

# The Freethinker

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I HAVE spent a certain amount of time perusing *The New Reformation*, a recent effusion from the well-publicised pen of Dr. John Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, better known as the author of that best-seller of ecclesiastical fiction, *Honest to God*. To review a book of this nature, at any rate in any precise sense, constitutes an impossible task, since the "Wool" in Woolwich seems to be the operative syllable which has communicated itself to the episcopal style of writing.

What, however, does emerge from this recent successor to *Honest to God*, is that the Reformation which began with Luther and Calvin, is nowadays a spent force. A new, and presumably more radical and comprehensive "Reformation" (more honest-to-God—and man) is urgently required for the visibly tottering creed of Christianity.

To wade in detail through Dr. Robinson's diffuse lucubrations would scarcely be edifying either to writer or reader; but the subject initially broached by our modernist Bishop is both topical and important. Is a new Reformation of Christianity even possible in this year of grace 1965, at least in any concrete sense similar to that launched by Luther during the first half of the 16th century? This subject can, of course, be treated under several heads, but I propose here to deal with it primarily from the standpoint of Christian theology, particularly since the primary problem for Christianity today is the surely basic problem of credibility. Is Christianity true? Unless that can be established, every other species of reforming activity is clearly superfluous.

## Old and New Reformations

Since Dr. Robinson uses the term Reformation (with a capital R), I also shall use it in the same sense that he does. By the term, I imply those movements which have appeared from time to time during the 19 centuries-long evolution of Christianity with the avowed and specifically defined objective of reforming Christianity from within. Of these successive movements of reform, by far the best-known as well as the most influential, was the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and succeeding centuries, to which, indeed, the definitive term "The Reformation," is often attached. (Cf. Archibald Robertson's *The Reformation—a must for Humanists*—as lucid as the Bishop is the reverse).

What in actuality was this Reformation? What did it try to reform? How far again in actuality did it succeed? Did Luther, Calvin *et al* succeed in creating a new type of Christianity, and what were the historic conditions under which they did it? Lastly, and most important of all from our (and Dr. Robinson's point of view, assuming—as he does—that the Protestant Reformation of the 20th century is now definitely unequal to the fundamental task of giving us a viable Christianity today) is it nowadays possible for any current or future Reformation to do so?

Historically speaking, the European Reformation of the 16th century did not of course set out with any intention of abolishing traditional Christianity but merely of reforming it: hence its name. This Reformation had several aspects, both practical and ideological. The attack upon indulgences, with which the initial German Reformation started, combined both practical and theological objectives. The Protestant reformers found themselves faced with a huge dogmatic structure initiated in the early Christian centuries by the Church fathers (of whom St. Augustine of Hippo was the most important) and later given an Aristotelian philosophical foundation and a formal logical

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## Christian Perspectives

As and when considered as a theological movement, the Protestant reformers did not set out to abolish this theology altogether, but to revise it with reference both to biblical scriptures and to modern (i.e. 16th century) secular knowledge; and the final result was not the abolition of Christianity or even entirely of its traditional forms. For example, Luther accepted the dogma of the Trinity (though he admitted that the term itself was unscriptural), whilst Calvin interpreted St. Augustine's predestinarian views more rigidly than any Catholic schoolman had ever done. The upshot was a new Christian theology, identical in some points with the old, but reformed, and on some points (such as transubstantiation) abolished.

This new reformed Christianity proved sufficiently viable to last for several centuries, say from the publication of Calvin's *Institutes* in 1536, down to that of *Honest to God* by Bishop Robinson in 1963. Actually, as I have tried to demonstrate in *The Crisis of Christianity* (due for publication early next year) Dr. Robinson's Christian atheism really dates back to Calvin & Co., since *lex orandi lex credendi* (we believe in the one to whom we pray). But how is it possible to pray to a God (like Calvin's) who has already predestined everything?

The Reformation was successful in the sense that it did actually create a form of Christianity viable for several centuries in Europe and (as I recently showed here) still apparently so in a backward former Catholic area like South America. But why was this so and could it again be so with regard to a new Reformation such as Dr. Robinson now advocates occurring under contemporary conditions? I suggest that current intellectual perspectives make any such viable reformation of Christianity in the 20th century impossible. The reason why it was possible to reform Christianity in the 16th century, lay in the fact that the cosmic and historical perspectives of Protestant Reformers were essentially the same as those of their Catholic predecessors. Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin believed in a geocentric universe closed both in time and in space. Neither Catholic fathers nor medieval schoolmen knew anything about either modern science

## VIEWS AND OPINIONS

### *The New Reformation*

By F. A. RIDLEY

or modern historiography: Copernican astronomy, Darwinian biology, Einsteinian relativity were *terra incognita* to both medieval Catholicism and to the Protestant Reformers. Nor was either species of Christianity any better informed with regard to human history or to comparative religion, or even to the actual circumstances under which their own religion had originated.

It was this basic identity of outlook between medieval Catholicism and the Protestant Reformers which alone made possible any viable reformation of Christianity. But obviously no such identity exists today. The pre-scientific world common to both the original founders and to the later reformers of Christianity is now in process of disappearing; and its elementary postulates which

are those of traditional Christianity both Catholic and Protestant, become even more meaningless.

The Bishop's analogy between old and new Reformations is therefore irrelevant. There can, and will be, no future or viable Reformation of Christianity in any way analogous with the 16th century one.

