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RELIGIOUS SECT CONTROLLED GIRL'S MIND, SAYS CORONER

It has been revealed that a 14-year-old girl is being escorted to and from school by her parents to protect her from being brain-washed by members of the Guru Maharaj Ji's Divine Light Mission. The Home Secretary is investigating the case. Mr Jenkins has also been asked to determine how much influence the Mission had on Susan MacDonald, aged 20, who jumped to her death from the eighth floor of a Manchester block of flats. The Manchester County Coroner said that he would not comment on the religious validity of the DLM, or on its business methods. "But", he added, "it is quite clear that the Divine Light Mission and the guru had taken complete control of this girl's mind".

Relatives and friends of the dead girl told how she had become obsessed by the guru's teachings after a visit to India in 1973. After returning to this country she went to live at their South London commune. Miss MacDonald worked 16 hours a day in order to save £150 so that she could attend a DLM peace festival in the United States. But she was told there were no seats available and the Mission, which is reported to have made a profit of nearly £25,000 on charter flights to the festival, would not refund her money.

The Divine Light Mission started operating in Britain about five years ago and claims to have 6,000 followers in this country. Its Messiah, Guru Maharaj Ji, is a corpulent Indian youth of indeterminate age who waddles from Rolls Royce car to jet plane, and lives in luxurious "divine residences" provided by the dim-witted gulls who hand over their possessions to the sect.

It has been officially claimed that the youthful guru has an international following of six million devotees, but the method of calculating this figure is even more obscure than the lad's message for mankind. He became "the Lord Incarnate" after the death of his father (also a religious leader) in 1966. Although Guru Maharaj Ji is the public head of the family business it is widely believed

that his mother is the real power behind his flower-decked throne. She is referred to as the Holy Mother and can dish out the mystical mumbo-jumbo with the best of them. But mum is also a shrewd financial operator, and she nominated the trustees when the DLM was granted charity status. Her two other sons are also prominent in the DLM hierarchy.

Divine Loot

Since becoming established in Britain the Divine Light Mission has accumulated considerable assets. It bought a large house in Highgate where the guru rests his divine head when on rare visits to London. The Palace of Peace, a converted cinema in South London, was acquired at a cost of £65,000. It owns freehold properties in Edinburgh, Exeter and Rugby. Profitable enterprises include Tender Loving Care Products and Mother Nature Products. But it is the Divine Jumble Sales that really bring in the loot. Many people may have contributed unwanted goods to be sold without realising that they are financing a religious racket. (This highly questionable method of raising money was exposed by the National Secular Society some time ago.) It is not surprising that the latest figures show the Mission's income to be £164,000 over a period of six months. The Charity Commissioners have also helped Guru Maharaj Ji to grow fat (literally) on public gullibility.

The Divine Light Mission, like most other dubious religious imports, demands total obedience and submission from its followers. When seeking "Divine Knowledge" the novice is required to concentrate for long periods on a piece of music and chant the praises of the guru. Such repetition, particularly if the newcomer is already unstable, can produce an emotional crisis. It is not surprising that many who have become involved with the DLM have been reduced to unthinking zombies.

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The Humanism of Julian Huxley

HECTOR HAWTON

Sir Julian Huxley, who died recently at the age of 87, was the grandson of Thomas Huxley, Darwin's renowned defender. He had a distinguished career as a biologist, writer and broadcaster and held many important posts including the director generalship of UNESCO. Sir Julian was the first president of the British Humanist Association.

None of the tributes I read, with the exception of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*, referred to the late Sir Julian Huxley's passionate endeavour to formulate a religion which would be acceptable to modern secular man. Dr J. A. T. Robinson sought to do much the same for Christianity with no more encouraging response. "As a Humanist", said the *Sunday Times*, "Huxley helped to shape the thinking of a generation, even if his ideas about the relationship of evolutionary principles and religion never found much of a following". A curiously contradictory commentary.

Yet to speak of Julian Huxley without evolutionary humanism is like talking of *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. He made important contributions in his early period to biology, notably the problems of growth, but I doubt if he would have regarded this as the most significant part of his life's work. In his academic posts at Balliol, King's College, London, the Royal Institution and the Rice Institute, Texas, he showed himself to be a superb teacher. He was also a master of popularisation without vulgarisation. He worked with H. G. Wells and Wells' son, G. P. Wells on *The Science of Life* and won the Kalinga Prize for distinguished popular science writing.

His talent for explaining scientific theories in simple terms to the layman was brilliantly shown as a member of the famous BBC radio Brains Trust. His taste for travel and public life grew. In 1935 he became secretary of the Zoological Society. He was in charge of London Zoo until 1942 when he resigned following differences of opinion. After the war he was appointed the first Director General of UNESCO. This was very much after his heart as he had strong views on the need to spread scientific education and its combination with the humanities. He even hoped that UNESCO would adopt scientific humanism, but the opposition may well be imagined.

Many people have been puzzled by Huxley's use of the word "religion". Their difficulty is largely, but not wholly, semantic. The title of the book in which he first expounded his views in depth is *Religion Without Revelation*, a challenge both to

the orthodox believer and the unbeliever. He held that destructive criticism of established religion may have been necessary in the past but the time for negative activities is over. We need "a new idea system" without "the God-hypothesis", and this he tried to construct.

The foundation of the new, godless religion, was to be evolution: "Man is a product of nearly three billion years of evolution, in whose person the evolutionary process has at last become conscious of itself and its possibilities. Whether he likes it or not, he is responsible for the whole further evolution of our planet." Consequently man has transcended the purely biological stage. He is a bit of the universe conscious of itself and capable of planning a future that might otherwise be left to the play of chance. This psycho-social level operates by the mechanism of cultural tradition.

It is easy to see that this attempt to reformulate obsolete religious concepts in quasi-scientific terms has much in common with the speculations of Teilhard de Chardin. Huxley wrote an introduction to *Le Phenomene Humain*, which he described as "a remarkable work by a remarkable human being". For pronouncing a scientific benediction on the book, Huxley was rebuked by Sir Peter Medawar in the most savage review that ever appeared in *Mind*, which is the philosopher's trade journal. Medawar dismissed Teilhard's world-view as "philosophy fiction".

Practical Humanism

But it would be a mistake to think that Julian Huxley's evolutionary humanism is so abstract that it nowhere grapples with practical problems. On the contrary, Huxley suggests a very definite if controversial method for improving the quality of the human race. That method is "positive eugenics" or EID—eugenic insemination by deliberately preferred donors. This would be a practical possibility if stocks of genetically superior sperm are deep-frozen. Huxley declared: "The pioneers of EID, whether its publicists or its practitioners, will undoubtedly suffer all kinds of abusive prejudice—they will be accused of mortal sin, of theological impropriety, of immoral and unnatural practices. But they can take heart from what happened in the field of birth control, and can be confident that the national control of reproduction aimed at the prevention of human suffering and the promotion of human well-being and fulfilment will in the not too distant future come to be recognised as a moral imperative."

Julian Huxley's voice is now silent, but his message and vision will continue to inspire all who strive to build a more rational and humane world.

... to misquote Shakespeare, for all humanity celebrates this annual rebirth of nature. Down the avenues of time, from the childhood of the race, has come similar rites of fertility and fecundity, worship of the Universal Mother and of sacrificial Divine Kings. Jesus of Nazareth, who never lived on earth either as a man or god, and who did not die on a cross or a tree, is but one more in a long line of dying and resurrecting gods who have littered the path of mankind's long march to enlightenment.

