

The Freethinker

Volume LXXXIV—No. 34

Founded 1881 by G. W. Foote

Price Sixpence

TRUTH IS STRANGER than fiction; sometimes has the initial advantage of anticipating and even of foretelling truth! For upon hearing of the imbroglia recently reported from what, until Independence Day in October, will still be Northern Rhodesia, in which a Negro religious sect took up arms against the government and murdered several white police officers, I was reminded of a prophetic novel entitled *Prester John* written a generation ago by John Buchan. The theme, as I recall it, was precisely the emergence of a Negro messiah in South Africa who announced the Day of Doom for the then (pre-apartheid) white regime. Much water has flowed down the Zambesi since Buchan wrote his best-seller, and one has to concede that under the present regime of Dr. Verwoerd—of which the Dutch Reformed Church is the mainstay, and in which the predestinarian theology of Calvin is given a political, or rather racial application—the appearance of such a black messiah, a “Prester John” of the authentic Buchan vintage, seems to be increasingly probable. In Northern Rhodesia on the verge of independence and of a predominantly Negro regime, the soil does not appear to be particularly favourable for any spectacular success by a messianic movement, for there is, nowadays, no alien white caste there to canalise Negro hatred and to attract potential recruits.

Alice
Consequently, the Negro prophetess who headed this latest fanatical South African sect, and who bears the eminently respectable name of Alice (in Rhodesia—not Wonderland), has proved just a mere flash-in-the-pan. For all movements, including messianic ones, are ultimately conditioned by circumstances. Messianic movements—or at least successful ones—represent usually a social protest disguised in the religious forms of a pre-scientific age of superstition. It was so that all such movements arose that have cut any subsequent figure in the world from the days of Jesus Christ and the Holy Prophet, Mohammed, onwards. At present one might even suggest that a white messiah in a Southern Rhodesia about to pass under African rule would actually have a better chance than had the resurrected Alice and her following in now African Northern Rhodesia.

In the present disturbed state of the world when in both the USA and South Africa (including Southern Rhodesia and Portuguese Africa) inspired versions of messianic religion are already playing a significant part, the socio-religious phenomenon represented by the successive appearance of messiahs, constitutes not a merely academic or speculative problem, but one perhaps destined, and in the near future, to spectacularly important developments. Apart from the appearance of the miraculously resuscitated Alice, we already have the far more menacing and well-organised phenomenon of the Black Muslims and their Malcolm X breakaway in the USA. For not only are the Black Muslims apparently well-led and well-

disciplined—but what is even more important in the long run—the current social scene is eminently suitable to their racial phobias and to their potential growth with racial hatred rising to fever heat. With a correspondingly spectacular growth of the white opposite numbers, the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society—also vigorously recruiting adherents for the final racial show-down—the prospects of a Negro “Mohammed” preaching a Jihad (holy war) both racial and religious would appear to be excellent.

Indeed, should the Republican candidate — an avowed enemy of the recent Civil Rights Bill—Senator Goldwater, be elected president in November (an improbable but perhaps not impossible conjuncture), the prospects of a Negro messiah would surely soar. Actually, Goldwater's nomination seems to represent the reply of the white racialists to President Johnson's Civil Rights legislation. For such a phenomenon would represent an intransigent minority fighting against numerically and culturally heavy odds: an historical situation generically similar to that of the early Muslims when they confronted the surrounding world of the unbelievers in the 7th century. When the odds are so obviously weighted against one in *this* world, God represents a most desirable ally!

Messiahs—Yellow and Black

In modern colonial history, many authentic examples can be quoted of the powerful role played by self-proclaimed messiahs at the head of insurgent movements in which (as in present-day America and South Africa) nationalist and racist objectives are pursued under a transparent cloak of religious fanaticism. It is sufficient to recall in this respect the Chinese Tai-Ping messiah of the 1860s “the younger brother of Jesus Christ” (as he styled himself), and the Sudanese Mahdi of the 1880s, both of whom, by historical irony, came into contact with that white potential messiah, General Gordon. It would appear to be an odds-on chance that such “Black Christs” and American “Mahdis” will make their appearance within the next few years.

Jesus Christ and Malcolm X

Our contemporary messiahs, being contemporary are not yet respectable! But in religious, as well as in secular matters, it is success alone that produces ultimate respectability. For example, who today, could be more respectable than are Jesus, traditionally a crucified rebel, or than Mohammed, who started life as an itinerant camel-driver? Today these former “enemies of society” constitute the very quintessence of respectability, whereas the Sudanese Mahdi or the Chinese Tai-Ping messiah, both much more publicised in their life-time than were either Jesus or Mohammed, met with ultimate disaster and are now completely forgotten. Had, for example, the fanatical early Muslims had to confront Lord Kitchener's modern artillery (as their Mahdist successors did at Omdurman) Islam would certainly have been nipped in the bud. Similarly, had the Roman secret service been more

VIEWS AND OPINIONS

Messiahs Old and New

By F. A. RIDLEY

efficient, it would have rounded-up the early Christian agitators who (as is clear even from the much-edited New Testament) were originally regarded by Rome as representing a subversive movement against the Empire and the law and order which it represented.