Charles Bradlaugh made the notable observation that "No one ever saw a religion die." In the literal sense of the *rigor mortis*, this remark will, no doubt, stand. But the dying symptoms of religions are often visible to the percipient onlooker. They were so of Roman Paganism (as its Christian successors noted with obvious glee!) and they are so of Christianity today from, say, Woolwich to the Vatican.

## Are We Really Freethinkers?

By F. H. SNOW

SCPTICS find frequent cause for accusing Christians of unfaithfulness to their ideals. As believers in the precepts of their exemplary Jesus, Christians are open to condemnation if, mainly, their conduct fails to stand up to their professions. My experience among them, in the days when I aspired to *post mortem* bliss, was that whilst there were few who gave evidence of living close to Christ's precepts, there were many who thought they did, although frequently behaving in unchristianlike fashion. They were hardly hypocrites, seeming unaware of their deviations from the letter and spirit of their Blessed Master's ordinances. They appeared incapable of identifying in themselves the sins they deplored in others, particularly those of malice, prejudice and uncharitableness.

I have had reason to wonder whether an analogous situation exists with regard to sceptics. Are we who very rightly objugate the failings of the upholders of religious virtues, true to our own rationalist principles? Do we consistently subject ourselves to the discipline of that reason which we hold up to the religious as justifying our repudiation of their creeds, and to our fellow-men in general as essential to a right appraisal of the motives, morals and problems of individuals and nations? Are we the freethinkers which, without fear of contradiction, I assert that all sceptics would vigorously resent being told they weren't? Or are we no more than critics of those whose prejudices stamp them as adversaries of freethought, or who we, mainly because of uncensored animus, wrongly place in that category?

Some conversations with a long-standing worker for the cause of freethought, persuaded me that he was not a freethinker, by reason of his fixed hates of certain peoples and vituperative denigration of parties and policies with which he disagreed, instead of scrupulous consideration of all their aspects. He appeared to have decided against them with the inflexible certitude of the faith-ridden religionist, and to be quite unable to gauge them with the logic he applied to systems of thought of which he approved. Any German, to him, was thoroughly bad, and would emulate with gusto the Belsen atrocities; Russians were little better, having murdered their royal family; the Chinese, except the Formosans, were hardly more than savages, blacks fit only to serve, trade-unionists were traitorous agitators.

Many logical objections to such wholesale condemnations would occur to those who think freely. It needs no outstanding intellect to realise that one should bear in mind, as far as possible, every factor relevant to a subject on which one forms an opinion. By so doing, one goes far towards ensuring just judgment. I can't imagine how any-

one worthy of the name of freethinker can lose sight of this.

Of course, a very large proportion of those who are outside the sceptical category show little independence of thought, save in the small matters of everyday life. The replies of some persons to a street interviewer's question: "What do you think of Sir Winston Churchill?", shortly after that grand old statesman's death, instanced this, and prompted me to write a letter (which remained unpublished) to certain newspapers, rebutting the expressed belief of those TV "extras" that, but for Churchill, they wouldn't have been alive. I pointed out the senselessness of that belief, on the grounds (1) that it assumed the wholesale assassination of Britishers, had Hitler triumphed—a belief which neither Sir Winston nor any other statesman had voiced, as they surely would have, had they held it, and (2) because it implied that, under the leadership of any of the statesman who stood with Churchill against the Nazi aggressor, the spirit on which we British pride ourselves would have wilted.

That Churchill's brave words inspired our people is undoubtedly true. That the words of no other leader could have similarly inspired them, is not. But words, however eloquent, do not win wars, as shown when the Germans swept through the French, in spite of Weygand's "They shall not pass!", and, for all my admiration of Churchill's part in our victory, I could not, as a freethinker, subscribe to the bald claim that without his leadership we would not have survived.

Likewise, such claims as that all Germans are Belsen-minded, outrage reason. That Russians are potential assassins because their predecessors of fifty years ago killed their royal family, is equally absurd, abhorrent as is that deed. Have not royal heads been lopped off in England, and much blue blood spilled by France's dreadful guillotine? We do not regard ourselves or the French as bloodthirsty wretches because of the atrocious deeds of long-dead forefathers. It was my atheist friend's unwillingness or inability to consider the objects and subjects of his antipathy from any amelioratory angle, that prompted this article. The stark fact impressed itself upon me that it was possible for persons to regard themselves as freethinkers for most of a lifetime and work zealously for the "Best of Causes", but be merely sceptics.

Surely the basic freethought principle is readiness to review, at all times, the most emphatic of conclusions. However confident a freethinker may be that nothing can shake his views, he is false to his label the moment he sub-

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# Atheism

By CHAPMAN COHEN

AN ATHEIST is one who does not believe in God. I accept that definition on the condition that we take "god" as meaning some-thing, and not a word that may mean anything, and finishes up by meaning no-thing. And a good reason for insisting that "god" shall stand for a definite something is that the only opposite to some-thing is no-thing, and every belief must have something on which to rest, even though it may be nothing more or better than a delusion. In the era of human development that gave rise to the gods they were to their unconscious creators the most obvious, the most solid of facts. So when the Atheist says I do not believe in gods — which if it means anything involves the further statement, "I do not believe gods exist" — he is using "god" in the only sense in which the term is intelligible. Either we are talking of what the world has known as gods, or we are uttering mere gibberish. To be intelligible a thing must be definable; not completely definable, but definable so far as it is understood. If when we use the term "God" we do not mean what the world has always understood as God, what, in the name of all that is sensible, do we mean? The plain truth is that "God" is nowadays not an explanation, it is a narcotic.