The Easter festival, which is the focal point of all Christian belief and more important even than Christmas, is neither peculiar to, nor has much in common with, the foundations of Christianity. Of course, all this is well known and it is popularly supposed (even among atheists) that Easter is one of many pagan customs taken over by the early Church and adapted to its own purposes. Due in part to recent discoveries and objective scholarship, it has become increasingly evident that this basic worship of a dying-resurrecting deity is far more fundamental and universal. It has long been my view that the origins of Christianity are more to be found in the Hellenic-Judaic-Egyptian culture centred around Alexandria, with its vast library and colleges, than in the inward-looking temple teachings of Jerusalem.

One of the problems in considering Christianity as originally an heretical Jewish sect is its rapid advance throughout the Ancient World and particularly to the seat of political power at Rome. It appears as a highly organised institution complete with rules, legends, myths and a considerable literature almost overnight. This phenomenon could be explained by assuming that it was a deliberately "invented" theological exercise incorporating all the age-old ideas of the annual rebirth of plant and animal life each Spring. These concepts include sacrifice to that most ancient of deities, the ever-virgin yet ever-fecund Earth goddess in her various maternal forms. If the Jesus story was a contrived re-telling of the natural cycle, it might have been either seriously intended or even a satirical work introducing yet another "hero" god in the tradition of Attis, Osiris, Orpheus, Dionysus, Mithra, *et al.* This fiction could easily have been seized upon by a credulous populace, ever seeking a saviour or expecting a messiah, and rapidly turned into yet another religion. After all, there is a parallel almost in our own times; the rapid rise of Mormonism based on the mistaken belief of the semi-literate Joseph Smith that a work of fiction was a record of true events.

In this context the Easter story appears as a re-enactment of the ritual common to all these gods. Through the myths surrounding them runs a similar theme, part of the oldest and most universal beliefs of all—the awe and veneration given to the reproductive powers of man and nature, and the physical acts connected with these forces. Space is too limited to develop this theme adequately here, but let me outline a few salient features.

Ritual of the Gods

Orpheus perennially returns to the underworld where he has to spend several months each year (the germination period). Dionysus is born in a cave, and it is to a cave his worshippers go each year, to await his miraculous rebirth. In one of the earliest, though "non-official" Christian traditions, sometimes called the verbal or esoteric, Jesus is depicted as being born in a cave (a well-known euphemism for the womb) at Bethlehem—the House of Bread of the Earth Mother. According to this version he dies, not on the cross but on a tree, and can be identified with the Green Man, a figure common to the May Day (Spring) fertility rites. In the mythology of Egypt, Osiris (who, alone of Egyptian gods, is always depicted as a man, with none of the animal attributes usually given them), is ritually killed by his brother Set. The body is then hidden in a tree, floats down the Nile, is wrecked and broken into 13 pieces, symbolising the months of the lunar year. These parts of the body are hidden by Set throughout Egypt, and Osiris can only be restored to life when his sister-wife Isis has found the thirteenth part, the phallus. When this essential organ is added to the rest, the god is resurrected in the form of his son Horus, who reigns on earth, while Osiris "descends" into heaven (the underworld), and becomes king of the dead; all this after three days. In passing it is worth noting that Osiris is always portrayed in temple and tomb paintings dressed in green leaves, or growing out of a tree. Is this the origin of the Green Man, or Jack-in-the-Green? The evil Set originally had a pig totem and was the local god of a tribe of pig farmers who apparently at some time had revolted against the central government; hence his identification with evil. This may explain the Semitic proscription of pork as an item of food, long before rabbinical doctrines invented health reasons for the observance.

Judaism, like Christianity, derived much of its religion from ancient Egypt. The golden calf, against whose worship by apostate Jews Moses thundered, was the Egyptian fertility cow-goddess, Hathor. Passover, like Easter, was originally the spring festival of the mother goddess, long before Jehovah

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The hostility that existed between the Vatican and Moscow has influenced world affairs since 1917 and the Roman Catholic Church was a major protagonist in the anti-Communist crusades of the Cold War era. Now it seems that shrewder counsels may prevail and that an attempt will be made to co-exist with the Godless Communism that was anathema to Holy Mother Church only a decade ago. Will God himself be relegated to a back pew if his Church decides that compromise and realism are necessary in order to ensure its survival?

Towards the end of last year, an article appeared in *The Observer*, the subject of which was the controversy at present being waged with considerable vigour in the Vatican, over the present and future relationships between the Church of Rome and the Communist world, east of the so-called "Iron Curtain". This controversy is being conducted at top level in the Vatican hierarchy, with, apparently, the Vatican itself (represented by its foreign secretariat) advocating some kind of mutual compromise between the two great rival creeds; whereas the local men on the spot, the Cardinal Primate of Poland and the notorious Cardinal (ex-Archbishop) Mindzenty, take up a generally hostile attitude. Incidentally, both the Hungarian and the Polish Cardinals have known the inside of Communist goals in their respective lands, now re-baptised as "People's Democracies".

During the fairly lengthy period that has now elapsed since the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, the permanent relationship between Catholicism and Communism has generally been of a hostile character. As far back as 1848, the year that saw the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels, Pope Pius IX (1846-48) condemned the revolutionary concept of Communism, then rather vaguely understood in a comprehensive sense so as to include an entire collection of radical philosophies on the far Left, raging from socialists like Marx and Engels, and Anarchist Communists like Bakunin, to an extreme individualist like Max Stirner.

Actually, it is only in this present century that the term "Communism" has come to be used almost exclusively as identical with Marxism—though even so, of such often mutually incompatible varieties as Stalinism, Trotskism, Maoism, etc. Using the term "Communism" in this present-day sense, one can define the current Catholic/Communist relationship as, effectively, the creation of the Russian revolution and of its political and ideological offshoots.

As such, the problem may be said to date exclusively from 1917.

It is probably not generally known today that the initial relations between the Vatican and the Kremlin after 1917 were actually quite cordial, but this was indeed the case. Nor is this so very surprising. After all, prior to 1917, Tzarist Russia had represented the ecclesiastical rival with Rome, the Russian Tzar himself being the head of a rival "Orthodox" Church, under the regime of which Roman Catholicism represented an alien and often persecuted sect. For the Tzarist Empire and the Orthodox Church were merely opposite sides of the same coin. One of the early Bolsheviks actually referred to the Orthodox clergy as "Gendarmes in Cassocks". The "Great Schism" between Rome and the Eastern Orthodox churches dates back to 1058, and Moscow in its own estimation represented "the Third Rome", having succeeded and superseded both Rome and Constantinople as the spiritual centre of "Orthodox" Christianity. Consequently, when the February Revolution finally overthrew the Russian monarchy in 1917, we find the then head of the Vatican Diplomatic Corps, Cardinal Gasparri, assuring an Irish visitor (Colonel Repington) that Rome rejoiced in the advent of the regime of religious toleration effected by the Revolution in the formerly intolerant and monolithic Tzarist Empire. (See my book *The Papacy and Fascism*.)

"Public Enemy Number One"

However, this conciliatory attitude did not last long. To paraphrase a biblical passage, Rome was soon to discover that the little finger of Communism was thicker than the loins of the Tzar. From 1922, when the ultra-reactionary, pro-Fascist Pius XI was elected Pope, the relationships between Catholicism and "atheistic Communism" went from bad to worse. As Papal Legate in Warsaw in 1921, this Pope had been present during the unsuccessful Russian attack upon the Polish capital. From then on, Communism became "public enemy number one" in the eyes of the Vatican.