Time works wonders. Today we look back on nineteen centuries of Christianity and, accordingly, we see Christian origins through a haze of conventional respectability. But early messianic Christianity was actually not in the least respectable any more than are say Malcolm X and his Black Muslims today. For then the Jews represented an unpopular minority scattered throughout the Roman Empire and periodically subjected to lynch law much

like the Negroes in the USA. Under such circumstances, Jewish messianic movements (including almost certainly early Christianity) were as inevitably anti-Roman as current American messianic movements are un-American. The American—and South African—police know this just as the Roman authorities evidently did—as is clear even from the Acts of the Apostles where Paul is described as “a seditious fellow making trouble throughout the world.” It is ironic nowadays, but probably true, that the Roman dossiers about Jesus and Paul probably bore a remarkable resemblance to present-day South African or American police dossiers about our Negro messianic contemporaries, Prophets Alice and Malcolm X.

The Magician

By WILLIAM MOORE

BROWSING THROUGH the public library in Sacramento one evening I came across a novel written by my favourite story teller and moral theologian, W. Somerset Maugham. Maugham is a strict behaviourist and helps us to have greater understanding of the foibles and weaknesses of our fellow man. The novel, *The Magician*, was one of his earliest works and had escaped my attention previously. The story deals with a theme that rarely appears in Maugham's later works, the supernatural. It is a drama concerning the forces of good and evil, with the triumph of the former over the latter after the tragic death of the heroine. I was rather surprised at the story because it is so unlike Maugham's usual approach to life. Then, suddenly, it dawned on me, it is a perfect description, analogously, of the tragedy of the religious life. The old master, unconsciously probably, had scored again in presenting a tragic aspect of our Christian culture.

Briefly, the story tells of the demonic power an occultist, Oliver Haddo, exercises over a beautiful woman, Margaret Dauncey, engaged to a promising surgeon, Arthur Burdon. Haddon feigns illness in front of Margaret's apartment one day and gains entrance when Margaret, out of pity, has him brought in. Once he has her alone, he hypnotises her with clever speech and fills her artistic imagination with ideas drawn from works of art both have seen. He plays the piano and she is carried into a dream world of romantic stirrings. He finally binds her to him by a magical trick and she is under his power, forever. She breaks her engagement to Arthur—and his heart as well—and marries Haddo. He is interested in using her only as an instrument in his mad scheme for gaining power over life and death through magic. She remains a virgin and through this peculiar state exerts great influence over destiny in Haddo's favour. Haddo takes her to a desolate estate where Margaret is confined while her husband practices the black arts. He finally takes her life in order to use her blood in creating monstrous humans. Burdon gets his revenge by using the same magic to kill Haddo in hand to hand combat.

As I say, I was surprised at these preternatural meanderings of Maugham until I saw them as an illustration of the way the Catholic Church induces young women to offer their lives for the evil purposes of that hideous organisation. The young Catholic girl sees the pitiful figure of Christ on the cross and takes him into her heart. Once he gains entrance, Jesus seduces the maiden with the liturgy of the Church and the stories of the saints. He embraces her, as Haddo does Margaret, but the romance does not consummate in the flesh as it should in normal

love. Frustrated, the bride of Christ does the most irrational and unnatural thing a woman can do, she vows her virginity to the Lord. If she could think rationally for a moment she would realise that this is a horrible perversion of nature, that no sane lover would demand such a frustration. The Church cynically uses this frustration by assigning most nuns to teaching work where their desperate desire for fulfilment and childbearing gets some release in the affection and attention they lavish upon their students. That is why in Catholic schools there is such an emotional bond between teacher and student. Some nuns follow the careers of their “children” until the latter are almost grandmothers.

The most pathetic scene in the story is that of Arthur's pursuit of Margaret to the barren estate where she is to die. He finds her in an isolated wood, sitting and weeping all alone. She is dying of loneliness and frustration, but so strong is the magician's spell that she cannot leave at Arthur's behest.

I have observed this scene so often in the religious life, priests and brothers as well as nuns, desolate and lonely and frustrated, yet incapable of making the break from religion. Fortunately, nuns and brothers are allowed to get a dispensation and leave, and many do but many others are incapable of leaving, due to fear, advanced age, and other reasons.

Margaret's blood is used to spawn new creatures, and the nuns attract new candidates to their revolting way of life by influencing the children in school. And so the horrible seduction continues, bringing new victims to the Church's altar of sacrifice. Let us hope that the advance of science hastens the destruction of religious myths to the extent that even young people can spot the magician when he comes, and send the old fraud a-packing back to the Dark Ages where he belongs.

[William Moore is an ex-Roman Catholic priest, who described his break with the Church in an article, “Now I am a Man,” which we had the pleasure of printing a few years ago. Like the above article, it first appeared in the American Freethought journal, Progressive World].

CHRISTIANITY AND CAPITALISM

“It was not long ago that Courtaulds featured in a ridiculous service of thanksgiving in one of our City churches for having won a battle against a take-over bid by the great industrial giant, Imperial Chemical Industries . . . One wonders whether the rector of that church is planning another service at which the directors of Courtaulds will be invited to pray for the victory of those they now plan to swallow up.”—Canon L. J. Collins (Daily Mirror, 27/7/64).