It lies heavily in favour of Atheism that while Atheism can fully explain Theism, Theism fails altogether to explain Atheism. Every authoritative modern work on the history of man is agreed that the idea of God came into existence as a consequence of the personification of natural forces. Whatever may be the divergencies among theories dealing with the evolution of the God-idea, there is general and complete agreement on this. The religious theory is that God made man in his own image. The substance of all scientific theorising is that gods are made in the image of man. Even those who refrain from calling themselves Atheists, or even Agnostics, and who resort to the device of placing a mathematical formula before the world as a substitute for "God", unconsciously bear testimony to the same end. Let anyone try to think of praying on any unthinkable subject or purpose to a mathematical formula and he will realise at once the absurdity of professing belief in a God such as that which current Theism gives us. The savage was wrong in his conclusions, but he was not so completely absurd as to substitute for the god who did something, who listened to his prayers, who granted favours or inflicted punishment, a mere symbol, a something without form or feature. The savage felt himself surrounded by gods, and had everything to gain by pleasing them. The modern man finds himself part of a society where a workable acquaintance with science is possible to all. He has not discovered gods, he has inherited them. They form no necessary part of his working world. Their persistence is as significant to the scientific student as is the presence of rudimentary ear muscles or the remains of a second stomach in man.

Shelley was expelled from Oxford University for publishing a pamphlet bearing the title *The Necessity of Atheism*. There was genius in the title, but there was also in it the summary of a lengthy process, the general nature of which is now well understood. We have to think of man developing in a world of which he knows little and understands less. In more than one way, through the misunderstanding of internal states and the misreading of the nature of external events, man pictures a world that

is full of mysterious "spiritual" forces with his own well-being completely dependent upon his gaining their favour and goodwill. Picture man, then, as Miss Florence Kingsley describes him in her experience of the primitive West African:—

Everything happens by the action of spirits. The thing he does is done by the spirit within acting on his body, the matter with which that spirit is associated. Everything that is done by other things is done by their spirits . . . The native will point out to you a lightning stricken tree and tell you its spirit has been killed. He will tell you when an earthen cooking pot is broken it has lost its spirit. If his weapon failed him it is because he has made its spirit sick by means of other spirits of the same class. In every action of life he lives with a great spirit world around him.

It is from this crude material that the gods are formed; in this kind of environment they are born. The history of the gods begins in a world in which the "supernatural" is all-powerful, with man cowering before the creatures of his own imagination. It is a history of a transition from a world in which the gods are everywhere and do everything to one in which the gods are being rapidly evaporated into nothing. The radical difference here, the nature of a revolution before which political and social revolutions are mere incidents in the life of humanity, is that man begins by interpreting the world in terms of his own fears and feelings. He ends by explaining himself in terms of environmental forces, material biological and mental. It is human weakness and ignorance that gives the gods birth, it is inherited superstition that causes them to persist throughout the ages, becoming weaker and weaker as man's intelligence moves from discovery to discovery, from fear to understanding, until in the language of Heine, science brings "the last sacrament to a dying god".

There is, it must be noted, no growth in the idea of God. There is only progressive deterioration. The gods grow fewer as the human mind approaches maturity. Let us also note another significant feature. The majority of men and women do not reason themselves out of Theism. Mostly they outgrow it. The gods die from the sheer pressure of human experience. The logic of fact ultimately overthrows the logic of theory. It was environmental forces that brought the gods into existence. It is environmental forces that deals them the death blow.

I repeat here what I have said elsewhere. From the age of fetichism the history of the idea of God has been a history of continuous modifications and rejections. Scarce an invention that has not slain a god, scarce a discovery that has not marked the grave of a discarded deity. Criticism reduced the number of the gods; knowledge limited their power. A refinement of feeling and a deepening of understanding killed doctrine after doctrine upon which the rule of the gods rested. Auguste Comte was right when he called fetichism the creative age of theology. It was, for once the gods are created they are full-born. They have no childhood, youth, maturity or old age. They are either here or they are not; the difference of character ascribed them are mere reflections of human development. The gods come and go, and no one regrets their passing save those who have not yet outgrown them. They leave behind them not a trace of any single good they have conferred upon humanity. Man endowed the gods with his own vices, but also with his own virtues, and as he grew ashamed of the faults in his own character

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## This Believing World

CHRISTIANS WERE divided in their reaction to the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement on Rhodesia. Many of them objected to the idea of using force against our white brethren in Rhodesia if not against Africans. But he was stoutly supported by a Roman Catholic (*Daily Mail*, 30/10/65) who expressed, on behalf of Catholics of "every political persuasion and none," unstinted admiration for the Archbishop's "courage and clear vision." Jesus the "Prince of Peace" proves noticeably inadequate in such crises as the Rhodesian.

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THE *Daily Sketch* (1/11/65) faced what it called the "brutal facts" on mixed marriages. These are not marriages of people of different colour or race, they are marriages of different religions. And it is a "brutal fact that marriages between people of different religions are often unhappy. In the past, religious wars were easily the most bestial of all wars. This should give a pointer to people of different religions who want to marry.