Whilst political and economic causes were not lacking, the principle reason for making Communism the major enemy of the Church of Rome is probably to be found in the ideological sphere. It was not really Communism in its secular sense as economic collectivism to which Rome objected. After all, there were precedents for this in Church history itself: notably that very remarkable experiment in sociological collectivism carried out by the Jesuits in Paraguay during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Naturally, this experiment, conducted by the "Praetorian Guard" of the Church, had never been condemned from Rome.

What the Vatican primarily objected to in the Communism of Marx and Lenin as inaugurated in 1917, was its then unique character as a mass ideology of atheistic persuasion—the first such ever known, since even the French Revolution had officially stopped short at the “Deism” of Rousseau, Robespierre and Paine. But now the Revolution had been extended so as to include God among its victims. To realise the full traumatic effect on Rome of this atheistic ideology, one must realise that, at least prior to the second Vatican Council (1962-65), which appears to have rather belatedly realised that *bona fide* atheism does actually exist, it was the firm and unalterable doctrine of Catholic theology that there was not and never would be any such thing as a *bona fide* atheist. According to this theology, self-styled atheists were either feeble-minded, or, more probably, criminals who, being fearful of divine judgment, tried to pretend that it did not exist.

A Change of Attitude

Consequently, it caused no surprise in Catholic circles when Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical letter *Quadregesimo Anno* (15 May 1931), condemned not only Communism but even the modernist Democratic Socialism as potentially atheistic—indeed, Socialism in all its branches, for regarding man's terrestrial life here upon earth as his most valuable possession and chief concern—an attitude that strikes at the roots of belief in the supernatural.

From 1931, Communism was accordingly regarded by Rome as its major enemy. Nor, at first, did it cease to be so even after the conclusion of World War II. Rome in no way changed its attitude even when Stalin, professedly in the interests of national unity, officially dissolved the League of Militant Atheists during the war, for Pope Pius XII (1939-58) was, if possible, even more anti-Communist than had been the pro-Fascist Pius XI. It was not until the accession of John XXIII (1958-63), a shrewd ecclesiastical strategist who evidently realised that times had changed, that Rome began to change her attitude. Now, it would appear, the Vatican has come to historical crossroads, and it will soon have to make up its mind which way it intends to move.

A significant pointer to the direction of its ultimate decision can be found, perhaps, in the “extraordinary congregation” held last year in Rome by the Jesuit order. One of its principle redactors was the French Jesuit Father Jean Yves Calvez, who was recently strongly tipped by a well-informed French correspondent to be the next General of the Jesuits. Father Calvez is not only a social theorist of note, but an authority upon (of all people!) Karl Marx. Shades of Pius XI and XII—not to mention Ignatius Loyola himself!

However, to recall a well-known adage, “What the Jesuits think today, Rome will think tomorrow”.

Have we here, then, a valid prediction of “the shape of things to come”? Though it certainly appears to be a far cry from “The Spiritual Exercises” to *Das Kapital*, the worldly-wise Jesuits have a reputation for doing nothing without a motive. Be that as it may, the post-war expansion of Communism has now effected so definite a confrontation that it has become impossible for Rome to continue its attitude of hitherto total boycott. In the course of its 2,000 years history, the Roman Catholic Church has seen many revolutions come and go, and has learned successively how to compromise with most of them. It seems probable that the Russian Revolution will prove to be no exception.

Actually, there does not seem to be any valid reason why the two great totalitarian creeds of our era should not effect at least a working compromise, for Catholicism is essentially a Collectivist ideology; it was Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, that represented the religious aspect of Capitalism in its militant heyday. Unbridled competition has never been a Catholic virtue; and, at least theoretically, “usury” (rapacious money-grabbing) ranks among the “Seven Deadly Sins” of Catholic theology. Here, surely, we are not far from the attitude of the founders of Marxism, so tersely expressed in the famous aphorism of Frederick Engels: “Money, a bottomless sea, in which all honour and decency disappear.” Long before the Russian Revolution, a countryman of Lenin, the great novelist Dostoyevsky, predicted that Rome would eventually join forces with Socialism against the then Capitalist/Protestant alliance; and about the same time, the Catholic historian, Lord Acton, described the recently published *Das Kapital* of Karl Marx (1867) as “The Koran of the Socialist”.

Redundant Deity

The only remaining stumbling-block is, of course, God. But is this really so fundamental? No doubt a great many Communists sit loosely to atheism, and in Catholic countries many of them apparently adhere to the opinion that “Paris is worth a Mass”! Equally, many otherwise *bona fide* Catholics would be only too glad to get rid of God; after all, in the space-age, the traditional “Old Man in the Sky”, with his angelic retinue playing harps on wet clouds without visible means of support, is surely something of a cosmic liability? This state of things was perhaps foreshadowed in the heterodox theology of the late Father Teilhard de Chardin—whom future historians of Christianity may well come to describe as the Thomas Aquinas of the twentieth century. (Yet another example of Jesuit foresight?)

Both Catholicism and Communism are fundamentally realistic terrestrial organisations; for, whatever Rome may or may not know about any future

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Freedom to Publish

PHILIP NATAL

Readers will recall that "The Freethinker" was forced to change printers recently because of persistent censorship of articles by an employee of the firm which had printed the journal for many years. Philip Natal, who is well known in the print industry as an independent and freelance journalist, writes about the growth of interference with editorial and advertising content. His views first appeared in "Printing Trades Journal" and are published here by permission of the editor of that journal.

I don't know why the compositor who agreed to set *The Freethinker* when he joined the firm later changed his mind, and I don't know what prevented the printing firm concerned sacking the man as soon as he began to refuse to do his work fully. But can we lay down any principles to govern conduct in cases like this? It is important to do so if at all possible in the light of the actions which have been taken during the last year or two in some newspapers, where workers have for political reasons refused to print certain copy, or have agreed to print it only if the publishers printed other material at the same time.

Let us begin with the publisher. Anybody who wants to have printed in Britain anything which can be published here legally should be able to do so at a reasonable cost. This is a principle which, I believe, has never been put forward before, probably because it has not been needed. Until now there has always seemed to be somebody willing to print anything which can be legally published. But I can imagine circumstances in which certain points of view could not get into print at all even though there would be no legal objection. In those cases, I submit, the British Printing Industries Federation, as the only body which is at all representative of the trade as a whole, would have an obligation to persuade a member to print the job. The social health of the British community depends on all sections accepting responsibility for the performance of certain functions. Printers as a whole should be prepared to ensure that every potential publisher can find a printer, even after every printer in the land, when approached individually, has turned the work away, providing everything is legal and the publisher is prepared to pay a fair price for the work he has specified.

It follows from this, therefore, that a printing firm should turn a job away only with reluctance. It may be difficult for some people to print material which they consider to be deeply objectionable, indecent or blasphemous, for instance, but we must all be prepared to endure some discomfort in order

to carry out our function in the complex society in which we work. Printers, both employers and employees, should refuse to handle work which breaks no law only if handling the work would cause intense pain.

If any print workers, especially compositors, feel so strongly about some things that they could not endure playing any part in preparing or printing certain types of work, they should make this clear to their employer when joining a firm. In my experience feelings of this intensity are rare, and employers have a right to assume that every employee can be relied on to print any job entrusted to him unless the employee has made his position clear in advance.

This subject has come up several times recently because attention is at last being focused on the fact that ownership of all the widely known media of information and opinion in Britain is, with the exception of the BBC, vested in people whose qualification for ownership is primarily that of being good businessmen. As long as virtually every newspaper and magazine is itself a business or part of a business, it is difficult for anti-business views to find a powerful outlet. Those who believe that the capitalist system needs violent alteration, if not complete obliteration, are not likely to find much support from those who obtain profits through the system by publishing newspapers and magazines. Some print employees have these radical anti-capitalist views and therefore feel frustrated. In their frustration they have occasionally tried to influence the editorial content of what they have been printing.

