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WILL RELIGIOUS FANATICS GAIN CONTROL IN BANGLADESH?

The news of the ruthless assassination of Sheik Mujib-ur-Rahman and his family was immediately followed by the new regime's proclamation of the re-styled "Islamic" Republic of Bangladesh, in place of the former People's Republic. This one-word change in the official designation of that unhappy country gives cause for some apprehension, even though the ten-man Cabinet that has been appointed includes two representatives of the Hindu religious minority. This can be taken as a token of their desire to treat all citizens justly. Nevertheless, the title of Islamic Republic must detract from the status of those citizens who are Hindus, Christians, Animists, Rationalists and Atheists.

No religious regime of any kind has ever been noted for progressive legislation, equity or compassion and existing Islamic nation-states (Libya, Uganda, Saudi-Arabia) are particularly repressive. Some have even re-introduced the harsh medieval Islamic penal codes, such as the stoning to death of women found guilty of adultery and the amputation of right hands as the "appropriate" penalty for theft. (It is interesting to note that both these barbarous practices recall Christian scriptural texts—but Christianity has at least outgrown these excesses under the influence of more humanistic attitudes.)

We are not suggesting that the new government of Bangladesh is likely to follow this kind of Islamic model, or that, if they did try to do so, they would long retain power in a country with the cultural traditions of Bengal. Indeed, their chief reason for dedicating the nation to Islam may well be simply the immediate advantage of obtaining much-needed financial support from oil-rich Islamic countries. But in the affairs of nations, the long-term view must also be considered. And in the long term, the Islamic emphasis could give fanatics constitutional backing for religious persecution, political totalitarianism, censorship, and the oppression of women. When Pakistan was established in 1947, it was in

the belief that the religion of Islam would provide the cement for holding together the new state, despite its geographical, cultural and linguistic divisions. But it became increasingly clear that religion alone could not bind together the East and West wings of Pakistan, and the administration, centred in West Pakistan, perpetrated injustices and atrocities against fellow-Muslims in the East.

A Good Man who Failed

After East Pakistan's war of independence, Sheik Mujib was hailed as its saviour, champion of the people, and symbol of their resistance, victory and new sovereignty. But the man could not live up to the image, and, long before the assassin's bullet cut him down, he had been overcome by the seemingly insuperable economic problems of the country and its recurrent natural disasters. He retired behind the lying reassurances of the sychophants with whom he had misguidedly surrounded himself, allowing them to destroy the democratic procedures he had set up in the early days of Bangladesh. Corruption swept the country, and he gave up trying to curb it, or even to keep himself informed of what was going on. It would take a superman to tackle the immediate problems of Bangladesh; and Mujib, for all his good intentions, was no superman.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the coup to the outsider is simply that there should be anyone actually wanting to take up the reins of government in such an impossible position. The new regime, whether or not committed to Islam, may at least perhaps be realistic, and determined to take action appropriate to the situation. If they can only launch a vigorous campaign against the excessive population growth in Bangladesh, a solution to its most pressing problem may be in sight.

One of the few members of the Sheik's family to survive the *putsch* was a little grandson—named Russell, after the English humanist philosopher. Will this child one day see his country delivered from the dire poverty that is its greatest enemy?

Interim Report from Whiter-than-White Committee

BARBARA SMOKER

The Second Special Report from the Select Committee on the Abortion (Amendment) Bill promised a further interim report before the summer recess, and this was accordingly published last month as the Third Special Report.

For an interim report after six months of deliberations it is remarkably slight. It makes no reference at all to the provisions of the White Bill, which were what the Committee was set up to consider in the first place, but the final sentence of the Report says that "the re-established Committee should be able to report without delay in the next Session". (This assumes, of course, that the Committee will in fact be re-established by the Government.) Meanwhile, this Report consists of recommendations that could be implemented immediately, without legislation—apparently with the intention of bypassing parliamentary debate.

Time having (deliberately?) run out for the White Bill, the Committee has virtually donned the mantle of the former Lane Committee, going over much of the same ground, though with the handicap of having to keep to those matters raised in the White Bill. Moreover, not only did the present Committee start out with firm opinions on the subject—a few liberal, the majority reactionary—but these opinions were generally known, and this must be a continuing embarrassment to them.

Uneasy Unity

This is no doubt one reason why the actual recommendations of this Report take up only two pages: least said, soonest mended. Remarkably enough, however, it is a unanimous statement. For this Committee to have achieved unanimity in even two pages of recommendations is comparable with Satan and the Virgin Mary presenting a joint statement on sin.

We can only guess at the amount of give-and-take behind the scenes. It is certain, however, that the Report did not really please any of its authors, and during the press conference that launched it there was some indication that they remained as divided as ever—though, till the very closing stages, they maintained a common front.

The Committee had, the conference was told, received over 200 written submissions, and the period for submissions would not expire for another ten days. Some of those who had submitted written evidence would be called during the next Session to give oral evidence, of which there had been very little so far. This was why, we were told, the Report made no reference to any of the evidence received.