The Scarlet Woman

By REGINALD UNDERWOOD

"THAT WAS A remarkable sermon on married life his Eminence preached to us this morning," said the young and impressionable unmarried lady to her elderly and less impressionable much-married companion. "Well, yes, my dear," came the reply, "it certainly was. Remarkable is the word for it. I only wish I knew as little about the matter as he does." Whether or not the old lady was aware of it, she had plumped her finger with the nicest precision on one of the most familiar and irritating impudences of the Roman Catholic Church. The handing out of official advice by those without experience to those with ample experience but in no way official.

But before considering its shortcomings, we must consider what is meant when we speak of the Roman Catholic Church. In the ordinary everyday sense we mean that vast, seething organisation of human beings of all sorts and sizes who, having been formally baptised into the Catholic faith, subscribe, or pretend to subscribe, to its tenets and practices. In short, all those who are nominally Roman Catholics. It is quite a different matter when we speak of the Church in a more specific sense, as when we say, not without justice that the Church teaches this, preaches that and practises the other. We are then using a misleading abstraction. We are using a linguistic device which does more to disguise than to describe the reality. An abstraction cannot possess explicit attributes or exhibit practical performances. Yet the Romish Church possesses the most explicit attributes and as an exhibitory performer it has no religious equal.

It is obvious therefore that in thus referring to the Church we are not thinking of that welter of the ostensibly faithful who loosely constitute the great lay body. We are not even thinking of the huge general run of the menial priesthood. Left to themselves these could not even cohere let alone do any preaching or teaching. All the same we are definitely referring to human beings. We are in fact referring to that comparatively small company of the elect who, however remotely they may sit aloft and aloof, nevertheless rule the roost. They are the animating core on which the life and activities of the Church in its entirety depend. They are the Catholic chosen people. In Milton's phrase, "by merit raised to that bad eminence." For notwithstanding the saintly qualities attributed to them by Catholic piousness, they are every bit as vain, ambitious and self-seeking as the place-hunters and time-servers in any other sphere. Common mortals with an uncommon astuteness. If they were not they wouldn't be where they are. They are literally the executive committee. If they ceased to function as they do, Roman Catholicism would quickly disappear.

But they are past masters in the subtle art of effacing themselves, of achieving intensely personal aims with a deceptively impersonal effect. In this way they can keep so diplomatically out of sight and so dangerously out of mind, which for them is a trick well worth two. It is most important to realise this and to be constantly alert to it, for if in any way these secretly high and mighty are forgotten or overlooked or treated as negligible, we shall never even begin to understand what is meant by the Church. There could be no such thing as the Church apart from them. Whenever we see or hear of the meddling some Romish Church overstepping the mark as it so grossly and persistently does, we must firmly remember that it is they who are the actual aggressors. They are

the sinister power behind the papal throne.

It is astonishing that there are still such hordes of otherwise intelligent Catholics, as well as many non-Catholics, who seem unable to grasp this. They obstinately cling to the vague traditional superstition that there is in existence something called the Church which has a completely independent entity. They speak of it as though it were a sort of intermediate, supramundane agency, poised as a means of communication between heaven and the hierarchy. Hence the various complimentary or uncomplimentary nicknames the Catholic Church has been given. In opposite camps, Mother Church and the Scarlet Woman are perhaps the best known and the most symbolic. But the hard-bitten Romish Church cunningly knows how to turn such symbolism to its own advantage.

Mother Church makes a capital handle for those so fond of blathering that they like to know where they are, which means nothing more than where the Church tells them they are. And they are outraged if they are accused of preferring to sit down idly with a comforting delusion rather than stand up valiantly to a discomforting truth—the unpalatable truth signified by the Scarlet Woman. Both titles have their lighter side. We may mercifully make merry at the motherliness exuded by that chaste selection of elderly single gentlemen in stately conclave met. Yet they have so long been adept in the feminine art of tricking themselves out to trick others in, they have so long indulged their incurable addiction to parading in elaborate fancy dress like a lot of ecclesiastical mannequins, that no wonder somebody has irreverently but delightedly called them a parcel of scarlet old women.

Mother Church may be a lot of arrant nonsense and Catholics of course would say that the Scarlet Woman certainly is. But they superciliously refuse any challenge on the matter. Mother Church is the sort of nonsense the priests wholeheartedly foster. They exhort their flocks that Mother Church, thus truly understood, means the mystical voice of divine revelation and that just as the Church is the mouthpiece of God so are the priests the mouthpiece of the Church. For Catholics this seems to be an ineradicably ingrained idea. It enables the lowly priests to pontificate as boldly as the high priests, that the Church always knows best, that the Church cannot err, that because to err is human, to forgive, and to punish, is ecclesiastical, the priests being the accredited representatives. Yet to those who have ears to hear it is plain enough that the voice of the Church in this sense is not in the least mystical. It is purely mythical. The real voice is unmistakably human. It may be collective, it may not always be as tunefully in unison as its oracles would wish, but it proclaims in anything but mystical terms its rigid goodwill and pleasure, just as it exercises wherever it can its ruthless badwill and displeasure on those who fall foul of Catholic intention. But Catholics, especially local priests, are not allowed to have ears to hear: it would quickly put an end to them as Catholics.