Interference with Content

I cannot see any way in which the frustration of these men can be relieved. If they had their way and were able to overthrow capitalism as we know it in Britain, it is doubtful if they would encourage the appearance of pro-capitalist views in newspapers and magazines any more than today's capitalists encourage the propagation of extreme Leftist attitudes.

I am even more alarmed by printing trade unionists interfering with the content of jobs than with the relative lack of capital investment in our industry, serious though the latter is. We shall merely be poorer as a result of the failure of printing management to be bold. If union interference with copy is allowed to become commonplace, however, many of the assumptions on which the British way of life is based will be called into question, and everybody who can influence the dissemination of information and opinion will be encouraged to be less tolerant.

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Warning Against "New Look" School Religion

Barbara Smoker, president of the National Secular Society, gave the Leicester Secular Society's 94th anniversary lecture at the Secular Hall, Leicester on 2nd March. Speaking on the subject, *Religious Education: the New Indoctrination*, she declared that many secular humanists who were strongly opposed to religious indoctrination in our county schools when it was blatant Christian proselytising, have been lulled into complacency by the new "open" approach which, while still giving the main emphasis to Christianity, brings in other world religions too, and encourages the pupils to discuss comparative religion. But how can this be genuinely "open" when it merely compares one faith with another, as though this covered the whole range of tenable thought on the subject, without any reference to non-religious alternatives, such as secular humanism?

Once a Year

Miss Smoker continued: "This failure to recognise monism (non-belief in spirits) as a valid viewpoint was always dishonest and anti-educational, but has become even less excusable with the increase in disbelief in society at large. Something like 10 per cent of the adult population, and very

much more among those who have had university education, are now agnostics or atheists, yet this body of opinion is completely excluded from the school syllabus.

"Some schools do invite a humanist speaker in to talk to the sixth-formers once a year as a gesture towards educational balance and fairness, but all this amounts to is, at most, one hour out of the total school life of that minority of pupils that reaches the sixth form, while religion gets two hours a week, every week of the term, throughout the school life. This is a curious idea of balance and fairness.

"The fact is that the new 'openness' should make secularists more wary, not less. The old-style indoctrination was dropped because it was found to be counter-productive in its unacknowledged aim of bringing the rising generation back to the churches. The new-style Religious Education is more subtle, and thus more persuasive. And even if it still fails to bring young people back to the traditional faiths, it gives the idea that belief in 'souls' being able to live apart from bodies is intellectually acceptable. Hence the upsurge of fringe religions and belief in ghosts, demonic possession, 'the paranormal', 'the occult', and other popular forms of superstition."

Freedom to publish

Some of the people who should be campaigning for laws which would help distribute more fairly through the community the power to determine the content of newspapers, magazines and broadcast programmes are tending instead to seek to rectify the present imbalance by *ad hoc* action inside printing factories. A recent case was at Ipswich. There was an industrial dispute at the Crown & Anchor Hotel, a Trust House Forte establishment, when 20 employees were sacked after they went on strike in protest against the dismissal of a shop steward. Trust House Forte advertised the 20 jobs in the *East Anglian Daily Times*. The shop steward said it had come as a "big blow" that National Graphical Association members on the paper had allowed the advertisement to appear. Natsopa men on the paper were in favour of stopping it altogether.

Union Silence

A few years ago even an incident like this would have been regarded as of some importance nationally, and the head offices of printing trade unions would have been quick to remind their members of their obligation not to interfere with editorial or advertising content. Today, I am afraid,

not only are the union head offices blatantly silent, but incidents like that at Ipswich are regarded as of minor significance.

It should always be remembered that editors are appointed—and dismissed—by proprietors. Some proprietors, like Lord Thomson, believe that they don't mind what political views their editors have as long as they are running a "successful" publication. Even Lord Thomson, however, has said that he would never tolerate a Communist editor, and he always defines "successful" as "profitable". So although it is right that editors should have the last word about what appears in their publications, editors should never assume that in their opinions, judgements and actions they are in any way representative of anybody except the sort of people that proprietors like to have as editors.

HYMAN LEVY DIES

Professor Hyman Levy, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics, Imperial College of Science and Technology, has died at the age of 85. He was a prominent figure in rationalist circles for many years. There was a secular committal ceremony at Putney Vale Crematorium, London, on 6th March. A tribute to Professor Levy will appear in our next issue.

SIDEWAYS TO SECULARISM

Our contemporary, *New Humanist*, recently carried a report on the New Life Congress which was organised by the Diocese of Chelmsford and attended by representatives of many Christian denominations. Also in attendance were two ladies from Essex humanist groups who pronounced it "an unexpectedly rewarding occasion". Having accepted the invitation to attend, as a refusal "might have been construed as atheist bigotry", they participated in a discussion on Christians in Education, at which the group came down against the religious provisions of the 1944 Education Act and in favour of moral education. We are informed that "Julia and Rita wondered just how far along the secular road the group would have gone without humanists in their midst". The real cause for wonderment is that anyone can be surprised because Christians are now plumping for that elusory will-o'-the-wisp known as moral education when a 30-year spell of compulsory RI has clearly failed to bring home the bacon.

The ladies concluded that "if we want increasing secularisation, then the way to make it possible is to work with the Church . . . 'Church-bashing', rather than helping our cause, hardens Christians' attitudes and entrenches them; it means that we behave in the same bigoted way that the Church used to". Most secular humanists would agree that we can work with religious people on specific issues and projects; and rather than rejecting invitations to conferences we welcome the opportunity to state our case and to consider what our opponents have to say. Additionally, it is accepted that violent and abusive attacks on the churches are futile. But the expression "Church-bashing" is now encountered so frequently that we suspect it has replaced "old-fashioned Victorian rationalism" (so popular with the cause-collecting whizz-kids of the 1960s) as a term of abuse to be used against anyone who makes the mildest criticism, however justified, of religion and religious institutions.

Those humanists who argue that the most effective way of achieving increasing secularisation is by working with the churches should ask themselves if they really believe that the churches are prepared to sacrifice the advantages of Establishment, their privileged position within the education system, the huge sums of money extracted from public funds for the upkeep of their buildings, the bishops' bench in the House of Lords, three per cent of broadcasting time, and public maintenance of chaplains in community institutions and some embassies. Will they refrain from setting up "front" organisations through which they campaign to sabotage hard-won, and often humanist-pioneered, social reforms?

Humanists should bear in mind that Christians who attend functions like the New Life Congress can agree to any proposal or accept any argument advanced by humanist participants. But such

NEWS

Christians are speaking for themselves alone. The centres of Church authority are at Canterbury and Westminster and those who enjoy real power are not bound by the resolutions or decisions of their subordinate and well-intentioned brethren who occasionally accept the logic and justice of the humanist case.

Whilst agreeing that insularity and Church-bashing will not help our cause, we would submit that it is not helped either by credulous naïvety.

'LET US PREY'

A Sunday newspaper interview with John Gradley, a retired managing director of four London cemeteries, has exposed a number of "squalid rackets in the funeral trade". One of these is the racket of the multi-denominational cemetery chaplains who make the Vicar of Bray seem the quintessence of constancy.

In order to keep their flow of funeral work steady and avoid going on part-time working, these clerical vultures change their religion from one funeral to the next and deceive bereaved families into believing they are ministers of their own religion. Mr Gradley said: "I've known them have gowns, headgear and prayer books relating to every known religion. The family naturally think that he belongs to their church, but he might not."