The recommendations call for the provision of more adequate counselling for any woman seeking an abortion; for the rejection of any certificates of opinion given without prior examination; for a reappraisal of the forms of certification and notification and the system of recording them; and for disclosure to the GMC of professional misconduct by practitioners. There is also a recommendation that approval of abortion clinics in the private sector should be subject to various conditions, including an official scale of fees. Then special conditions are laid down for foreign women—that they should not be a majority of the women treated at any one place, and that special facilities should be provided for them, such as an interpretation service. This paragraph of the Report was the subject of insistent questioning at the press conference, especially as to the provision of an interpretation service obviously being more economical and practical if groups of the same nationals were treated at the same place, even if this resulted in some clinics having a majority of foreign clients. Why was this to be forbidden? The only reason given by the Chairman was that foreign women needed to be protected against financial exploitation—though, as was pointed out from the floor, this protection would automatically be provided by the implementation of the recommendation as to a scale of fees. Incidentally, it was elicited by a questioner that "foreign women" would include women from the Irish Republic.

Awkward Questions

Even more controversial was the paragraph on referral agencies, which "as a matter of urgency", demands the compilation of a DHSS list of approved pregnancy referral agencies and pregnancy advice bureaux and a ruling that no clinic should be permitted to accept referrals from any unlisted agency or bureau. Why, the Committee was asked, should the recommendation be for a "white list" system of this kind (comparable with the onus of proof being on the defence rather than the prosecution) instead of the far simpler and less chancy system of a "black list"? No satisfactory answer was given on this point. However, one hopeful representative of a women's liberation paper suggested, tongue in cheek, that the DHSS list of agencies and bureaux would serve a very useful purpose if displayed in public places such as railway-stations.

Questions were also asked as to the total number of referral agencies, the proportion of them

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Until recently, history was usually considered to be a matter of dates, the lives of monarchs and the records of battles. The mass of people—voteless, unrepresented and without civil rights—were regarded as unimportant. But today history is being seen increasingly as a struggle to achieve radical social and political reforms. The establishment of the National Museum of Labour History, at its permanent home in London, is the culmination of many years' work and planning by ordinary people—including, especially, the author of this article, who has been a stalwart of the Labour and freethought movements throughout his long life. Here he relates how it happened.

Since the official opening of the National Museum of Labour History at Limehouse last May by the Prime Minister, I have been repeatedly asked how it was that this voluntary venture by a comparatively few interested people could get off the ground.

One could say that it has been one of those "grass roots" projects, created and backed by dedicated people with a clear vision and plenty of determination to succeed in their objective. Its early history can now be told before this veteran of 85 years retires to the realm of forgetfulness.

I left a Bethnal Green (East London) Elementary school at the age of 14. It was about 1906 when I joined the Social Democratic Federation, at a time when many labour meetings were being held and pamphlets published. I read all the material that was obtainable within a limited income, when my wages were around ten shillings a week.

One considered it a crime in those days to throw away a pamphlet, even if it did cost only a penny, so it was stored for reference and to be read again. This interest of mine was due, I think, to my childhood habit of constantly reading through pages of my grandmother's scrap-book of social history of the 1840s, which fascinated me. Moreover, this was the only book I was allowed to read on the sabbath day, as my mother followed the usual strict religious customs of the time, when no child was allowed to sing music-hall songs or play games on Sundays but must attend church twice. They were days of gloom for me, relieved only by reading and looking at items portrayed in the old lady's scrap-book, which she had so diligently assembled in her younger days.

The magpie habit of collecting and never destroying pamphlets at that time was the start of my collection, which now totals 590 items of social history. Throughout the long, intervening years, there was always at the back of my mind the hope

of forming a society of like-minded people interested in collecting and preserving Labour's historical material and subsequently finding a home for it. One was reminded of the secularist movement, and particularly the National Secular Society, with its long history.

Everyone I spoke to about my endeavours thought it a very good idea, but when it came to doing something about forming a society all support vanished into limbo. Nevertheless, I still kept the idea alive wherever and whenever I got a chance to talk about it. This often resulted in some book, pamphlet or token coming my way: "For your museum", people would say.

It was not until 1963 that I discovered that a small local society at Reigate under the secretaryship of Henry Fry were sponsoring an exhibition of Labour documents, etc. Once again I had hopes, and the happy result was eventually the foundation of a Trust for a permanent exhibition, which is now housed in Limehouse Town Hall as a result of an agreement with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Historical Value

In money terms, the vast majority of the items cost me very little at the time of acquisition. Some, of course, were gifts from sympathisers. About the rest, I think I had "a nose" for what was suitable as an educational asset to a museum featuring the rise of the working class.

My greatest find, for the price of twopence, was undoubtedly a first edition of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-92) with notes of his trial for treason. I remember how my father, who was a follower of Charles Bradlaugh, always spoke fervently of Thomas Paine and his writings. As an office boy, in those early days of penury and pease-pudding for dinner, I would often spend my dinner-hour visiting the book barrow stalls outside the Standard Theatre, Shoreditch, or in the street gutters of Faringdon Road. On those costermonger barrows would be a quantity of old books, piled higgledy-piggledy, mostly surplus from a sale of middle-class household goods, destined really for pulping. One day, as I tossed over the pile, mostly of early-Victorian religious sermons bound in calf leather, embossed in gold lettering, that in their time had looked so elegant and correct in a "gentleman's library", my roving eye spotted this small volume—*Rights of Man*. Actually the book consisted of the two original sixpenny pamphlets, bound together with the printed notes of Paine's trial and conviction, when he was, in his absence,

(Continued on back page)

What Is "Christian Morality"?