The education of Catholic priests is almost exclusively sacerdotal. They are trained to become as it were expert clerical mechanics. They have to live and move by rule and rote. They would certainly say that reason is the gift of God, but they evidently agree that it is better to give than to receive, so they abuse the gift by making little use of it. But perhaps that is inevitable since their

(Continued on page 271)

This Believing World

We must report another dreadful thing which happened to the English Church. It appears that a Roman Catholic priest (*Sunday Express*, August 2nd), organised a sixpenny lottery, and many Anglicans who bought tickets did not know "that the lottery was for a Roman Catholic cause." The Rev. G. Parlett, rector of Buckland, Dover, even said that he wouldn't have anything to do with lotteries." On the other hand, another vicar in Dover, the Rev. S. Easter, with "unity" in mind, declared that he "will never say anything that would harm ecumenical relations." But what a lot of holy and unholy barriers will have to be jumped before the Christians get "unity"—and harmony.

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Not to be outdone by Borley Rectory or other haunted buildings, old and new, the Shakespeare Exhibition at Stratford-on-Avon, has turned up a ghost, which appeared to two "independent witnesses." So an infra-red camera has been set up in an attempt to get him (or it) duly photographed, for, obviously, a clever ghost could elude any other kind of camera (or film). The ghost, we learn, came down from a picture of Queen Elizabeth, and glided over to a portrait of the Earl of Essex—as it naturally would—but, alas, the infra-red camera has now frightened it away. Our psychic journals have been done out of a beautiful ghost story—and perhaps a famous love story at that.

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It is not only "The Freethinker" that pokes a little fun at the immensely reverent attitude towards spirits and other phenomena in Spiritualist circles. The *South London Press* (July 31st) might agree with two leading Spiritualists that "no professional medium was mentally deranged," the impression given in the film, *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*. But it disagreed with them when they declared that "a Spiritualist seance is a deeply religious rite performed with the utmost reverence." The writer of the article had attended one at the home of Harry Edwards, and he found it was not so. There was no prayer and no hymn—and there was no religion either when Ronald Strong was the medium.

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Our own experience has been that most seances are "deeply religious," with a lot of silly hymns sung reverently to get the correct atmosphere. Spirits hate sceptics whose presence puts them off, which accounts for the fact that properly conducted "investigations" never produce even a trace of a ghost. However the *South London Press* writer smilingly admits that Messrs. Edwards and Strong "put on very good acts"—and what more should one want?

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We were specially intrigued by the heading of an article in the *Ipswich Evening Star* (July 24th)—"The Christian's Duty in Secular Matters"—and waded through very disappointedly a mass of Christian verbiage. Its author, the Rev. Dr. Paul Welsby claims, "Within the Sacred walls of the Church, we find God. Outside these walls lies the secular, the material, where we do not find God." Some of us think this is a triumph for Secularism—though in fairness, it is well to point out that inside the sacred walls of a church, there is no evidence whatever that anybody has "found God."

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All the "evidence" we ever get is that Christians say they have found God which is quite a different matter; and we are sure that even Dr. Welsby would strenuously

maintain that many of the supreme Men of God in history, the Popes, never found God inside or outside the sacred walls of any church. For the rest, his three-column article is a shining example of sacred nonsense.

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It may have taken a long time for him to find out but, some weeks ago, the Bishop of Rochester in his *Diocesan News*, wrote that "the Church needs more men who have graduated either in the arts or the sciences. It also needs men who will give several years service before they marry. An educated society demands a well qualified clergy . . . We have always been given to understand that our theological colleges have never failed to turn out men of God qualified in nearly everything—in the arts, in science, but above all, in the Word of God. Is the Bishop implying that we have all been misled, that the clergy are a bunch of ignoramuses, quite unable to play their part in a modern world? Even THE FREETHINKER would not go quite as far as the Bishop of Rochester.

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Charles Bradlaugh once remarked that he was attacked even more for his Malthusian views by Christians than for his Atheism, but now we have the Bishop of Bristol almost imploring "young couples" to be "wise and thoughtful" in planning a family. He said this recently at a diocesan conference, adding that "birth control methods were permissible for Anglicans within the bond of marriage." But the good Bishop would never thank Bradlaugh and those of his followers who braved every indignity—backed up by the full weight of the law—for the right to practise birth control. It may well be that one day Jesus will even be called the greatest Birth Controller that ever lived.

Young Humanists on TV

THE YOUNG Humanists who appeared in the BBC-2 programme, *Let Me Speak*, on August 8th, acquitted themselves extremely well against the often cynical questioning of Malcolm Muggeridge. Graham Kingsley's opening statement was clear and unequivocal, but not—as Mr. Muggeridge alleged—dogmatic. "We don't believe in following the advice of supernatural beings, even if there are supernatural beings, we don't hope that we can look up the answer in some holy book." Mr. Kingsley said: "we think that human problems must be solved in human terms." And it was from this standpoint, not from any abstract "progress" that he condemned the Roman Catholic Church's ban on contraceptives: "putting what it considers God's will against the needs of man." For the Humanist—as other speakers emphasised—decisions are a matter of personal responsibility.