We wonder what would happen if one of these all-purpose officiators were invited to conduct a secular funeral ceremony. No doubt he would oblige if the fee was satisfactory. And, of course, there would be no need for sartorial expenditure.

Confirmations in the Church of England declined by just over 11 per cent in the three years between 1970 and 1973 according to figures included in the 1975 edition of the Church of England Year Book. The south of England showed a slightly larger percentage decline than the north—11.4 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. The number of deacons ordained also fell in the same period from 437 in 1970 to 377 in 1973.

AND NOTES

DISCORD

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland is one of these daft, fundamentalist Protestant sects which some Sassenachs think were invented by James Bridie and Alastair Sim. But the Wee Frees are not amusing eccentrics who add to life's rich pattern and to the gaiety of nations; they are narrow-minded and intolerant, and nasty with it. People who fall foul of them in some areas run the risk of becoming social outcasts—not a pleasant prospect if you live in the highlands and islands. So Iain Mackenzie, a church elder who owns a furniture store in Wick, Caithness, must be regarding the church's forthcoming annual Synod with some apprehension. For in the eyes of his pious, Wee Free brethren, Mr Mackenzie has committed a gargantuan act of wickedness, described by another church member as "profanation of the Sabbath".

It is rather difficult to imagine what act of depravity anyone could perpetrate in the north of Scotland on a Sunday. So what has Mr Mackenzie been up to? It appears that he attended a religious service at a youth club, where hymns were sung to guitar accompaniment. Now, the guitar is sometimes regarded with suspicion by retired colonels and others who associate it with long hair, pot-smoking and demonstrating. But the Wee Frees are not guilty of such petty discrimination; they ban the use of *all* musical instruments at their services. Presumably—and understandably—they would not use even the bagpipes to make a joyful sound unto the Lord.

Most Scottish Protestants have a bee in their bonnet about Sunday observance, but the Wee Frees have a hive of them up their kilt. They have been known to lock up hens and to imprison cockerels under fishing creels to prevent them from mating on the holy day. So Mr Mackenzie will have a formidable task in persuading his brothers in Christ that singing hymns to musical accompaniment does not contravene the fourth commandment.

The Free Church of Scotland was founded at the end of the last century. It has 8,000 members and 16 churches.

PROTEST AGAINST CHARITY TRICKERY

Members of the National Secular Society distributed leaflets to people attending a sale of second-hand goods at a hall in Kentish Town, London on 1st March. The leaflet asked how many of those who donate goods or attend such sales know that they are financing the Divine Light Mission, and to what extent DLM advertising methods harm genuine charities.

The National Secular Society statement continued: "The Divine Light Mission can claim to be a 'charity' because the charity law in this country, which dates back to the year 1601, allows the privileges of charity status to all religious bodies, whether they do good or not. This charity status means that they do not have to pay income tax or corporation tax like other organisations—many of which, though they are concerned entirely with the public good, are denied charity status if, for instance, they state publicly that some law needs reforming. Nothing less than a complete overhaul of the charity law will protect the public from being hoodwinked by groups of people like the Divine Light Mission".

THE GOOD BOOK

Miami police have revealed that a nine-year-old boy, Arnold Zeleznik, was murdered after being offered as a human sacrifice. He died shortly after arriving at a hotel for a holiday with his parents. Arnold's father left him in the hotel lobby while he went to collect the room keys. The boy vanished, and after a search he was found in a bathroom with his throat cut. A copy of the Bible was found lying on the floor. Later, a 31-year-old man who had been released from a mental hospital was arrested. In his pocket was a letter containing biblical references to sacrifice.

Every copy of the Christian Bible should carry a government mental health warning.

An Anglican clergyman who used tonic wine for holy communion has been answering charges of heresy before an ecclesiastical court in Nigeria. He said that the sanctuary wine made him giddy. He had not received any complaints from the congregation.

Catholicism and Communism

life, she undeniably knows a great deal about this one. Without doubt, the present and future relationship between Rome, on the one hand, and Moscow, Peking and their ideological satellites on the other, represents one of the most intriguing problems of our time; also, one of the most important.

NSS Upsets the Methodists

The "Methodist Recorder" seldom notices any publication or statement by the National Secular Society, but the Society's submissions to the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting brought a spirited retort in that paper's "Notes of the Week" column. To its credit, the "Methodist Recorder" published a full reply from Barbara Smoker, president of the NSS, in its next issue. "Freethinker" readers can now judge the merits of the Methodist and the Secularist statements which are published below.

BARBARA SMOKER REPLIES

After referring to the "wild charges" made by the National Secular Society in their submissions to the Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, you proceeded to nit-picking details that hardly warrant the description "wild charges." The Central Religious Advisory Committee does not, you say, represent the seven main religious sects that make up its membership because its members are appointed by the two broadcasting Authorities—but they nonetheless represent individually the faiths to which they belong and collectively the Judco-Christian tradition, to the exclusion of other religious and non-religious viewpoints. Even if CRAC tolerantly allows these other viewpoints some air-time, this hardly compensates for their having no voice in actual policy making.

Religious broadcasting takes up about three per cent (not one per cent) of radio and television time—and this is something like ten times as much as is justified by the amount of public interest in it. On this basis, religious broadcasting would be in the same bracket as minority entertainment like grand opera and table-tennis.

Far from demanding "illiberal suppression", as you allege, the National Secular Society has always campaigned for freedom of speech for every viewpoint, and has consistently supported oppressed religious minorities in various parts of the world. Advising us to press for "more adequate time for the presentation of humanist and secularist philosophies" is laughable, for that is precisely what we have been doing since broadcasting began in the '20s and we have got nowhere. Indeed, the very memorandum you are criticising is concerned to obtain just that.

You suggest, in conclusion, that the secular humanist viewpoint is already adequately presented on radio and television! The BBC itself makes no such preposterous claim; on the contrary it is stated BBC policy that there is no need for a fair balance in religious broadcasting since religion is "not a controversial subject"! The fact is that the three per cent of air time devoted to religion is balanced not by one per cent, or even by .001 per cent, devoted to humanism, but by none at all. It is true that an occasional humanist voice is heard on the air—but only either incidentally, because a speaker chosen on other grounds happens to be a humanist, or else in the context of a programme put out by the religious department, with humanism forced into the opposition role and with a Christian spokesman standing by to have the last word. Some secular humanists actually disapprove of humanists accepting invitations to participate in such programmes, since we are

METHODIST CRITICISM

The earnest supporters of the National Secular Society believe that the Christian faith gives a wrong interpretation of reality and of human nature. It is not surprising that they dislike religious broadcasting on radio and television. But they do their own cause little good by the wild charges in the memorandum they have presented to the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting; the Annan Committee.

The Society asks for the abolition of the religious broadcasting departments. There is only one, within the BBC, but let that pass. It is, they say, scandalous that huge sums are being expended on these departments when 'economy measures are being imposed on other departments whose work is more worthwhile and appropriate to the last quarter of the twentieth century.' Penny-pinching producers of religious programmes will smile wryly at that one.

The Central Religious Advisory Committee comes in for sharp criticism, as a pressure group representing, and pushing the claims of, the seven main religious sects in Britain. CRAC members are not representatives. They are appointed by the two broadcasting Authorities. The Committee, on its own initiative, has broadened its membership, extended the lay element, and pressed for adequate time for those of other faiths. The Society has either not done its homework, or is impervious to inconvenient facts.