R. A. D. FORREST

Is there a morality that, on the evidence of the gospels, can be regarded as distinctively Christian? Any unblinkered scrutiny of the gospels must make it manifest that they are primarily concerned with theology, not ethics, and that the incidental ethical content is either unoriginal or else actually runs counter to acceptable principles of morality.

Some years ago, Lord Boothby contributed an essay to a symposium¹ of the religious views of a number of notable people. In the course of that essay he quotes with approval a paragraph from Bertrand Russell's *Scientific Outlook*, written by Russell in his most bellicose mood; and then, almost immediately, goes on to say: "I believe that the teachings of Jesus Christ are the best that have been offered to mankind."

This attitude of mind, which accepts with excessive complaisance the superiority of Christian ethics, while rejecting the other doctrines of that religion as intellectually indefensible, is all too common, even among avowed humanists. It is probably behind much of the opposition to certain social reforms, especially in the sphere of sexual relations, and is certainly the main reason for continuing the indoctrination of children under the name of religious education.

Before, however, we reject this evaluation of Christian moral teaching, we must examine the gospel record to find out how much moral teaching it in fact contains.

Those who, whether or not they accept the narrative part of the gospels as true, use the term "Christian" as equivalent to morally acceptable, often point to the Sermon on the Mount as the source of their ethical creed. If they could only be induced to read chapters 5-7 of Matthew with some attention, they might be astonished to see how little moral teaching is to be found there. We do indeed find there the golden rule (already uttered in slightly different wording by Confucius); the injunction "love your enemies" (quoted from *Leviticus* xix, 18); and prohibition of revenge, a precept anticipated in Buddhist writings centuries earlier. While a moral maxim is none the less valid for being unoriginal, it is surely strange that such a collection—hardly an amalgam—of ethical judgments, of diverse origins, should be hailed as distinctively Christian.

Much of the rest of these chapters consists in "counsels of perfection", such as demands for passive acceptance of injustice and rules regarding the relations of the sexes which the civilised world has found to be impracticable.

By far the largest part of the Sermon is, however, theological rather than moral, if the word "moral" is interpreted as guiding the behaviour of man to man or of man to other sentient beings. This is particularly evident in one verse (vii, 6) which must have puzzled many an earnest reader; the command to "give not that which is holy unto the dogs" must be obscure indeed to anyone ignorant of the fact that to the Jews of the time "dog" was the common term of contempt for a heathen, a non-Jew. This usage appears clearly in *Revelation* xxii, 15, where "dogs" are classified alongside various types of malefactors; and perhaps even more plainly in Matthew xv, 24-26, where Jesus, having explained that his mission was confined to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel", elaborates the point by adding that "it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs"—an answer to the supplications of the Canaanitish mother which even the late Professor Brandon could not refrain from calling "cruel".

Other passages in this Sermon may be accepted as good psychological advice; unquestionably, many persons do take "excessive thought for the morrow", but the advice against such excess flies, as that on other matters, to the contrary extreme, as in v, 40. For the rest, these 109 verses are concerned with theology rather than with morals—a point which emerges yet more clearly when we compare the Beatitudes (and Maledictions) in the Lucan version (Luke vi, 20-26) with the emasculated parallel commonly read, as part of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew v, 3-12.

The Parables

Is more to be learnt from the parables? We may at the outset put aside the parable of the unjust steward, from which any moral that could be drawn strikes one as highly unedifying; the parable of the sower tells us of the differing mental attitudes with which Christian preaching is received, but nothing further; the prodigal son is shown to prosper at the end just as well as his industrious and blameless elder brother; the story of the labourers in the vineyard, whose reward depended on the whim of their employer and was unrelated to their deserts, is unlikely to commend itself as a model in an industrial society. Still more void of moral content is the story of the rich man and Lazarus; it is not told of Dives that his wealth was immorally won, nor that he employed it to his neighbour's hurt; nor do we read of Lazarus that he had any noteworthy virtues.

At first sight, the parable of the good Samaritan cannot be faulted on the ground of lack of moral content, and indeed it is possible to read it as approval and encouragement of disinterested kind-

ness. But the context in which the story is told must be looked at; it is told in answer to the question (Luke x, 29) "Who is my neighbour?" This, as well as the verses (x, 36, 37) immediately following, indicates that it is rather an expansion by definition of the notion of neighbourliness, which was already accepted by the questioner as entailing certain duties. The benefactor in the parable is made a Samaritan in order, plainly, to point the contrast between his behaviour and that of the priest and the Levite. But why a Samaritan rather than, e.g., a Greek? The answer, in terms of the religious and racial exclusiveness which we have already seen in the attitude of Jesus, is that the Samaritans, though schismatic, were not heretics; their doctrines diverged no more from those of other Jewish sects than these did from one another; they were, moreover, of the seed of Abraham and inheritors of the promise.

Two items in the narrative parts of the gospels contain oft-quoted sentences. In the story of the anointing of Jesus's feet by the "woman who was a sinner", Jesus, answering the objection that the expense might have been better applied to the relief of the poor, says: "Ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye can do them good" (Mark xiv, 7). On any straightforward reading, these words must mean that the occasion for relief should be the inclination of the giver rather than the direness of the need—a reading which conforms better with the dictates of a religious code than with any rational moral principle.