★

THE DEATH of Jesus still forms the subject of innumerable theological works, and appears to retain its popularity. Two books on it are reviewed by *The Observer* (31/10/65)—*Why Was He Killed?* by Guy Schofield, and *The Passover Plot* by Hugh J. Schonfield. Both are "speculative," being based, as they must be, on the four Gospels. Hundreds of more or less similar speculations have been published, everything being based on "Holy Writ"; but it is quite intriguing to see how few of the "speculations" deal with the solemn statements of Irenaeus who, writing in the year 180 AD, declared that Jesus died *not* as the Gospels say, but as "an old man."

★

IF JESUS was an old man when he died, then the accounts in the Gospels must be false. In any case, the reviewer, Dr. James Parkes, a convinced Christian, is not convinced by either Mr. Schofield or Dr. Schonfield. Of the latter, he says, "The author fails to convince because his Jesus is doubly un-Jewish, first in a slavish and mechanical attitude to the Scriptures, secondly on an unscrupulous manipulation of men and women which neither Law nor Prophet would approve." We like the words "unscrupulous manipulation."

★

AN ARTICLE on "the world of spirits" by Hilda Martin in the *Lewisham Journal* (1/10/65) gives us the usual picture of a "spirit guide"—that is an American Indian, complete with feathers, guaranteed as genuine by the inevitable old lady of 78, a Mrs. Johnson. It is just as authentic as are the numerous other portraits of Indian spirit guides who cluster our Spiritualistic journals. Mrs. Johnson found she was "psychic" at the age of ten; seeing spirits and hearing them speak "clair-audently."

★

WE SUSPECT that lots and lots of people will be "converted" by this kind of twaddle, which has an irresistible attraction for some country newspapers and feminine writers. But why should we be surprised? The various sects of Christianity have produced chapels, churches, and worshippers galore on the basis of similar twaddle. Not to mention the peculiar beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Christian Scientists.

## ARE WE REALLY FREETHINKERS?

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ordinates reason to rhetoric. As an atheist, I have no fear that reason would fail to dispose of any argument against my conviction that there is no God. As a free-thinker, I must not let that conviction ossify into prejudice, and must be ever willing to accord protagonists of God the amplest facilities to upset it. That is, of course the attitude of any atheist worthy of the name.

To deserve the title of freethinker, it is incumbent on atheists, rationalists, humanists, to preserve a similar attitude in the secular field, abhor instinctive and political biases, die-hard rages and *a priori* condemnations, and weigh every line of thought in honest effort to justify the problems and policies of their fellow men.

## ATHEISM

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the change was reflected in the bettering of the character of his gods. Today the gods do nothing. They are nothing.

Shelley's phrase, "the necessity of atheism", is fully justified by a survey of human history. It is more than justified for history leads to a generalisation of greater authority and stronger emphasis. The revision of the statement should read "the inevitability of atheism". Atheism is an explicit statement in words of what has always been implicit in practice. Atheism admits the fictional reality of the gods as it admits the fictional reality of good and evil spirits, of witches, fairies and demons. It takes the god-idea, traces its history, describes its origin, and registers its decay and death. Atheism is thus the final stage of a lengthy historic process. Atheism is more than necessary, it is inevitable.

## WITHOUT COMMENT

THE VATICAN Council approved by 2,031 votes to 193 the first part of the amended document on "religious liberty." This part stresses that all men must recognise the Roman Catholic Church as the true church.—*Daily Telegraph* (27/10/65).

## OBSOLETE LEGISLATION

The police superintendents of this country were quite right to point out the nuisance and dangers of obsolete legislation.

They have quite enough to do enforcing laws which everyone accepts as socially necessary without the problem of deciding whether or not to prosecute infringement of statutes inspired by another era. Scientific knowledge and social conditions change over the years, and with them codes of acceptable conduct. Unfortunately the Statute Book does not always keep up with these changes.

Much social legislation still in force dates from a time when people were fined for not going to church and believed in witchcraft and demon possession. Other laws arose in the sanctimonious atmosphere of Victorian narrowness. Many of these statutes have never been repealed. So we have legislation relating to blasphemy, Sunday observance, male homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia and divorce. Quite modern legislation relating to adoption, education, family planning and censorship is based on ancient assumptions, for example, that everyone is or ought to be religious and concerned to uphold religion and the social teaching of the Churches.

Many of these laws are unenforced because they are unenforceable. Others are so out of tune with the spirit of our times that we do not expect our police to prosecute under them, though we are too cowardly or hypocritical to have them repealed. And so they go on, in force but ignored, bringing the whole body of law into disrepute.

Let Parliament help the police by throwing out all laws not worth their keep.

DAVID TRIBE,  
President, National Secular Society.

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Lecture Notices, Etc.

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

### OUTDOOR

London Branches—Marble Arch and North London: (Marble Arch). Sundays, from 4 p.m.: MESSRS. L. EBURY and C. E. WOOD.

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

Manchester Branch NSS (Platt Fields), Sunday, 3 p.m.: MESSRS. CLARE, MILLS and WOOD. (Car Park, Victoria Street), 8 p.m.:

MESSRS. COLLINS, WOODCOCK, and others.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 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

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, November 21st, 6.30 p.m.: F. A. RIDLEY, Free-thought in 1965."

Manchester Branch NSS (The Wheatsheaf Hotel, High Street), Sunday, 21st November, 7.30 p.m.: F. J. CORINA, "God and the Politicians."