Humanism, in Mr. Muggeridge's opinion was likely to appeal more to the young than the old. "Soon we shall die," he said, and "in the light of this stupendous fact of death" he found it difficult to believe that this brief existence amounted to no more than the birth, growth and extinction of a single ego." But, "unfortunately" as he would say—the Humanist outlook had become widely held. A nurse who read a letter from a London hospital rejecting her as a trainee because of her lack of religious belief, said she neither expected nor received any help from a supernatural being. Mr. Muggeridge said he would rather be attended on his deathbed by a believer than "our delightful nurse here." Indeed, he expressed an even more absurd preference: that of the witch-doctor to the "mumbo jumbo of science."

THE FREETHINKER

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1

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Lecture Notices, Etc.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: MESSRS. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

London Branches—Kingston, Marble Arch, North London: (Marble Arch), Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY and J. A. MILLAR.

(Tower Hill). Every Thursday, 12—2 p.m.: L. EBURY.

Manchester Branch NSS (Car Park, Victoria Street,) Sunday Evenings

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 7.30 p.m.

North London Branch NSS (White Stone Pond, Hampstead)—Every Sunday, noon: L. EBURY.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Birmingham Branch NSS (Midland Institute, Paradise Street), Sunday, August 23rd, 6.45 p.m.: GEORGE CLARK and HOWARD CHAYNEY. "Refusing To Pay Tax for Armaments."

Notes and News

POPE PAUL VI's first encyclical, made public on August 10th, contained what has aptly been termed the "obligatory element" about Communism. "There are reasons," the Pope said, "which compel us to condemn the ideological systems which deny God and oppress the Church, among which atheistic communism is the chief." But, as *The Guardian's* Rome Correspondent, George Armstrong commented, for those who see in Pope Paul "a somewhat blurred reflection of Pius XII, his condemnation . . . must seem very disappointing and unenergetic indeed." For, the Pope went on: "it is not so much that we condemn these regimes as rather that they have radically condemned us in thought and in deed." And, he added plaintively, "We deplore them more with the cry of a victim than the sentence of a judge." It should not be impossible, in fact—for those who make a practice of it—to detect hints of a possible *rapprochement* with Communist regimes. On the whole, though, we agree with the Pope that his encyclical doesn't express any new or fully developed ideas.

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It is interesting, nevertheless—and not unamusing to an outsider—to note Pope Paul's references to enlarging the Church's "dialogue" with non-Christian religions, "particularly those of the Hebrew people," who "above all adore the one supreme God whom we, too, adore," of the Muslims, who worship one God, and "the great Afro-Asiatic religions." However, he added: "Honesty compels

us to declare openly our conviction that there is but one true religion, the religion of Christianity." And, as Mr. Armstrong remarked, Protestants and others belonging to the World Council of Churches may be surprised to learn from the Pope that the "initiative in restoring unity" was taken by the Roman Church.

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WE WERE living in the first secular age, Dr. Donald Soper told the Modern Churchmen's Union at Oxford on August 5th. None of the traditional environmental circumstances of religion had anything like the hold they once had, and he was sure that the forms and symbols of Christianity must be changed in order that the essential Gospel in which he most heartily believed could shine forth (*The Times* 6/8/64). Dr. Soper had no doubt whatever that the predominant characteristics of the man-in-the-street to the presentation of the Gospel was a measure of doubt and a general sense that what he was about to hear was dubious if not fictitious. Dr. Soper had even met "a certain Cabinet Minister" who "knew nothing about Christianity except "the vague recollections from Sunday school days 40 or 50 years ago."

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THE FAILURE of religious instruction in the schools is the subject of Diana Dewar's *Backward Christian Soldiers* (Hutchinson, 16s.), which was reviewed for the *Daily Herald* (4/8/64) by the Rev. Nicolas Stacey, and will soon be reviewed for us by Margaret McIlroy. Whichever way one puts it, said Mr. Stacey, "the harsh fact remains that after 20 years of compulsory religious education in State schools, many children leave with very little knowledge of or interest in religion." What Mr. Stacey, Dr. Soper and, we suspect, Miss Dewar, fail to appreciate is that the fault lies with Christianity and not with the schools. It isn't interesting because it isn't relevant, and all the gimmicks in the world can't make it so.

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"THERE IS widespread demand in Mauritius for information about family planning, and all sections of the people appear to be aware of the vital necessity for control of population growth," wrote W. M. O. Moore, Senior Registrar, Dept. of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Hammersmith Hospital (*New Society*, 30/7/64). The island, about the size of Surrey, has a population of 700,000, compared with 420,000 in 1946, and 55 per cent are under the age of 20. In 1960, the Government proposed to launch a family planning campaign offering a free choice of various birth control methods but "In face of strong opposition mainly from Catholics (representing about 24 per cent of the population), and Muslims (representing about 15 per cent of the population), the Government did not proceed with the programme." In 1961 the problem was again discussed in the Legislative Council, but only one third of the members were prepared to support an "all methods" family planning programme. Now a start is being made by means of the rhythm method.