No less frequently misinterpreted are the words of Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"—usually quoted as evidence of the supreme selflessness of Jesus. But of what were they ignorant? From the Roman soldiers and the rabble at the execution to the priests in council, all knew full well that they were causing a particularly cruel death to a fellow being; what they did not know, the ignorance which was pleaded to palliate their actions, was that they were crucifying the son of God. The standpoint of the recorder of this episode conforms completely with the fact that the New Testament, abounding in condemnations of the crucifixion of Jesus, nowhere condemns crucifixion as such.

Eternal Punishment

Nor is this out of keeping with our general conclusion that we find in the New Testament no guidance whatever on the treatment of animals—surely a matter of ethical concern to civilised man. So far is such concern from the minds of the N.T. writers that we find St Paul, after quoting an Old Testament verse, which might have been interpreted as demanding humane treatment, expressly disavowing that construction (I Cor. ix, 9).

Of the New Testament doctrine of everlasting punishment, we need say little, as it has been

exhaustively dealt with by Phyllis Graham in her recent book.² We shall therefore note only that, although it was not invented by Jesus (see *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, col. 1367), this doctrine was fully endorsed by him: see Luke xvi, 23-28, *et passim*. It must remain a paradox that so many persons, including not a few kindly minds, have found themselves able to tolerate such a doctrine. Much mental ingenuity is needed to derive an ethic of kindness from belief in a deity of such monstrously insatiable malignity.

The conclusion of this analysis can only be that the primary interest of the gospel writers (and probably the sole interest of the tradition behind them) was not ethical but theological. Ethical teaching enters into the account of Jesus's doings and sayings only in so far as it confirmed and reaffirmed Old Testament passages. This view, as well as that of the Jewish particularism noted above, is in accord with the views of the late Professor Brandon.³

The occasional passages which appear to embrace all mankind, such as "the whole creation" (Mark xvi, 15—in an addendum generally agreed to be spurious) are so few, and in such total antipathy to the general tenor of the works, that they are reasonably held to owe their presence to later editors. The gospels are works of theology, not of ethics, and it is not unfair to suggest that those who regard them as a source of moral teaching have read them through the smokescreen of their early indoctrination.

¹*What I believe*, ed. G. Unwin (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1966).

² Phyllis Graham, *The Jesus Hoax* (Leslie Frewin, 1974)

³ Especially as expressed in his work *Jesus and the Zealots*, Manchester University Press, 1967.

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The Roman Catholic Church has been rebuffed in Malta where, despite a campaign led by the island's three bishops, the government's draft Bill to introduce civil marriage has been introduced. In a statement the bishops declared that "marriage is a sacrament and therefore civil marriage is not a real marriage in the eyes of the Church".

The Death of Jesus and the Empty Tomb

G. A. WELLS

It is still widely believed that there is good historical evidence establishing that Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb that was later found empty. This article shows that some theologians have themselves produced telling arguments against the trustworthiness of the relevant traditions.

In Mark, the earliest of the extant gospels, we read that, as Jesus breathed his last, the temple curtain was rent and the centurion at the foot of the cross acknowledged him as "truly a son of God". Before the evangelist passes on to the next incident—how Jesus came to be taken from the cross and buried—he notes that his death was witnessed "from afar" by a number of women who had ministered to him in Galilee and accompanied him to Jerusalem (Mark 15:40-1). Now Mark's account of both crucifixion and burial may well be based on earlier documents; but these two verses about the women witnesses, placed in between the narratives of these two events, are likely to be entirely from Mark's own hand, for they are clearly, as V. Taylor says in his standard commentary,¹ an addendum to the crucifixion narrative (after this has terminated in the climax of the centurion's cry) and preparatory to the accounts of the burial and resurrection, where the women are also introduced as witnesses.

In these same two verses, three of the Galilean women are named: Mary Magdalene, "Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses", and Salome. To us who know post-Markan Christian tradition, the first of these three names (if not the others) has a familiar ring; and it comes as something of a shock to learn that none of the women (nor, for that matter, James and Joses) has earlier been mentioned by Mark.

It is an essential part of Mark's Christology that Jesus should die alone, deserted by man and even by God (15:34). His disciples are therefore represented as deserting him at his arrest: "they all left him and fled" (14:50). Hence only the Galilean women who had come up with Jesus to Jerusalem are available as Christian witnesses of his death. Mark's statement that they stood "afar off" from the cross is not, as some commentators suppose, to be accepted as historically correct because of its modesty (in contrast with the claim, made in the fourth gospel, that both women and disciples stood right under the cross). Mark's "modesty" is here due to the conflicting motives which inspire his narrative. He wants the women

present so that his readers do not doubt that Jesus really died on the cross; yet they must stand "afar off" because he also wants Jesus to die forsaken and deserted.

Two Traditional Lists Combined by Mark

Galilean women, then, see Jesus die (Mark 15:40). They also see him buried (15:47) and according to Mark's next verse (16:1) they go to the tomb on Easter morning and find it empty. Mark is anxious to convince his readers that the tomb found empty was really Jesus' tomb, and that the women did not find an empty tomb because they went to the wrong one. Hence the evangelist is careful to stress that they witnessed the burial: "they beheld where he was laid" (15:47). The witnesses are named in this same verse as Mary Magdalene and "Mary of Joses". In the next verse the women who find the tomb empty are said to be Mary Magdalene, "Mary of James" and Salome. It seems then, that the traditions on which Mark drew supplied him with one list of names for the burial and another list for the discovery of the empty tomb (only Mary Magdalene being common to both lists). In 15:40, which we have already suspected to be Mark's own original writing—placed as it is after his narrative of the crucifixion but before his account of the burial—he clearly tries to combine the two lists into one, by specifying (as witnesses of Jesus' death) both Mary Magdalene and Salome, and by making "Mary of Joses" of 15:47 and "Mary of James" of 16:1 into one person: "Mary the mother of James and Joses (cf. Taylor, *op cit*, p.652).

