logic (which Colin McCahon had) and the format of his later work *Teaching Aids* (June- July 1975). See: Marja Bloem and Martin Browne, *Colin McCahon. A Question of Faith* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum/ Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2002), p.224.

<sup>56</sup> Holyoake (1904-1983) was Prime Minister of New Zealand 1957, and then again 1960-1972. At the time of Prior's letter Holyoake was a member of the conservative Reform party, then from 1936 a member of the centre-right National party.

<sup>57</sup> The Prior Collection, box 11, The Bodleian Library, Oxford. Researchers can see the "Shirley Temple" scrapbook in the password protected 'Virtual Lab for Prior Studies' box 11 nr1525 picture 025

See: <https://research.prior.aau.dk/cms/uploads/images/jpg/20170323162402.jpg>



country, and the breaking down of trade barriers between them and Germany has no doubt had beneficent effects”, Everdean concludes by dismissing Nazism as no different to Bolshevism in its “appeals to greed and envy” whereby they “seem to be little more than differing manifestations of one basic political tendency which is equally abominable in all its forms.”

The next piece by “John Everdean” is the one such article solely the work of Clare Prior, being a report on the golden jubilee conference of the International Council of Women, held in Edinburgh July 11-21, 1938. (Prior, C, 1938)<sup>58</sup> The Priors were in Edinburgh at this time where Arthur attended the Fourth Calvinistic Congress (6-11 July 1938) and had a job assisting “the Secretary of the movement in making summaries of the addresses and discussions.”<sup>59</sup>

The final “John Everdean” piece is a long article on the Munich Crisis of September 1939 entitled “Sidelights on the Crisis. A New Zealander in London”, with the particular byline: “Written for The Otago Daily Times by John Everdean”. (Prior, A & Prior, C, 1939)<sup>60</sup> This, written it would seem primarily by Clare, with certain observations by Arthur<sup>61</sup>, is conventional journalism: a series of impressions and events that Everdean (as “I” and “we”) participated in and observed. These four articles by “John Everdean” would have been published in the *Otago Daily Times* with the support of their friend John Moffett, the paper’s Literary Editor.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Arthur Prior writes to Bethell of this, stating that Clare is the author and sent this article to the *Otago Daily Times*. See: Grimshaw (2018) Letter 32, p.178

<sup>59</sup> See: Grimshaw (2018) Letter 28, p.158; for Prior’s report of the conference to Bethell see Grimshaw (2018) Letter 32, pp176-179. Prior wrote various reports of the Congress for journals - including one (not published) for the *Otago Daily Times*; see: Grimshaw (2018) Letter 32) p.178.

<sup>60</sup> For a transcript of this article see Jack Copeland’s *Introduction* to Grimshaw (2018) (ed.), pp.10-14.

<sup>61</sup> Most notably the aside of “Everdean”: “Perhaps it [the crisis] is an especially vivid memory to me, and to those of my age, because of the last war. Not because we remember it and can recall the miseries, the losses, the bitterness. No, but for the opposite reason- that we were not old enough for it to have any meaning and because our knowledge of it all is second-hand. This crisis with its moments, its days, when war seemed inevitable was something quite new and quite shocking”. This in particular would seem more to be the voice of Arthur (born 1914) than Clare (born 1917)- and because Arthur’s father served as a medical officer in the Great War, and so would have been a source of that ‘second-hand knowledge’.

<sup>62</sup> Most notably the aside of “Everdean”: “Perhaps it [the crisis] is an especially vivid memory to me, and to those of my age, because of the last war. Not because we remember it and can recall the miseries, the losses, the bitterness. No, but for the

## 8 Conclusion

Kenney (1970, p.322) stated the "Independent Labour" letters were, apart from an essay "On Theology and Art" published in the *Otago University Review*, Prior's first published work he had come across. Given he was working from Prior's scrapbooks<sup>63</sup> and papers this was understandable. However, over the past 20 years we have come to know that Prior undertook quite substantial published writing under his own name (or initials) in *Open Windows* and the *Student* and the *New Zealand Journal of Theology* before 1937<sup>64</sup> as well.