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JOHN MORGAN of the *New Statesman*, on a visit to Poland, "found it difficult to be as excited as western visitors usually show themselves at these crowded churches." The Catholic Church, Mr. Morgan said, "is seldom associated with liberal thought or the democratic processes" (7/8/64). And one of Mr. Morgan's Warsaw friends remarked that if Poland didn't have a communist government, it would probably have a fascist one—"the country people being so hostile to the idea of government (and the notion of playing any part in it) and the Polish Church being so intolerant."

THE EDUCATION CONTROVERSY

Suffer Little Children

By BOB CREW

WHEN THE Lord said "suffer little children to come unto me," he could not have known the difficulties it would involve in the years ahead, when his many disciples throughout the world interpreted his divine utterances in diverse ways. The Catholics would have us believe, no doubt, that he had Catholic children in mind when he said it, whilst Jewry is likely to deny that he said anything that Moses didn't know about. If he ever spoke them at all, I repeat that he could not have known the problems these simple words would cause centuries later in a modern, civilised society like we claim for Britain today, wilting under the strain of its Christian heritage.

Of course, whether he said it or not is an incidental consideration in a country obligated to the development of a fanciful theme, desperately held together by the ideals of the Church. What is important in such a country is that the status quo is pleasantly agreeable to thinking that he said this or that and countless other euphuisms for which there is not a shred of evidence, in order to preserve what is known as the Christian way of life; this way of life being vainly reckoned superior to other ways of life, spinning a moral fibre among the people.

Never mind about the millions of Christian soothsayers who have waged bloody wars on each other throughout history. Never mind about the millions of people elsewhere in the world who hold different beliefs, whose morals are obviously no worse and in some places clearly better than Christian morals. Never mind the Christian failure to come to grips with the important moral questions of our time, or the glaring omissions in Christian conduct from the burning of witches to the persecution of homosexuals. Such is the conceit and vanity of the Christian religion. Never mind.

The point is that whatever the Almighty is claimed to have said is thought to be a necessary learning for the young. This is because it is the young who are more likely in their ignorance to believe and be impressed by it than they would otherwise be later on in life. Religious education in the schools is Christianity's last hope in a country where it is losing its grip.

It is clearly quite undemocratic for children in state schools to be compelled to one religious learning in particular, especially when the parents object to it. There is no longer any widespread justification for the application of religious instruction in schools any more than there is for the teaching of Latin and Greek. In order of priority alone, religious instruction is quite unnecessary to prepare people for the lives they will have to lead. There is further evidence of this lack of justification in the increasing number of "lapsed" Christians who do not respond to the teachings conferred on them as it is reflected by the emptiness of their churches. There is evidence enough in the growing secular, humanist and scientific factions in society challenging and often rejecting Christian teaching.

Currently the British state is lacking in democracy on the subject of religious instruction in schools. Not only does it use state schools as market places for Christian indoctrination, but it spends state money (a large proportion of which is taxed revenue from non-Christians) to finance church schools so that they can teach their denominational dogmas with impunity. The state would

not subsidise schools propagating political causes or secular teachings. If the state cannot subsidise all, it is an illogical corollary to subsidise any. It is a perverse educational system indeed which allows clerical education to stifle the intellectual freedom of the young at the expense of many who are opposed to religious mythology and quite without representation of their own personal beliefs in the school curriculum.

This situation becomes even more ridiculous when one remembers that the British Protestant state provides Protestant and secular money to aid Catholic schools which teach their pupils that theirs is the infallible religion and that the other believers in society are either pretenders to God's will or possessed of the very Devil himself. I wonder if the Catholics would be prepared to donate some of their considerable financial resources to Secular teachings?

The government's argument for subsidising church schools is probably based on the economical theory that if these schools did not exist their children would have to be taught just the same and entirely at the expense of the public. As it is church schools do at least pay for a part of their education. It is also claimed that many taxpayers would object to paying for an educational system which did not allow for a particular denominational teaching. This may be so, but in a Protestant country, the Catholics should know—as indeed the state should know—that there are no convincing educational or moral grounds for giving preference to the Catholics. There would be nothing to stop Catholics or any other theologians running their own schools with their own money in a fully democratic country, and this is precisely what I imagine would happen if an equilibrium were dropped from the state curriculum and subsidies withdrawn from church schools. The Church would soon transfer some of its lucrative investments and reduce its donations to charities abroad! Neither would it be in the depths of despair in such circumstances. There would still be enormous hope for it in such institutions as private schools, the armed forces and the BBC.

Rights for Children

By NIGEL H. SINNOTT

"RIGHTS OF WOMAN! We will be hearing of the Rights of Children next!" This was the reaction of that late eighteenth-century writer of religious tracts, Miss Hannah More, to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In the last two hundred years, the concept of rights has received increasing attention at the hands of politicians and philosophers—human rights; rights of women; rights of the individual, and so on. Yet in spite of the welfare state and the many Children's Acts now on the statute book, there remain certain basic and most important rights withheld from children.