The ITA Report for 1975 has just appeared. Religious broadcasting amounts to about one per cent of the total output; not much evidence of huge sums extravagantly wasted on religious indoctrination. A comprehensive national service cannot ignore religion. What the Society should be pressing for, instead of illiberal suppression, is more adequate time for the presentation of humanist and secularist philosophies. One suspects that if they monitored programmes for three months they would find that they had it already.

(Continued on page 48)

Which New Testament? The Ending of the Gospel of Mark

G. A. WELLS

None of the original documents of the New Testament is extant today, and the oldest existing copies, made by hand before the invention of printing, differ from one another, although mainly in minor details. Apart from accidental copying errors, scribes omitted or corrected material which they found superfluous or unworthy of a divine revelation. Such omission or correction was particularly likely to occur in the earliest days, when the documents were not regarded as authoritative and definitive, and when there was no centralised Church to enforce or secure uniformity of text; and it is of course for the earliest days—up to the end of the second century—that the rich manuscript tradition of our New Testament is most defective. We know from the apocryphal gospels, as well as from statements of orthodox and heretical Christians of the period, that in the second century the texts of the gospels were altered and combined in many different ways. In the third and fourth centuries, the practice of freely altering the text was arrested, and the process of correcting earlier changes began. But it was not conducted exclusively on strict philological principles. It is true that a search was made for old manuscripts, and that newer ones were corrected from these. But if a passage was regarded as improper, undignified, or in any way offensive, it was sometimes rejected—whether or not it was in the most ancient copies—on the ground that it must have been introduced by impious men, bent on corrupting the morals or beliefs of the readers. Origen, for instance, was convinced that the scriptures could not contain contradictions, and was therefore disposed to excise a passage which was clearly in conflict with another one which he accepted.

One of the most obvious cases of variant readings is the end of the gospel of Mark, which terminates in four different ways in the various manuscripts. One variant is the omission, in some of the oldest extant copies, of the last twelve verses of the gospel as printed in the Authorised Version, namely Mark 16: 9-20. The Texas theologian Professor W. R. Farmer has recently published a very interesting discussion of them (*The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, Cambridge University Press, 1974, £3). He shows that, although many ancient copies must have included them—for otherwise they would not be present (as in fact they are) in many early translations and lectionaries—omission of them seems to have been characteristic of copies made in Alexandria, and in communities in close contact with that city: perhaps for the reason that Christians adopted the text-critical methods developed

there in the second century BC in editing, e.g. the Homeric poems—methods which sanctioned the excision of passages deemed unworthy of the gods.

Without these verses, the gospel ends with the story that Mary Magdalene and another Mary were addressed in Jesus' tomb by "a young man in a white robe" who told them to tell Jesus' disciples that "he is risen"; but they fled "and said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8). It is by no means impossible that Mark terminated his gospel thus abruptly. He could well have alleged the silence of the women to explain why the empty tomb, which he was glad to mention as decisive evidence of the resurrection, had been so long in gaining currency. Paul, writing before Mark, had listed appearances of the risen one to named persons as proof of the resurrection, but had said nothing of any place of burial. Now mere appearances could be dismissed by sceptics as subjective and hallucinatory. An empty tomb was obviously a more objective warrant, and this is surely why Mark alleged it (and why Matthew and Luke took the allegation from him and elaborated it). But he still had to give some indication of why, in earlier days, the resurrection faith had been based merely on the evidence of the appearances.

Verse eight is, then, possible as a conclusion to the whole gospel. Furthermore, it is easy to see that verses 9-20, even if genuinely written by Mark, could early come to be regarded as spurious. Verse nine seems to introduce a contradiction in saying that the resurrection occurred "early in the first day of the week"—not "in the end of the sabbath", as in verse one of this chapter 16. Verse nine raises yet further difficulties by stating that Jesus "appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons". The natural implication of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:5 would be that the first appearance was vouchsafed to Peter. Apart from this discrepancy, a woman who had been possessed by demons might strike some early Christians as not the most suitable person to vouch for the resurrection (Celsus, criticising Christianity in the second century, found it unconvincing that "a half-frantic woman" should be cited as the principal witness). But if verse nine could, on any of these grounds, be regarded as spurious, what follows it is equally open to objection; for the sequel makes the risen Jesus promise (among other things) that believers will be able to handle snakes and drink deadly poison without coming to harm (verse 18). Farmer shows that some early Christians were worried by these verses, and that it may well

(Continued on page 46)

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE by Robin Furneaux. Hamish Hamilton, £6.

Robin Furneaux has written an immensely long and leisurely book, which, as well as being a biography of Wilberforce, is also a detailed account of British politics in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic War period. One feels that much of the political minutiae could have been omitted, covered as they are in numerous other works. His treatment of Wilberforce is in the eulogistic tradition, setting him up (along with Shaftesbury) as a shining example of Christian philanthropy—a living proof of the concern of Christians with social reform. But in spite of all the biographer's efforts, Wilberforce's image emerges somewhat tarnished in the end.

William Wilberforce was an MP for 40 years, and his career spanned the two massive upheavals of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. But his views were remarkably little affected by either. His only response was to adhere ever more rigidly to support of the status quo. As time went on he became more conservative, rather than less. His overriding commitment was to religion.

After a brief boyhood flirtation with Methodism, he was converted to "vital religion" and became one of the leaders of the Evangelical revival (the Clapham Sect) within the Church of England. There he collaborated in founding the Society for the Suppression of Vice, cynically described by its opponents as "the society for suppressing vice among those with less than £500 a year", which saw its task as stamping out "seditious and blasphemous" literature. Among their other activities, the Evangelicals tried to ban the theatre, dancing, Sunday papers, and indeed most leisure enjoyments. Wilberforce's only comment on Jonathan Swift was, "What a thoroughly irreligious mind; no trace of Sunday to be found in his journals or letters!" Like the other Evangelicals, Wilberforce was a connoisseur of death-bed scenes, the morbid details of which he savoured; and he was never particularly upset by the deaths of friends, feeling certain that he would be reunited with them in heaven.

The one respect in which Wilberforce could be described as progressive was in his long struggle to achieve abolition of the slave-trade, which is fully documented by Robin Furneaux. But apart from this, Wilberforce was dreadfully reactionary: he had a dread of revolution and atheism, which he regarded as synonymous; he supported all attempts by the Government to suppress radical agitation and demands for Parliamentary reform; he approved of the Combination Laws which banned trade unions,

FREETHINKER

defended the "Peterloo massacre" in 1819, and supported the Corn Laws. He believed in crushing any form of independent working-class action, and positively enjoyed prosecuting radical publishers, including the sister of Richard Carlile.

Needless to say, Wilberforce was thoroughly detested by radical activists, who were not in the least taken in by his philanthropic pretensions. Cobbett thought the most delightful feature of America was the fact that there was no Wilberforce there: "Imagine that, no Wilberforce!" And a radical critic concisely summed Wilberforce up as "never favouring the liberty of any white man in his life".

Viscount Furneaux, attempting to show his subject in as favourable a light as possible, defends these embarrassingly reactionary views by reminding the reader that Wilberforce was, after all, only a product of his society, or explains them away as an unfortunate aberration—a kind of social blind spot. But his arguments are not convincing. There were other politicians in the period, from a similar class background, who took a more progressive attitude—Fox and Burdett, for example—and one cannot avoid the conclusion that Wilberforce's conservative views were not accidental, but the logical result of his religious philosophy. Wilberforce maintained that a short span of life on earth was unimportant compared with an eternity of heavenly bliss. In his book *Practical View* he wrote: "Christianity renders the inequality of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom she instructs to be diligent, humble, patient . . . the true followers of Christ will all be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance."

