

THE LAW

The Rubin Trial (cont)

The tone of the trial of Harold Rubin, up for blasphemy (for exhibiting his painting *My Jesus*) becomes, as the case wore into its third and fourth weeks, more serious, more scrutinising. "This case does not only concern Rubin. It is the trial of freedom in art, freedom in literature, freedom of expression", said Rubin's counsel. With the case for the prosecution closed, the defence witnesses have included notable figures in all the arts, and have introduced issues of the deepest import.

Rephrasing. The close of the prosecution's case was marked by accusations by the defence that the Rev Gerhardus Cruywagen, the State's chief witness, had taken steps to ensure his getting publicity when he went to look at the picture, and that a "rabble-rouser" named Jeff O'Connell had been used to attract attention to the painting.

The last witness for the prosecution was Bess Spruyt Lambrechts who thought that Rubin did intend to make fun of Christ. At this point, the magistrate, over protestations by the defence, altered the charge to "with some animal-like or monster-like head" instead of "with the head of some animal or monster".

Warnings and quotations. Rubin's counsel then introduced the note that more was at stake than the fate of Rubin or his drawing. And he began by calling the Southafrican poet Uys Krige, who found that the picture was "a cry from the heart — just the opposite of what the State is alleging". He was followed by Cecil Skotnes, an artist and the President of the Southafrican Council of Artists. He referred to the banning of works under the German Nazis, and when asked by the prosecution: "If I said I could see nothing but ridicule of Christ behind this picture?", replied: "I should seriously doubt your intelligence." Next witness called was Richard Daneel, actor, producer and drama critic, who quoted from various Afrikaans poets to prove that they too had sometimes doubted God, revolted against Him.

During a heated exchange with the prosecution, the defence said that the charge was for blasphemy under the common law, not for heresy under Church law. The subject of the case would seem to touch very few people in their ordinary way of life, yet is watched by a packed gallery and receives full newspaper coverage in both languages. It continues.