The point of this detailed analysis goes beyond the mere details; for if the above suggestion is correct, Mark's narrative of the death, burial and empty tomb is thereby shown to be not straightforward historical reporting, but an attempt to synthesize earlier traditions; and we can know nothing of their provenance or reliability. Nobody knows who was Joses whose Mary (his mother?) witnessed the burial, or who was James whose Mary found the tomb empty. But they were presumably known (at any rate by hearsay) to the Christian community in which the underlying traditions (on which Mark drew) arose. If "Mary of Joses" means that Mary was his mother, then the upshot is that in some Christian community, the mother of a man himself known perhaps only from tradition, was believed to have witnessed Jesus' burial.

As the women in Mark's narrative approach the tomb on Easter morning, they wonder "who will roll away the stone for us from the door?" (16:3). Since, according to 15:47, they had witnessed the burial, it is strange that this difficulty crosses their

mind only now. But, as Taylor says (*op cit*, p.605), "the women's question arises from their purpose" (to anoint the body), "and if this is held to be improbable"—on the ground that Jesus had already been dead for the best part of three days—then "16:3 must be dramatic and imaginative rather than historical."

Proof of the Resurrection

It and the following verses seem to represent Mark's own imaginings (not those of a source on which he drew), for "every word belongs to his vocabulary" (*Ibid*, p.606). The women find the stone already rolled away, and when they enter the tomb a young man dressed in a white robe tells them that Jesus is risen—in words which, says D. E. Nineham, "reflect the Marcan vocabulary and correspond to the usage of Paul [who knew nothing of empty tomb stories] and the early Church".² In the scriptures supernatural beings habitually wear white; and Nineham gives evidence that "young man" was a not uncommon designation of an angel at the time when Mark wrote. It is clear that the assurance of this angelic person is a necessary part of Mark's proof of the resurrection—the mere emptiness of the tomb would not have sufficed to evidence the fact. That the angel's testimony is thus an integral part of the empty tomb story does not inspire confidence in the historicity of the whole. This is recognised by Christian commentators. F. W. Beare, for instance, says: "If we do not share the early Christian belief in angels who take part with human form and human speech in the incidents of human life, there is no reason for us to attach any historical value whatsoever to the story, even to the minimal element that women came to the tomb and found it empty."³

I have argued in a previous article that there is an obvious motive for the concoction of empty tomb stories.⁴ Paul had based the resurrection faith solely on the recorded appearances of the risen Jesus to named individuals (including Paul himself). But mere appearances could be dismissed by sceptics as hallucinations. An empty tomb was obviously a more objective warrant. That Mark's story was dictated by this motive is clear not only from its internal implausibilities, but also from the fact that the three later evangelists are not content with an empty tomb; they elaborate Mark's tendency to posit objective and tangible evidence of the resurrection by insisting on the reality of the risen body. Matthew, for instance, says that, immediately after the angel's message to the women, Jesus himself appeared to them, and they "took hold of his feet" (Matthew 28:9). The incident is in part but an expansion of Mark's empty tomb story: for the risen one simply gives the women exactly the same message as they had already received from the angel at the tomb, namely that they are to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see Jesus

(Mark 16:7, Matthew 28:7 and 10).

Luke establishes the physical reality of Jesus' resurrection by making him consume a "piece of broiled fish" in front of his disciples (Luke 24:42). John has it that he showed them the nail marks in his hands (John 20:25-6). Again, these discrepancies are of interest not in themselves, but because they show how different apologists made up different stories for a given theological purpose. Matthew and Luke are not, in this instance, altering Mark's narrative in the interests of a different Christology. The Mark which they used as a source terminated with the women at the tomb, and recorded no appearances of the risen Jesus. In this case, Matthew and Luke are supplementing Mark's narrative so as to reinforce a Christological view already adumbrated by Mark. But the stories they offer for this purpose are so divergent that they were obviously either freely composed to illustrate the required thesis, or, as E. Haenchen suggests,⁵ drawn from "a flood of local traditions which had established themselves in one place or another".

Concessions from Theologians

Professor C. F. Evans (theologian of King's College, London), concludes his careful study of the resurrection traditions in the New Testament by insisting that it is "quite impossible" to harmonise them. He repudiates Dr J. A. T. Robinson's suggestion that the differences in, for example, the empty tomb traditions are relatively minor legendary accretions, and no more than what one would expect in genuine accounts of so confusing a scene. He notes against Robinson that "the tradition differences can so often be accounted for in terms of conscious editorial modification which governs the whole version. It is not natural confusion but rather the lack of it, and the influence of rational reflection and apologetic, which have given rise to the contradictions."⁶

Critical theologians, then, have themselves supplied good evidence for rejecting gospel incidents as tendentious fiction. This has naturally alarmed some of their colleagues. The late Martin Werner, for instance (who was Professor of Theology at Bern) noted that, although Jesus' historicity is not today disputed as it was at the beginning of the century, anyone who wished to reopen the question could find, from contemporary theologians, plenty of support for a negative view.⁷ And so it is.