Marble Arch Branch NSS (Carpenters' Arms, Seymour Place, London, W.1), Sunday, 21st November, 7.30 p.m.: Simon Ellis, "Modernising Britain."

Northamptonshire Humanist Group (Carnegie Hall, Abingdon Street), Friday, 26th November, 7.45 p.m. Forum: "Religion in the school." Speakers, DAVID COLLIS, H. W. JOHNSON, JENNIFER ROUTLEDGE, REV. PETER STUBBS, DEREK WRIGHT.

Written questions and enquiries to John Phillips, 5 Albion Place, Northampton. Tel. 35780.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, W.1), Sunday, 21st November, 11 a.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Secular Progress." Tuesday, 23rd November, 7.30 p.m.: M. HURWITT, "Police Behaviour."

## Notes and News

AFTER HIS defeat in the New York mayoral election by Republican John Vliet Lindsay, the Democratic candidate Abraham Beame was asked to name the villain of the piece and replied, "William Buckley." This, as Alistair Cooke remarked in the *Guardian* (4/11/65) confirmed a pre-election survey which showed that for every Republican vote Lindsay would lose to the Conservative Buckley, Beame would lose two Democrats. Furthermore, Mr. Beame's losses would be "very noticeably Irish and Italian Catholics." He was losing them, Mr. Cooke added, "not so much to the Catholic Buckley as to the reactionary Buckley."

MR. COOKE saw the big swing of Democratic votes to Conservative as "a small symptom of a big ailment" that is spreading from the American West and through the Middle West: the growing power of the John Birch Society and other Rightist groups on school boards, city medical departments, parent-teacher associations, public libraries, and municipal government in general.

IN A speech before the local council of the American Jewish Congress in June, John V. Lindsay questioned New

York's new law permitting the state to provide textbooks for parochial schools. It went, he thought, over the boundary of church-state separation. And he urged that a court test case be brought. Msgr. Farricker replied that the new textbook law was a good one, but "only a drop in the bucket" in aid to parochial schools (*Church and State*, October 1965). And John L. Sullivan, past president of the Holy Name Society of a New York Catholic Church, said that "it was not the duty of a mayoral candidate . . . to question state law."

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THE REACTION of an American public (state) school teacher, who asked that her name should not be used, was different. She was delighted at Mr. Lindsay's stand. If parents wish, she said, "they have every right to send their offspring to private or parochial schools. But it is unfair to ask the taxpayer to subsidise them to any degree."

★

HERE IN England, the *Catholic Herald* (29/10/65) welcomed the appointment of Dr. Horace King as Speaker to the House of Commons. A Methodist, he had always shown a marked sympathy for denominational schools" and his "understanding of the problems facing Catholic education is well known." Mr. Robert Mellish, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, and a Roman Catholic, said that Dr. King had always been "a good friend to the cause of Catholic schools." Dr. King had said that he did not want to be involved in any arguments as to whether there should be denominational schools or not. "But since the 1944 Education Act had recognised the principle of denominational schools in the country's educational system, they were a fact and should be paid for by the state." It is true, of course, that the 1944 Act perpetuated the dual system. But state recognition of denominational schools need not entail state support.

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"AM I an Irishwoman?" asks Brigid Brophy in the *New Statesman* (5/11/65). By nativity, schooling and economics she was English; she went quite often to Dublin, but only because it was a beautiful city. And yet the geography and history of Ireland holds her imagination "in a melancholy magic spell." But this is not because Miss Brophy is Irish, if she is; it is because the history of Ireland is "unbearably sad." The Irish-English, "touched with two nationalities but belonging to none," should know, said Miss Brophy, "that the worst thing an oppressor imposes, when it holds down a nation, is nationalism; the ultimate wickedness committed by England was to drive Ireland into a nationalistic act of cutting off its nose to spite its face. . . . Like wise, they, if anyone, should know the bitter folly of religious intolerance." In Ireland there were three permissible answers to the question, "What is your religion?"—Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. Miss Brophy who has to answer "None" is, in Ireland, "neither a foreigner nor an Irishwoman, but an invisible woman."

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FATHER B. S. CRITTENDEN, of Sydney University has (we learn from the *Catholic Herald*, 29/10/65), urged the abandonment of the Catholic school system in Australia and recommended that Catholic children should attend the state schools "with the rest of society." The ecumenical movement, Father Crittenden said, had meant a growing appreciation for other Christians, non-Christians and Atheists.

# Sungods and Messiahs

By GEORGE R. GOODMAN

IN ANSWER to Mr. Cutner's queries on September 24th, 1965, I should like to state that my article "Easter" on May 7th, 1965, was, originally, not written for THE FREETHINKER, but for that perpetual propagator of orthodoxy's fables and deception, our reactionary BBC, upholder of the established Church and her reason-insulting dogmatism. I had left out references to sources, as they would have made the article too long and cumbersome for a magazine like *The Listener*; all the same, my MSS were returned.

But I have no hesitation in stating that my sources were, in the main, the following books:—

Gerald Massey's, *Ancient Egypt, The Light of the World; The Natural Genesis*; and *Book of the Beginnings*; and the American author Dr. Alvin Boyd Kuhn's *The Lost Light; Who is this King of Glory?* and *Shadow of the Third Century*.

The last three books are indispensable to serious investigators and as they are most efficiently indexed and all sources clearly stated, any name or happening in connection with the Church's innumerable frauds and forgeries, can be found within seconds. And the books are available in most libraries in Britain and America.