The apparent contradiction between Wilberforce's sympathy for slaves and his hostility towards the working class at home disappears when one remembers that his philanthropy never extended beyond groups who were suitably subservient and unlikely ever to claim equality with the upper class. Freed slaves in the West Indies would simply become a cheap-wage labour force instead. They would be unable to challenge the status quo, and, of course, could also be converted to Christianity by foreign missions, which the Evangelicals were interested in promoting.

Likewise, Wilberforce enjoyed dispensing charity to factory children, chimney-sweeps, "maritime female penitents", and animals (he helped found the RSPCA), all of whom could presumably be relied upon to be both grateful and inarticulate. What he wanted to see was "magnanimity from the

REVIEWS

rich and resignation from the poor"—an eighteenth-century concept which was rapidly becoming outdated by the time of his death in 1833. Wilberforce, as a social reformer, was very much in the tradition of upper-class paternalism. And the limitations of such a concept of social reform are greater than writers like Robin Furneaux would have us believe.

PATRICIA KNIGHT

A CIRCLE OF CHILDREN by Mary MacCracken. Gollancz, £2.80.

Mary MacCracken is an American who discovered that she had a gift for teaching children for whom the general term used in this book is "seriously emotionally disturbed". "Autistic" is a common blanket description of such children, but in the school in which Miss MacCracken worked there were not only severely withdrawn children (to whom that word properly applies) but others who were "hyperactive, violently acting-out". There was Brian, who talked always at incomprehensible speed, and Jenny, who would not speak at all. There was a little girl who believed she was a dog; and a boy whose compulsion was, in the most desperate and dangerous ways, to make it impossible for people to give him the love and approval he longed for. There were others for whom the term was "attic children", because their terrible derangements had driven their parents to hide them away from the world. Most were uncommonly bright: many were quite beautiful. For such children, institutions waited, "huge and bleak and monstrous". In the school, run by a woman whose main energies were given to the raising of funds, the recruiting of allies, lay for most of the children their one hope of escaping lifelong imprisonment in such institutions.

Merely to be patient in their midst, let alone to teach them, involved a very special gift indeed. Mary MacCracken entered the scene as a volunteer—a teacher's aide: rejected by Helga, the teacher she was assigned to. Helga was "the totally natural therapeutic teacher". It's not possible to find a neat label for her qualities, as the author accounts for them—she simply (and complicatedly) had a genius for finding her way through that maze of furies, intricate and nameless fears, total withdrawals, total refusals of function. Mary MacCracken outfaced Helga's rejection of her—and won the other's approval. And so she started on her own career as a teacher: and this book is her description of it.

Again, there's no way of smoothly summing up the nature of her work. Certain general things can be said. For example, that this is teaching of a mercilessly exacting kind: "In this school there was no teachers' room, no coffee break, not even a lunch hour." The teacher's attention, rapt, as continuously sensitive as it could manage to be, was engaged every moment of the day. Beyond this, one can say that it was a matter of instinct and ingenuity. She taught her incontinent children to pee, for example, by cheerfully peeing herself in their presence and inviting them to copy her. She'd observed that imitation of a trusted person was sometimes, for them, a way through some block and tangled disinclination. At times she had to close her eyes and ram her way through to some necessary end: as when she taught Brian, aged nine, to eat his first solid food. (She'd discovered, through a lucky accident with a tape recorder, that his apparent highspeed gibberish was fantastically accelerated ordinary speech. A most moving moment in the book. Brian had been talking all the time!) Now and then she could work towards a situation in which child taught child: one kind of sickness meshed in with another, and good came of it for both. Working with another teacher, she embarked on a series of expeditions into the wider world—up and down hills, to swimming baths—for children for whom, until then, the world had really not been much larger than an attic. Mary MacCracken naturally has general things to say about all this; but what the reader carries away is the memory of many slow, patient, modest, remarkable tales. And, of course, of rewards as huge as the labours: "We had changed each other's lives more in those twelve weeks than most people do in a lifetime."

Occasionally, there's a curiously American note. The school had many professional advisers, for whom, it must be said, the author betrays no great admiration. "Five experts in a room", she says of one high-flying confabulation, "at approximately 30 dollars an hour." That's 30 dollars an hour each.

The book provides a sort of vivid, intensely lit, dramatic view of work among such children. It's very moving without going out of its way to be so. Its great quality is its avoidance of all but the most necessary generalities. "There is no one picture", says the author, "no one description, of a schizophrenic or autistic child". Perhaps it's the experts' passion for tying things in bundles that makes Ms MacCracken so unenthusiastic about them.

I can't resist one generalisation of my own. Again and again, I'm struck by the light that intense teaching of this sort, in such difficult fields, throws on teaching elsewhere. "I was gradually learning . . . that teachers' colleges were wrong to spend so much time on planning", says Mary MacCracken.

"Instead, we should have training in reaction, role play with the unexpected." It is clear enough that lesson notes and careful schemes would get a teacher nowhere in such circumstances as are described in *A Circle of Children*. The gift needed is that of the trained opportunist. It is, I'm convinced, the gift we ought to nurse, the skill we ought to train, in teachers of every kind.

EDWARD BLISHEN

THE AKENHAM BURIAL CASE by Ronald Fletcher.
Wildwood House, £3.95.

When, as a young teacher, the American free-thinker Robert Ingersoll was asked by some local preachers to give his opinion of baptism, he replied that "with soap, baptism is a good thing". This answer cost him his job. In the middle of the last century baptism was taken far too seriously to be a safe subject for joking. Even today, baptism is a strong pillar of Christian orthodoxy, and the exact post-mortem status of the unbaptised is still a controversial theological issue. But in nineteenth-century Britain those with an unorthodox view of baptism were likely to be penalised after death as well as during life.

The Church of England had sole rights in officiating at burials in its own churchyards, and in most rural areas there were no public cemeteries and so no alternative to being buried in the local Anglican churchyard. This meant that the bodies of the unbaptised, the excommunicated and suicides had to be buried without a graveside ceremony. This undoubtedly caused suffering to a large number of grieving relatives and friends, but any attempt to reform the law met with fierce opposition from those anxious to defend the privileges—and, in particular, the property rights—of the Church of England. As one pious Member of the House of Commons put it:

Let the House remember that the proof of continuous identity in doctrines and services is . . . shown to be essential to the validity of the title to all religious and denominational property . . . the introduction of the various and diverse Services of different denominations into the churchyards of the denomination to which I belong will fundamentally invalidate our title to that property, and, in this respect, place the Church of England, as a denomination, in a position of inferiority, as compared with every other denomination in this country.

Ronald Fletcher's book is an account of a "burial scandal" of the 1870s. A two-year-old son of a Baptist labourer died—unbaptised, of course, because Baptists do not believe in the magical powers of baptism for children. When the family tried to hold a burial service in a field across the road from the local churchyard, the Anglican

minister intervened. According to one account, the Anglican, whose name was Drury, and an attending Baptist minister almost came to blows. The news of this incident spread widely, and eventually became something of a *cause célèbre*, the notoriety of which was heightened when the Reverend Drury sued the *East Anglian Times* for libel over an account it had published of the incident. The jury found for Drury but awarded him only 40 shillings damages.

The publicity that this case had attracted prompted several attempts to reform the law, and within a few years the Burial Laws Amendment Act was carried. This enabled any form of Christian burial service to be conducted in an Anglican churchyard, a reform which completely met the disabilities of dissenters.