NOTES

1. *The Gospel According to St Mark*, 2nd edn., London, 1966, p.598.
2. *Saint Mark* (Pelican NT Commentaries), 1969, p.444.
3. *The Earliest Records of Jesus*, Oxford, 1964, p.241.
4. "Which New Testament? The Ending of the Gospel of Mark", *The Freethinker*, vol 95 (1975) p.43.
5. *Der Weg Jesu*, 2nd edn, Berlin, 1968, p.558.
6. *Resurrection and the NT*, London, 1970, pp.128-9.
7. *Der Protestantische Weg des Glaubens*, vol 2, Bern and Tübingen, 1962, p.237.

IRRELIGIOUS HOUR

Had the first Director-General of the BBC been a man of the average British irreligious temperament, instead of an avid Scottish Calvinist, the nation would have been spared its enduring heritage of Christianity on the air. Over the decades the Central Religious Advisory Committee has spread its tentacles from BBC radio to BBC television, then to commercial television, and ultimately to commercial radio, till today there are nationally almost five hundred hours of religious broadcasting each week.

It is a condition of the licensing of all commercial stations in Britain that they should perpetuate Lord Reith's Christian bias, and every TV channel and radio station has to churn out a set quota of religious indoctrination and "uplift" every day of the week, and several times on Sundays. To enliven this dreary duty, some of the compulsory religious slots are given over to discussion between believers and unbelievers—theoretically to demonstrate the superiority of belief over unbelief—and care is taken to ensure that a religious spokesman (generally a mainstream Christian) has the last word.

On Sunday, 17 August, Capital Radio (one of the two London commercial stations) dared to break with this conformist custom, when their regular Sunday evening religious hour, "A Question of Faith", took the form of a phone-in programme on secular humanism—with Barbara Smoker (President of the National Secular Society) in the studio answering listeners' calls.

She had appeared on this programme on several previous occasions, as one of a panel—the usual atheistic spice in the Christian pudding. But this was different. And the difference did not escape the notice of the Independent Broadcasting Authority—the authority charged with licensing the commercial broadcasting stations.

Pressure was apparently put on Capital Radio to alter the programme. The recognised religious slots must never (and certainly never on Sundays), the IBA said, be of a kind likely to disturb the faith of listeners. And there must always be an element of "positive religious uplift".

Capital Radio, to its credit, stood its ground, and the programme took place as planned—though under the veiled threat of the IBA's final warning: "We shall be listening very carefully". Barbara Smoker says she was so scared of losing the production team their jobs, if not actually losing the station its licence, that her usual hard-hitting style of riposte was consciously softened. However, she made some good points, and no doubt introduced many members of the public to an outlook they had never considered before.

Time will tell whether this one hour of local radio proves to be something of a breakthrough,

NEWS

or nothing but a flash in the pan. Even a flash, however, is welcome indeed after half a century of almost total freethought black-out.

SOPER TRUTH

It is seldom that *The Freethinker* has a sympathetic word for Mary Whitehouse, whose almost daily protests about something or another have made her the most censorious busybody in the land. But Mrs Whitehouse was certainly justified in protesting to Church leaders over Lord Soper's statement (in "The Sunday Debate" television programme) that "most Christians no longer believe in the Virgin Birth and the physical resurrection of Christ".

Lord Soper is one of Britain's best-known Christian showmen. For many years he has entertained audiences all over the country with his preaching and confrontations with hecklers (real and imaginary). He is a Christian Socialist, and, like most of that ilk, is adept at standing truth on its head in order to reconcile fairly radical socio-political views with the superstition of Christianity.

No doubt there are some religionists in fringe socialist-pacifist groups who accept the gospel according to Lord Soper. But it is nonsense to claim that the majority of Christians no longer accept the old mythology. Practically every Roman Catholic and the vast majority of Protestants believe such nonsense. Lord Soper may be embarrassed by the superstitious and irrational attitudes of his fellow-Christians. But he would earn their respect, and that of unbelievers, by openly declaring that he himself no longer accepts basic Christian teachings, rather than trying to hoodwink his hearers into believing that his brand of Christianity enjoys wide support.

It has been announced by the Converts' Aid Society that the number of Protestant clergymen converting to Roman Catholicism is increasing, but that lay conversions continue to fall. Adult conversions, which were 9,000 annually ten years ago, have dropped steadily, and when they were last calculated (1973) had fallen to below 5,000.

AND NOTES

"THE UNIVERSE" BURNS ITS FINGERS

The Universe, probably the most rabid Catholic newspaper in the United Kingdom, has had to publish an apology to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, worded as follows: "A review in our issue of 17 January of a book entitled *Babies for Burning* quoted a passage about a registered charity, The British Pregnancy Advisory Service, which we now realise was misleading in certain respects. We have been asked to make it clear that the doctor mentioned in our review had been reinstated by the General Medical Council by the time he was employed by the BPAS. We regret any embarrassment our review may have caused to the Trustees of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service".

We understand that *The Universe* has also agreed to pay the legal costs incurred by the BPAS in obtaining this apology.

A spokesman for the BPAS comments: "We are delighted, but this is only a beginning. *The Universe* obviously recognised the danger of losing a libel action we would certainly have brought if an apology had not been forthcoming. We are, of course, continuing our action against the authors and publishers of *Babies for Burning*, as well as our other requests for retraction from individuals and journals that have made misleading statements about BPAS".