To start with, the feast which in English-speaking countries is called Easter (German *Ostern*), cannot—as Mr. Cutner rightly points out—claim to be either Egyptian, Jewish or Christian. Nor could the Saxons with the goddess Eastre or Eostra claim originality. The height of their pagan cult was 700 to 1,000 years prior to the Saxon invasion of Britain and, by the time they invaded, their old cult had already undergone great modifications, owing to their contacts with Rome and Gaul.

In olden times, the Spring Equinox was always most joyously celebrated wherever there were human beings, immaterial of their beliefs or unbeliefs. It was only wretched Roman Catholicism, with its witless creeds and grisly passion-week, that turned the Friday before Easter into a melancholic monstrosity. Ignoring the Church's wet blanket, what could be more welcome than the sunlight's annual return, awakening nature and putting new life into plants, insects, fishes, birds, small and large mammals—not forgetting the human family.

All we are, all we hold and enjoy, all we possess in the way of a healthy body and mind, we owe to the sun. The ancients realised this and adored the sun. We still do, and take our holidays in spots where we think there will be plenty of sunshine, so that we can soak up the health promoting rays into our system.

The dogma manufacturers, in order to produce a historical Jesus, not only turned a solar deity into a Christ, but also turned everything else upside down. The death and burial of the sungod was always at the September equinox, when the sun was "dying". This event was, quite naturally, followed by 40 days of lamentations (Lent), ending on October 31st, the date of our Halloween. This is the true Lent, not where the Church placed it, at the wrong side of the year. It goes right against the laws of nature and does not fit in with the natural symbolism of a solar year, to lament and fast—40 days in the Spring when all nature is bursting to release its accumulated energies.

Halloween was *originally* a feast when masks of animal heads were worn, accompanied by a lot of horseplay, buffoonery and weird capers. Why? Because, according to

the mythos, the gods hid themselves during the winter months in animal bodies and the deities, not being used to being in animal bodies, behaved strangely and ungainly. But when the Church arbitrarily and quite unreasonably turned November 1st into a morbid "All Soul's Day", the masquerading in animal masks was transferred to Midsummer-night (compare Shakespeare), where it is really quite unseasonable.

The ten days of Penitence in the Jewish Calendar, culminating in the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) are, even now, a yearly reminder of the ancient custom of fasting, confession of sins and lamentations for the dying sungod, though the latter is not mentioned nowadays.

The sad days were, with the ancients, always in the autumn, when the light of the solar god was waning. To place the "death" amidst nature's happy rejuvenescence, is a monstrous anachronism and an ineptitude such as only dogmatic churchmen could have enacted. Why did they do it? They could hardly ask their dupes to wait six months for the "resurrection." Yet to place the death of an invented "Saviour and redeemer" at a period of year when all nature shouts joy and re-awakening from Winter's sleep, is a foul blasphemy against the cycle of life.

The address to the deity by the early Christians was up to the fifth or sixth century, "Our Lord, the Sun!". After that it was altered to "Our Lord, the God!". The Messiahs were all incarnations of the sun (see Gerald Massey's and Dr. Kuhn's books) and Easter is always on the 14th Nisan (Jewish month) or the first Sunday (Christian date) after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox. The date itself is a clear indication that we are dealing with sun mythology (or worship) and not with any historical event! That is also the reason why the stories of all sun-heroes, messiahs, founders of great religions—not forgetting the sixteen crucified saviours—are the same all over the world.

The Christ-story in the gospels was merely a rescript of many antecedent allegorical biographies of Pagan cult-gods such as Cybele, (Thrygia and Asia Minor) identical with Rheia (in Greek mythology), Atys of Phrygia, Janus (Italy), Prometheus (Greece) who was chained to a rock; and particularly Osiris, Isis and Horus (Iusa) of Egypt which were taken over lock, stock and barrel.

The gospel writers borrowed myths from Pagan sources, so much so that when missionaries, in later centuries, came to India, they were completely baffled and nonplussed. They could not understand how the Indians had already similar stories of their own about Krishna Jesus who had lived 550 BC! Likewise, on arrival in Mexico, the Christian missionaries were amazed to find a cult of the cross and many other apparently "Christian" usages. The natives of Mexico had already, prior to the advent of Europeans, a crucified god whose attractive name was Quetzalcoatl.

In the *Mahabharata*, the great epic poem of ancient India, are two characters Arjuna and Krishna, whose names are not very far in sound and spelling from John and Christ! And in the Tibetan language, there is also Argiun (Ar-John), who was the assistant and associate of Krishna. Martin Luther called John the Baptist Johannes der Wiedertauffer (the again baptiser). In the Chaldean Genesis there is a Ioannes (Joannes), the fish-avator of Vishnu, not so very far removed from the biblical Jonah and Luther's Johannes.

Augustine calls Jesus a fish—Greek *Ichthys*—and says

"it is the mystical name of Christ, because he descended alive into the depths of this mortal life, as into the abyss of waters". The Early Christians had a fish on their door-posts, drew a fish in the sand as a Lodge sign, marked their urns with fishes (not a cross, which does not appear before the sixth to seventh century), their priests had a fish-mouth as a headgear (they still have, but it is now called "mitre"! ) and the "door of life" at the western end of a church is in the shape of a fish-mouth.