We now also know that Prior wrote under a number of identities that included a variety of his own name<sup>65</sup> and, as discussed, at least three non-de plumes. These varied writings by Arthur Prior under the nom de plumes "Richard Bramley", "Independent Labour" and (both singularly

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opposite reason- that we were not old enough for it to have any meaning and because our knowledge of it all is second-hand. This crisis with its moments, its days, when war seemed inevitable was something quite new and quite shocking". This in particular would seem more to be the voice of Arthur (born 1914) than Clare (born 1917)- and because Arthur's father served as a medical officer in the Great War, and so would have been a source of that 'second-hand knowledge'.

<sup>63</sup> On the suggestion of a reviewer of this article I undertook a detailed reading through of all of Prior's scrapbooks available via The Virtual Lab of Prior Studies to see if I could identify any further nom de plume writings by Prior or Clare Prior. While in the Blue scrapbook I noted there were copies of letters by "Popoffski" and "Old Bolshevik" from 1937 I was, via further research on the paperspast search engine able to discount Popoffski as being Prior (Popoffski in earlier letters self-identifying as Glaswegian born and being over 50 years of age). I cannot so easily discount 'Old Bolshevik' as being either a pen name of Prior or of Clare. While there are three 'Old Bolshevik' letters in the *Otago Daily Times* (July 21, July 23 and August 6), only the first one on 'Trade Unionism and Socialism' is in the Blue scrapbook. However, the second, "What is Socialism' twice endorses points made by "Independent Labour", while the third "Presbyterian Old and New" begins: "I have been very much interested in the two letters on the drink question, in which your correspondent "Richard Bramley" has brought out the profound contrast between Presbyterianism as it is to-day and Presbyterianism as it was in the minds of its founders. There are certain other directions in which this same contrast seems to me worth developing."

They then reference and quote from the Scottish reformer Patrick Hamilton, a very typical Prior reference and interest. It is quite possible "Old Bolshevik" is Prior writing under another nom de plume but there is nothing more than this circumstantial evidence to support it – and the fact that there is no further use of this non de plume once the Priors leave for Europe.

<sup>64</sup> There is also future research planned by the author to discover what may be written by Prior in the *Critic*, the Otago University Students' newspaper.

<sup>65</sup> Prior used, variously: Arthur Prior, Arthur. N. Prior, A.N. Prior and A.N.P.

and with Clare Prior as) “John Everdean” are of more than just passing interest. It is important to remember that these nom de plumes only occur at a particular time of Prior’s life and writing, specifically from 1935-1939<sup>66</sup>. From February 1935 to August 1936 Prior was a Theological Hall student studying for the ministry within the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. This meant any writing Prior did for the radical journal *Tomorrow* had to be under a nom de plume. Once he withdrew from theological training Prior is an MA student and an assistant lecturer in Philosophy under Findlay. This too limited what he could publish under his own name. It is also important to further note that once Prior returned to New Zealand from Britain in 1940 he only ever wrote under his own name or initials<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, while overseas 1938-1940, it was only in writing for the *Otago Daily Times* that a nom de plume (John Everdean) was used. Therefore, the nom de plumes serve a very contextual use. On the one hand they signal Prior’s intention to pursue a possible career as a religious journalist; on the other, they remind us that in a small city, in small communities, in a small country, there were limits as to what could be expressed under one’s true or full name. That is, as theological student or philosophy student and assistant lecturer Prior could only write in certain ways, on certain topics, in certain publications, under his own name. Yet in these ‘pen-name’ writings for a different audience, Prior is developing his religious and philosophical thought as a public intellectual, laying clear his views and beliefs, in a manner that not only adds to our understanding of what we already know, but also, allowing us access to new areas of Prior’s thought.

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<sup>66</sup> Except for that use of “Richard Bramley” while still at high school.

<sup>67</sup> The one variant is the use of “P” for sometimes writing in the small journal *The Presbyter*, both when in Britain and when returned to New Zealand. This is the only use of “P” (for Prior) that I have been able to find when I surveyed the scrapbooks.

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