Mrs Renée Short, MP (Labour, Wolverhampton NE), together with a dozen other Members, tabled a Motion in the House of Commons in which they noted with satisfaction *The Universe* apology and agreement to pay BPAS's legal expenses. In the House of Lords, Lord Houghton asked "what action the Director of Public Prosecutions has decided upon arising from the allegations of criminal actions in the book *Babies for Burning*". Lord Wells-Pestell replied: "The Director of Public Prosecutions has decided that the evidence is not sufficient to justify proceedings against any person arising from the allegations of criminal actions in the book *Babies for Burning*".

Lord Houghton commented that the reply given by Lord Wells-Pestell added to the mounting evidence of the unreliability of this book—on which, of course, the sponsors of the Abortion (Amendment) Bill relied heavily in getting it through its Second Reading.

IRISH SCHOOLS POLL

Bishops and priests who have been stridently claiming that all Catholic parents wish to have their children educated in church schools will be dismayed by the outcome of an opinion survey recently carried out in the Marley Grange district of Dublin. This survey reveals that the vast majority there are now in favour of non-denominational schools.

Several factors have contributed to this change in attitude. Most important is the violence between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, where schoolchildren have always been segregated along religious lines. Additionally, bitter feelings have been gradually building up against the majority of teachers in Irish church schools, who are notorious for their readiness to inflict physical punishment on pupils for the most trivial offences. Many members of religious teaching orders are in fact outright sadists.

Non-denominational schools are already open in Dublin and Cork, and most of those who attend them come from Catholic homes. Holy Mother Church is, at last, in the process of being expelled from the classroom.

INTELLIGENCE IN THE CHURCHES

Details of how the American Central Intelligence Agency has used missionaries and church officials to do its work are given in two reports by John D. Marks, an executive at the Centre of National Security in Washington and co-author of *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. The reports were specially written for the National Catholic News Service.

Mr Marks alleges that the CIA has regularly infiltrated the clergy and church organisations, and has poured funds into church-supported programmes, which they then use to manipulate events and promote political lines. At least one Catholic bishop was on the CIA payroll in Vietnam, and a CIA official had regular secret meetings with him. A Protestant missionary in Bolivia passed information about trade unions and farmers' co-operatives to the agency. He did so as "a patriotic duty".

Funds were made available to support a nationwide network of broadcasts in Colombia which were part of a church-run educational programme. The director of the network denied that it had received payment from the CIA. But Mr Marks, himself an ex-CIA agent, describes how the agency, through the offices of an American businessman living in Bogota, financed the programme. The station chief was Raymond Warren, who later directed the CIA operations against the Allende government in Chile.

BOOKS

THE VICTORIAN COUNTRY CHILD, by Pamela Horn.
Roundwood, £6.

"The Roman Catholic priest of Louth, in Lincolnshire," runs a news item of the 1860s, "has made the following comment on the issue of universal education: 'I can only say that it is a question of clothes, and especially of shoes; and I can't see how to get over that difficulty . . .'"

I am reminded of the logbook of the London secondary modern school in which I taught in the 1950s. This document, begun in the 1870s, made me aware of the Victorian problem that remained after compulsory education had been established: if there was rain in the morning, the school would be empty in the afternoon—because a child had only one set of footwear, and these after any resolute sort of rainfall were unusable.

Pamela Horn is concerned not with my urban boys and girls but with the rural child of Victorian times, and it is from her rich and fascinating book that the priest's hopeless words are taken. But the situation is much the same. One is horrifically struck by the importance of shoes. Or of boots. In the 1920s, which were closer to the Victorian era than arithmetic suggests, I wore boots when I went to primary school. They were inflexible things, and there was a social gulf, of which I still feel the effects, after half a century: it was between those who wore shoes, which were ineffable marks of social buoyancy, and those who wore boots, which turned you into . . . Shakespeare's Bottom. (Years later, watching David Waller in Peter Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream* stump round the Aldwych stage on caricaturally booted feet, I remembered how it felt to wear boots: the sense of ugly, clumsy inferiority). I suppose my boots were technically superior to those worn by rural children sixty years earlier. Mrs Kate Edwards, whose childhood was spent in Huntingdonshire in the 1880s and 1890s, and who is one of the witnesses drawn upon by Dr Horn, remembers that, for all the rubbing with shoe-oil every week, children's boots remained stiff, a cause of blisters and chilblains. The "little children 'ould start to cry with their feet afore they'd gone a quarter of a mile . . . Most . . . 'ould be crying about something afore we got to school . . ."

The book is full of old tears, bitter miseries. Childhood in the gentle English countryside was savage: "There was little time for pampering." The smallest were bundled into pieces of old shawl crossed on the chest and tied in a hard knot at the back. Then these tiny bundles were pushed aside to amuse themselves as best they could. There was a fair chance that mother was working on the farm herself. Given the number of women who were still so employed in the 1870s, says Dr Horn, the sur-

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prising thing is that tragic accidents occurring to untended children were not more common.

Food, for many, was hard to come by. In the countryside, brimming with milk, milk was a rare treat in the diet of the poor. Even the skim milk went to pigs rather than to people. The best of what there was had to go to father, to keep him in working trim. Children were often given tea kettle broth, which was "hot water flavoured with a few herbs or tag ends of bacon, sometimes little but the pure hot water." There was also a substitute for tea, in Wiltshire known as "frog water". You blackened a crust in the oven or before the fire, placed it in the teapot and poured boiling water on it. It stood for few moments, and then was "fit for use".