Moreover, a fish-bladder (*Vesica piscis*) was and still is the symbol of Christ, but is now called *Aureola*, an oval-shaped bladder, in which the entire upright figure of the Christ can be seen, (see any stained glass-window) complete with his Egyptian sun-disc, the mark of his being the sun-god. No wonder, the Early Christians were called Pisciculi, meaning "Little Fishes". Their Christ was the big fish meaning (Ichthys) and the disciples Fishermen.

It would be erroneous to point to the year 2000 BC and assert that that was the year when the Egyptian "Messiah" did the identical things that the Gospel Jesus performed or was alleged to suffer. The Egyptians linked their religion to the sun, (i.e. a sun-god with numerous underlings), the seasonal happenings, including the Nile inundations (which were most important to them) and to the star-clusters through which the sun travelled; in other words, the cycle of the zodiac. Apart from that, they had a whole pantheon of gods in the underworld, who attended to the souls of the departed, when they arrived there.

Whereas the Christian passion drama was alleged to have happened only once and to a historical person (completely invented), the old Egyptians had the sagacity to say, without any equivocations, that their passion drama was allegorical and was, therefore, performed every year at the right season. That the Egyptians had also a very extended animal-cult which underwent great changes in the course of many centuries (covering 3,200 years) is, for the purpose of our investigations, of minor importance, because we are, in the main, interested in their Trinity, Osiris, Isis and Horus.

Even the latter underwent some changes which is quite natural, because nothing remains static on this Earth, whether in the domain of science, politics or religion.

(To be concluded)

## Biblical Sophistry

By F. H. AMPHLETT MICKLEWRIGHT

READERS of Anglo-Catholic literature will know well the name of Fr. Gabriel Hebert of the Society of the Sacred Mission, Kelham. Within the confines of his theology, he is well read and scholarly and an able contributor to the theological debate in several fields. His present paperback, *The Old Testament from Within* (Oxford University Press, (Oxford Paperbacks, No. 100, Oxford University Press, 7s. 6d.), is a reprint of a book issued some years ago on the Old Testament. Taking the various sections, the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, he seeks to draw out of them the religious message which they enshrine. Thus, the Old Testament is traced out from the Creation by God to fulfilment of the final Old Testament message in the coming of Christ. As Fr. Hebert admits, he does not discuss critical questions nor does he attempt to write an historical introduction. His purpose is to seek out the religious revelation which completes the whole picture.

It would be easy to say that this is not the point of view of a secular humanism and to leave the matter there. But some comment is permissible. Fr. Hebert is reading back his own developed theology into the ancient Hebrew

literature and seeking to find its fulfilment. At the very outset, there would not be a unanimous agreement about the message which he finds there. For example, a Jewish commentator would agree with some of his assertions about monotheism but would deny its fulfilment in the Gospels. Fr. Hebert's method is none other than the historic Christian method from the Patristic period onwards, and will only appeal to somebody who is already committed to the theology. Again, it does not differ from the Islamic approach to the Koran. The seeking out of some esoteric message lying behind the sacred literature is not a method unique to Patristic Christianity. In any case, it is highly subjective and lacking in the evidential tests which the critical or historical scholar would demand the right to apply.

But it also raises the question of inspiration and revelation. The traditional Christian Church argued in this way simply because it had a propositional theory of revelation in and through the Bible, not unlike the outlook of fundamentalism pure and simple. But the impact of modern critical scholarship has shattered this fundamentalism. Treated evidentially, there is not a scrap of evidence that the collection known as the Old Testament is other than ancient Hebrew literature. The development of religious belief in ancient Israel can be tracked down through it in exactly the same way as the development of Christian belief could be tracked down through the corpus of and pre- and post-Reformation Christian literature generally.

This does not assert that the belief is true as such, or that a valid esoteric meaning can be traced in the pages. The seeking out of typological interpretations has been popular in recent years in certain circles concerned with biblical study. I once heard it described irreverently but pointedly by a learned liberal Protestant as the solving of a sort of spiritual crossword puzzle. It is a delusion merely because it is not securely grounded in a critical appraisal of the documents themselves. For example, it merely ignores the extent to which the documents are literary forms of Hebrew legend and mythology, or the extent to which modern anthropological or folklore studies have related this particular folklore to that of other cultures. By separating out the Bible from every other form of ancient literature or religious writing and then arguing upon the details, it can demonstrate anything that it wishes to do. But there is a clear fallacy in the whole approach.

The freethinker who spends an evening with Fr. Hebert's book will not have wasted his time. He will have been introduced into the biblical sophistry of the traditional Christian Church, a sophistry which went far towards creating the doctrinal culture upon which the Church erected its claims over human civilisation, and he will have encountered something standing in a diametrically opposed position to humanism so far as its estimate of man be concerned. Thinking historically, it is of far deeper moment than the reduced theology of, for example, the Bishop of Woolwich. In some ways, it is akin to modern Roman Catholic biblical writing. But he will also have encountered something which likewise stands in diametrically opposed position in its whole interpretation of the natural order to that which has arisen out of the liberal humanistic culture from the Renaissance onwards. Fr. Hebert is at one with the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, and the vision of Langland is one which the modern world has set aside.

### PILL BEFORE POPE

Students at Liverpool University Union voted last night to send a telegram to the Pope telling him that in a debate earlier, the motion: "This House prefers the Pill to the Pope," had been carried by 155 votes to 60.—*The Guardian* (3/11/65).