The basic rights of children are to be loved, to feel secure in their youngest years when such security is most

needed; to be given the opportunities to develop into sentient, happy individuals able to recollect their childhood without regrets, and to be protected from indoctrination, whether political, economic, religious or criminal, and, above all, to be shown the value of liberty by being allowed to think for themselves, and being given as much freedom of choice and action as their ages and personal abilities permit.

At present perhaps the most flagrant violation of children's rights are the denominational schools, where the child is indoctrinated with a one-sided view of the world around it. These schools deny the child the right to hear all points of view and, if possible, weigh them up objectively; they deny the supreme freedom upon which the other concepts of freedom, democracy and toleration depend—freedom of thought. More often than not, the child is taught to equate morality with the school's particular religion, and the so-called morality is invariably the masochistic and hypocritical "chastity is more important than charity" version, sometimes reinforced by unscrupulous, pseudo-scientific sex-lectures.

Another abuse of children's rights is the one-sex boarding school, mostly denominational, which seems to me to be an unhealthy left-over from the bad old days of male supremacy, when boys were "taught" to be tough and insensitive, competitive, tyrannical and pious; while girls were taught as little as possible—least of all to think, but enough to make them serve as pretty, docile, household ornaments. This system is designed to prevent any emotional relationship springing up between young girls and boys, and this attempt to inhibit their emotional maturation often causes the children to develop a love of power and brutality instead of for aesthetics and for each other.

The silly practice of school uniforms still persists in this nation which prides itself on its toleration of eccentrics and individualists—so long as they are not at school! Not only are uniforms an unnecessary expense, but they seem to be another attempt to suppress human individuality. It may be true that boys generally take more easily to them (though I wonder!) but most girls do not. "Dress them up like boys, make them play 'sport' like boys, and they might not think about them!" Those who advocate uniforms defend them on grounds of "discipline" and, believe it or not, "neatness." How strange that the state schools of the USA and most other countries can manage nicely without this form of regimentation! Is it not time that we scrapped the gym-slip, compulsory sport and Christian indoctrination, and rattle examination courses, and instead taught the children of this world of their rights to live, love, be happy and to think for themselves?

Any attempt to formulate a declaration of rights for children is bound to become very involved with the important, but in my opinion, secondary right of parents. Those people who talk about their parental and religious "rights" to place children in denominational schools fail to see that enclosing a boy or girl in an intellectual straightjacket is a gross denial of his or her liberty. The limit of freedom is surely that it shall not interfere with the freedom of anyone else.

The rights of children have yet to be formulated, yet this is most pressing in a rapidly-evolving society where our concepts of the rights of other people form so much of the basis of our ethical standards and love of justice. Only when the young are allowed to find their own talents and to be shown how to develop them, instead of what nineteenth-century authorities considered good for them, will they stand a better chance of self-fulfilment.

THE SCARLET WOMAN (Continued from page 267)

only freedom is the freedom to do as they are told. It never seems to enter their ordained heads that their superiors are just as human and fallible as themselves, that the Pope and his myrmidons can know no more about the mystery of things than anybody else. They apparently have no inkling that their stereotyped clerical duties are futile to meet the needs of this grim and present world, whatever they may be for the imaginary next.

They are mostly amateur actors of middling capacity. They can perform their little bit of magic with the wafer and wine. In their dog-Latin way, they can say a mass, sing a eucharist, recite a string of prayers and even on occasion, as the two ladies attested, deliver a remarkable if not exactly practical sermon. They sniff if they are called unworldly. If they are called worldly, they sniff twice. They do not so much want to have it both ways as to have it neither way. And in this they more or less succeed. They become that depressing, nebulous human commodity commonly described as neither one thing nor the other.

Yet these are the activated puppets through which the Catholic Church maintains its meretricious ascendancy. Here we have an unequalled collection of dedicated male celibates, supported by a monstrous regiment of subservient, dedicated spinsters, brides of Christ. Jesus must surely be the very ace of all polygamists! The sorry joke is that though they are all devoid of marital experience (or if they are not they ought to be), they are unique and united with sublime effrontery to tutor the married and marriageable as to how, why, when and where love shall make the world go round. Truly, nothing so perfect as a presbytery wife and a virgin's child. Many Catholics must sigh in secret sympathy with the much-married old lady, for they are not all so easily imposed upon. The priests glibly explain that it is all in the interests of human welfare, as if they are quite unaware that those who are not wilfully blind see perfectly well that it is all in the interests of the Church. Priests often think their parishioners are ignorant simpletons. Parishioners often know that their priests are.

But anything approaching a full-size picture of the Romish Church cannot be got into so small a frame. It can only be emphasised at this point that the high-handed method by which the Church handles its conjugal problems, exemplifies the method by which it handles all problems. The Catholic Church knows as well as any Atheist, that as long as the existence of God remains unproved, everything based upon God remains uncertain. It therefore relegates God to a cryptic background and bases everything upon the certainty of the Church.