Ronald Fletcher, the noted sociologist and humanist, encountered this case through his discovery of a collection of contemporary newspaper reports of the progress of the Akenham story. Fletcher has linked these lengthy reports with a sparse commentary, and the result is not entirely satisfactory. Almost half the book is taken up by a verbatim report of the libel action, which is particularly tedious. As an experiment in historical method, the book will no doubt have both critics and admirers.

For freethinkers, the principal interest of the book lies in its illustration of religious prejudice and intolerance and the bitterness with which the Church of England has opposed any erosion of its unjust privileges.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

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Grant Smith, a devoutly religious London detective, has been sent to prison for three years after admitting eight charges of perverting the course of justice, by fabricating evidence, perjury and theft. Smith is an elder of the Apostolic Church.

Which New Testament?

have been that such misgivings originated the view that they were a spurious addition, with the result that copies were made omitting them, which in turn became the basis for many others.

To be continued in the next issue

LETTER

EUTHANASIA

In his article in the February "Freethinker", Charles Wilshaw states that the recommended Act of Parliament to legalise voluntary euthanasia would lay down restrictions making it available "only to adults who had elected to participate in the scheme, and to no other class of person". No doubt such restrictions would facilitate the passing of a Voluntary Euthanasia Bill, since they would reassure people who are more scared of euthanasia than of the risk of a prolonged and distressful terminal illness. But I think it is important not to be driven by political expediency into accepting restrictions so narrow and rigid that the legalisation of provident voluntary euthanasia would discourage the medical profession from its present widespread humane practice of euthanasia un-sanctified by law.

Obviously, the statutory recognition of euthanasia, whether voluntary or not, would have to be subject to carefully considered restrictions; but if the net result were a decrease in mercifully induced death, such a law would surely be retrogressive. One can even envisage a punitive element in the denial of an easy death to those who had failed to take the necessary steps to claim it while they had the opportunity. Anyway, what about those who could never even have the opportunity? What about seriously defective infants—who are probably more in need of euthanasia than anyone else, but for whom voluntary euthanasia is by definition impossible? At present, most (non-Catholic) doctors and midwives quietly carry out the humane act.

I am certainly in favour of voluntary euthanasia, as described by Charles Wilshaw; but we must bear in mind that it would benefit only adults, and only those adults intelligent and provident enough to consider the possibility of needing euthanasia, long before the need arises, and to take the necessary legal measures in good time. It would be a tragedy if the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia were to entail such stringent statutory conditions with statutory penalties for infringing them, that it inhibited the existing humane practices of non-voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide.

BARBARA SMOKER

All Our Easter Days

took over. The sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, the first-born of the lambing season, indicates this, and would be natural among wandering bedouin herds-men, as the Jews undoubtedly were before they annexed the promised land, after escaping from their fellow Semites (not Egyptians) who ruled in the eastern Nile delta. They were the "Shepherd Kings" of historian Manetho—the Hykksos ("filthy ones") of the Egyptians. These invaders were finally expelled by pharaohs of the resurgent eighteenth dynasty around 1570 BC. The story of Exodus probably relates to this expulsion, and it is interesting that the pharaoh most concerned with reuniting his country was named Ahmose (Moses?).

Easter then, is not a Christian festival. It is merely a tarted-up version of the ancient Spring ritual dedicated to the mother goddess in various forms which were dictated by local circumstances and conditions. The word Easter derives from the

name of a Nordic goddess of Spring. Despite theorising on the origins of religion it is quite clear that primitive man did not sit contemplating the universe or his navel. Neither was he much concerned with inventing solar myths or cosmic principles, but he was aware of the process of reproduction and the role of the female. The oldest known votive figurine is the so-called "Venus of Willendorf", a grotesque representation of a very pregnant form with exaggerated breasts, belonging to the Neanderthal period of some 300,000 years ago. This was something that could be understood and the idea gradually grew that in order to promote fertility a sacrifice to the Great Mother was necessary to ensure her continued co-operation on behalf of the tribe. The part of the male in procreation was only partly understood, and the relationship of the sex act with birth nine months later was not always connected. Nevertheless, man had his part to play—to be slain, often after ritual copulation with the priestess guardian of the sacred tree or stream of the goddess.

Thus arose the idea of the Divine King, the consort of the Earth Mother, to be killed and reborn in his successor. Frazer gives an example of this in *The Golden Bough*—the priest-king in the sacred grove who is a killer and must himself be killed in turn. Unfortunately, Frazer did not emphasise that the grove is the temple of the Mother, and the slaying by his usurper a sacrifice to her. All this was clearly known to the originators of the Christian mythos with its elaborate formula for fixing the date of Easter. (Surely, there should be no doubt about the date of an historical event.) The confusion arises solely because of its antiquity and the fact that it is a lunar festival. Long before a solar calendar the moon was the arbiter of events, because the monthly cycle was seemingly connected with the ovulation and menstrual period. Until a patriarchal system evolved the moon ruled as Queen of Heaven.

Easter belongs to all mankind as the celebration of the rebirth of life each Spring. I conclude with this observation: the Coptic Church, which certainly existed in Alexandria long before Christianity reached Rome, treats every Friday as Good Friday and every Sunday as a combined Easter and Christmas Day. Could this be because from the beginning it was visualised only as something symbolic and not historical?

David Tribe

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Saturday, 22 March
Reception 6 pm Dinner 6.30 pm

Tickets (which must be obtained from the NSS in advance and not later than Thursday, 20 March) £2.70 each

Vegetarians catered for; advance notice essential

FREETHINKER FUND

It is gratifying to report that nearly 50 new postal subscribers were enrolled during the period mid-January until the end of February. Unfortunately the Fund total fell last month and we appeal to readers to make a special effort to bridge the gap during March. We are grateful to those who sent donations during February.

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THE FREETHINKER

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Brunswick House, 11 Brunswick Square, Hove, Sunday, 6 April, 5.30 p.m. John Lewis: "The Uniqueness of Man".

Croydon Humanist Society. Public Library, Katharine Street, Croydon, Wednesday, 16 April, 8 p.m. Susan Lord: "The Abortion Law".

Leicester Secular Society, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday meetings at 6.30 p.m. 16 March, Film Show and Discussion. 23 March, General Meeting (members only).

The Marie Stopes Memorial Foundation Lecture. The Lecture Theatre, Botany Department, University College, Gower Street, London, WC1. Monday, 17 March, 6 p.m. Memorial Lecture by Madeleine Simms: "The Compulsory Pregnancy Lobby—Then and Now".

Nottingham and Notts Humanist Group. University Adult Centre, 14 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, Friday, 14 March, 7.30 p.m. Edgar Eagle: "Francois Rabelai, Pioneer Humanist". Friday, 11 April, 7.30 p.m. D. V. McMenemy: "The Probation Service".

Southampton Humanist Society. Friends Meeting House, Ordnance Road, Southampton, Monday, 14 April, 8 p.m. Bryan Gould: "Legal Aid".

Worthing Humanist Group. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing, Sunday, 23 March, 5.30 p.m. Discussion led by Donald Park.

NSS Upsets the Methodists

invited only in order to liven up a dull subject with a little controversy and to give a false semblance of fairness. But this is like saying that the poor should refuse the crumbs from the rich man's table and die of starvation; for the humanist viewpoint has no opportunity of being heard on radio or television except in religious programmes, where the home team writes the rules.

Some programmes under the auspices of the religious department are not easily recognised as such when general social issues are under discussion, and it would be more honest if they were openly identified, as party political broadcasts are, to put viewers and listeners on their guard against accepting the views expressed as impartially objective.