## The Marxian View of Religion

WE LIVE in a capitalist world; a system of society based on the private or state ownership of the means and forces of wealth production, the exploitation of man by man and the class struggle. The Christian religion and the brotherhood of man were never practical possibilities in such a social order of society. The Marxist believes that world socialism will overcome the contradictions of capitalism, the self-estrangement of man divided against himself in political and economic alienation. "Only then," said Engels, "will the last alien power which is now reflected in religion vanish. And with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that there will be nothing left to reflect."

Man made religion. In the course of evolution the first men reached a stage of primitive thought; the elements of nature confronted them as alien forces in the struggle for existence. With the development of self-consciousness early man saw the forces of nature as supernatural powers endowed with a life of their own, with spirits and gods. In his awe and fear primitive man found a need to appease the god of thunder in his wrath and influence the spirits of the forest and the mountain.

With the emergence of a religious consciousness man duplicates himself in a world of religious fantasy wherein his human essence is reflected in gods of his own creation. Man becomes estranged with himself in a religious ideology of self-alienation. Man's own powers appear as self-subsistent forces or entities of which he becomes a victim. Religion is primitive man's philosophy; to curry favour with the supernatural powers that control the weather and fertility of crops and to ward off natural disaster he formulates magic rites, incantations and sacrifices.

The formulation of magico-religious rituals produces priestcraft and the first priest appears with his mumbo-jumbo and magic hand passes.

In his further struggle through human labour in producing the means of life man gains a true knowledge of the laws of nature and ejects the spirits and gods of the natural elements and passes from the "dark kingdom of physical necessity into a realm of freedom.

But the productive action of man on nature and continued improvement in the means of living, common property (primitive communism) gives way to private property. Man returns to a new form of alienation or estrangement with himself. Man again becomes a victim of his own creation in the kingdom of economic necessity — the exploitation of man by man.

The religious alienation does not vanish but continues in a new form. For with the progress in the material basis of society there is reflected in the religious sphere the last figment of man's religious alienation. This is the development of monotheism, the idea of the one almighty god, ruler over the whole universe. This historical period brings us down to the present day. Religious alienation only occurs in the sphere of consciousness, in the inner life of man, but economic alienation is that of real life.

World socialism, while emancipating mankind from the economic alienation in the material basis of society simultaneously dispels the religious illusions reflected in the ideological superstructure of society. As Marx said: "Socialism as a complete naturalism is humanism, and as a complete humanism is naturalism. It is the definite resolution of the antagonism between man and Nature, and between man and man. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution."

R. STUART MONTAGUE

## CORRESPONDENCE

### PIUS XII

Father G. M. Paris, O.P., of Malta, mentioned Miss Phyllis K. Graham's "calumnies" against the Pope.

Will he deny that Pius XII not only failed to condemn, but supported with his blessing the Italian invasion of Abyssinia?—in which, by the way, people were lethally sprayed with poison gas?

S. G. KNOTT.

### AGNOSTICISM

I'd like to comment on Chapman Cohen's article in THE FREETHINKER of October 15th on "Agnosticism." As an Agnostic myself, I want to say at once, that Mr. Cohen's wordy and exhausting denunciation of our creed, left me rather cold, but more than ever convinced that I am right when I say that a man is as foolish to say he *knows* there is no God, as the man who says he *knows* there is! This, the Christian and the Atheist have in common, it seems, together with the fact that both seem to be forever arguing their respective cases, whereas the Agnostic has no case to need to answer.

The Atheist and the Christian do not tell the truth, when they say they *know* there is no God, or there is, respectively, whereas the Agnostic speaks the simple truth that he does not know. He is not taking any middle courses, or squatting on any fences, nor evincing any fears at "abandoning all his gods," as someone, an Atheist, put it. I, at any rate, have never said, "I neither affirm nor deny the existence of God"—I merely follow the use of the word in conversation with "if there be a God"—Mr. Cohen uses the words "gods" (the ancient variety) and "God" (the present day one) as though they all were tangible entities. For example, "There are a multitude of gods in the world—gods are contemptibly common." And "the only helpful definition of God was that God began as a company of spirits, *which definition I accept!*"

The Agnostic would say (on mentioning *any* of these "gods" or "God")—"if these existed or exist," to demonstrate that he has no knowledge of such entities, but is open to conviction, whereas Mr. Cohen, with his next breath, denies even the possibility of such existence! And what does Mr. Cohen mean by "the terrible thing, Atheism?" Quoting this author again, "The Agnostic warmly declares he knows nothing about God." On this, Mr. Cohen, we are agreed! But do not follow this, please, by putting words into the Agnostic's mouth to better your argument—"What he says is (by implication) neither does anyone else," thus—when he justifies this he justifies the position taken up by the Atheist. This, to me, is not so. The Atheist, like the Christian, is dogmatic—the Agnostic is prepared to continue his search for the Truth, and knowledge; but, at present, must say in all humility, "I do not *know*." Chapman Cohen was obviously much more learned than I, but all that I have said, I can claim as original thinking—though I may be mistaken and find, later, that all this has been said before.

A word on the seemingly rather unkind attack on Mrs. Kit Mout in a recent letter in THE FREETHINKER. I, and many others, have an unbounded admiration for the writings and the Humanist work of this lady, and wish her every success in her splendid endeavours. She has been a friend to my son, my wife, and to me.

JOHN SHEPHARD.

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