To all thinkers, especially to Freethinkers, the Romish Church is doubly the world's menace, a political institution craftily masquerading under the cloak of religion. It is the baleful foe of all freedom. Hereditary Catholics are in chains from the start. Converts are they who have exercised their freedom once to deny it for evermore. No wonder other religious sects identify the Catholic Church with the Scarlet Woman. She who still "sitteth upon many waters" as St. John the Divine so ghoulishly portrays her, in the seventeenth chapter of his blood-and-thunder nightmare. The Romish Church being infallible is always right. Dissentients are always wrong. Nevertheless this outrageously silly claim does not conceal the perpetual Catholic defections. And in these days when the old vindictive Catholic vengeance is more effectually held at bay, it can fairly be seen and safely be said, that whatever is good in Romanism is not Catholic and that whatever is Catholic is not good.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CRITICISM

I have to thank your Business Manager for the sample copy of your paper received this week. I am sorry to say, however, that I am very disappointed in it. From its title I expected something worth reading but I find instead that it is certainly not "free" and neither does it express any thought.

With a few minor exceptions the whole of the paper is entirely negative in content. Anyone interested in "freethought" would, by now, be well aware of the failure of religion. What is the point of publishing a weekly paper which simply harps on the same theme? All that can do is to produce a vacuum: it certainly is not "thought." What is more, the ideas expressed are not free. They are as bound by prejudice as any religious publication. Whatever one may think about religion, and whatever may be the failings of some of its devotees and some sections of its so-called "church," a free man will not close his eyes to the great amount of good that has also been done in the name of religion and will not forget the sincerity and selfless devotion to mankind of many whose theology was, to say the least, naive (Roman Catholics included).

No, Sir, stupidity and hypocrisy are not the prerogative of the religious only and if we who have shaken off the fetters of religion are to find an alternative which gives meaning to life—and people everywhere are hungry for just that—then we have to do some real thinking with minds open and free from all prejudice, recognising truth and goodness wherever it may appear. There is a certain spiciness in good satire but who wants meals of nothing but spice?

I am not conceited enough to imagine that you will change the policy of your paper because of my complaint but if, by chance, you do begin to publish some real thought that is worth reading I should be glad to become a subscriber.

E. O. JAMES.

THE URGENCY OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The amendment to the Civil Rights by Baptist Ashbrook of Ohio, legalising an employer's refusal to employ a person of "atheistic practices and beliefs," should shock all the naively compromising Humanists into a vigorous immediate campaign of protesting that atheism is a platitude, a truism, identical with the true denial of fairies and elves who notably were—exactly like the Hebrew-Christian-Muslim god Yahweh, Son and Co—the goddesses and gods of the Celts and the Norsemen.

This idiotic amendment also knocks the bottom out of the pretentious American academic belief that the USA is now the world's cultural leader (see President Kerr, in his *Uses of the University*, Howard, 1964).

This legalising of a falsehood and a persecution for a truism makes my proposal an extremely serious, urgent task for all Humanists who genuinely care to build their humanism, firmly and primarily, on the basis of enlightened and truthful commonsense, by no means suicidally compromising with falsehood and humbug.

To this purpose I'm anxious to correct your staff's mistake in adopting a Christian-distorted definition of atheism in your excellent timely survey of *Freethought in America* (I was myself a contributor to the first three major monthlies).

Now, it is false to qualify atheism either as positive or dogmatic (i.e., arrogant), it is neither, but only—*true*. It is a true commonsense denial of all the gods, including the god Yahweh, Son and Co. (myths) and "the one god God in addition to Yahweh and all gods" (a fallacy of the category-mistake type).

By the way, this "god God" is already a second instance of category-mistake in Western religions, the first having been "The god *Pantheos* ("all-God") in the late Roman Empire, a concoction arising from "*pantes theoi*" (all-gods) formula.

Both theism and deism have sprung from the Vulgate translations where "God" and "Lord God" displaced "*the god*" and "*the god Yahweh*" of the originals, and, since the Middle Ages, have dissociated from Hebrew mythology and become independent, but equally fallacious beliefs in "the god God." Agnosticism is also an erroneous belief in assuming that the nature of "the god God" is unknowable, whereas any student of semantics or logic knows that it is a category-mistake, a fallacy.

A humanism, thus aided by biblical philology, history of Bible-translation, and modern logic, will achieve a breakthrough in uprooting Christian belief which is the all-important logical basis for Christian terrorism and intolerance in the USA.

GREGORY S. SMELTERS, (Sydney, Australia).

The Crimes of the Popes (A chapter from *The Crimes of Christianity* by G. W. Foote and J. M. Wheeler) Price 6d. postage 3d.

OBITUARY

By the death of Stanley Eckersley on July 31st in his sixty-eighth year, the Manchester Branch of the National Secular Society has lost another of its consistent members. His end came peacefully yet suddenly.

The cremation took place at Overdale, Bolton on Tuesday August 4th, when Mr. Bayford conducted a secular ceremony. He referred to the interests of the deceased, saying that Eckersley not only held Freethought views; he was a socialist too and altogether a humanitarian. His strong views on war and its folly had perhaps influenced him to take up the study of Esperanto, and it had been his delight to attend Esperanto congresses and discuss points with fellow-Esperantists from many countries.

We extend our sincere sympathy to his widow and other relatives and his friends also will find him irreplaceable.

He had been living in Ainsworth, Bury, recently but was better known in Radcliffe, and it was noticed with pleasure that the Editor of the local newspaper attended.

W.C.

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