Turning Dr Horn's pages, one comes across detail after detail illustrating two truths about that rural poverty, so little distant from us in time: that it was callously cruel and exploitative, and that it was often endured, especially by children, with tremendous heroism and resourcefulness.

Ironies abound, many to do with the schools. I had not guessed that some of the horribly depressing dame schools survived for no other reason than that, unlike the local authority schools, they had in winter a little warmth to offer. In any case, like most of the churches (where a favourite subject for sermons was "the supreme rightness of the social order as it then existed"): the schools were institutions that set out to smother revolt.

At a school in North Warwickshire in 1857, the children spent five hours and five minutes each week on religion and prayers, ten minutes on music. It was Unmerry England with a vengeance. "The position elsewhere," comments Dr Horn, "was no doubt the same." Pass a school full of shivering, ill-fed and wretchedly clothed children, and you would have heard chanting coming from it. Examples of what was actually chanted are quoted here. For instance: "The gold of half a guinea might be drawn out so as to reach nine miles and a half. This property in gold of being capable of extension to so extraordinary a degree is owing to its great tenacity or cohesion of particles."

Dr Horn has come up with her rich haul of detail, her memorable chorus of rural voices, under nearly a dozen heads—covering early life, the home background, school, work, church and chapel, sickness and its cures, crime and punishment. Given material that speaks so mordantly for itself, she needs to add little by way of generalisation or com-

REVIEWS

ment. She does say in her introduction, however, that, despite the appalling deprivations, most of the children "enjoyed a happy childhood, secure in the love of their own family." That private pleasure in being alive, despite everything, comes through, especially in the section on high-days and holidays. I am old enough myself to remember the wholly convincing resonance there was in the word "treat" in such a phrase as "Sunday School treat".

There were, for the country child, as Dr Horn points out, other treats of a less formal kind. There were "fairs, menageries, or merely the sight of a party of soldiers marching along the high road." But at this distance of time, a reader may find far less happy details lodged in his mind after he's turned the last page of this first-class study—a perfectly absorbing social panorama.

He may remember the photograph that faces the title page: taken from Bedford Gaol Records, it shows James West, a 16-year-old labourer, with his prison number attached to the lapel of his jacket. The boy was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude in 1869 for assault and theft. Twelve years earlier, three boys were convicted at Bicester for stealing "3 lbs weight of figs from the shop of Mr James Goble at Bicester—of the value of 2s". They were each sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour.

After reading *The Victorian Country Child*, its pages so full of hunger and need, one wonders not that there was in the English countryside in Victoria's day so much of what was complacently categorised as "crime", but that there was so little.

EDWARD BLISHEN

POEMS OF AN ANGRY DOVE, by Kit Mouat. Mitre Press, £1.20.

An angry dove? A revolutionary with a sense of humour—which means, basically, a sense of proportion—what strange animal is that? And a poet to boot! With a feel for words and rhythms, the happy phrase, the lovely lilt, often original, seldom obscure. Rarer and rarer indeed!

To readers of *The Freethinker* Kit Mouat is well known—for her clarity of thought, her hatred of sham, her warmth of feeling. I enjoyed her last book of poems. This one is no disappointment. One could perhaps argue that some of it is uneven and

that at times her little verses are hardly poetry. But when so much is excellent, this is a minor fault.

Mostly the poetry flows. Some of the poems are purely lyrical, as in "Snowfall" or "Winter in the Netherlands"; but mostly they are involved with people in their social setting, acutely observed, and sometimes satirically, sometimes sadly, commented on.

At times the satire is biting:

*In the conquest of Mexico and Peru,
The Crusades and a persecution or two,
More than twenty-million people died by the sword
For the Christians' love of their Saviour Lord.*

At times deliciously witty, as in "Finding a Black-bird Mauled by Another":

*Anyone can
Describe Man's Inhumanity to Man;
What is more absurd
Is blackbird's inblackbirdity to bird.*

She has an interesting sideline on "Gay Liberation":

*Cupid
likes women stupid;*

*Eros
wants to be boss;*

*others
chose virgin mothers . . .*

*at least our gay and liberated sods
don't expect women to believe them gods.*

Freethinkers will also appreciate a poem entitled "Miscarriage". And a very moving "Prayer dedicated to Christians who opposed the Abortion Act", beginning

*Gentle Jesus meek and mild,
Look down we pray on this boy child,
Offspring of a school girl mother
Raped by her favourite elder brother.*

There is considerable variety. The poems cover, thoughtfully and pertinently, many aspects of the modern social scene: from the Royal Garden Party to an unhappy marriage; from socialites at a coffee party to a crash on the motorway in the foggy dew; from an original conversation between Adam and Eve to thoughts about a tadpole accepting its evolutionary fate without hankering after a psychiatrist.

Finally, there is a "Dirge and Epitaph for Unpublished Manuscripts":

*There is no pain like the pain of those who have
conceived and live to be bereaved . . .*

*There is none so dead as the written word, typed
and wiped out, retyped, unread, unheard . . .*

which will find an echoing chord in the heart of every writer and would-be writer who has ever faced a rejection-slip, whether with courage or despair.

FANNY COCKERELL

● "Poems of an Angry Dove" is obtainable from G. W. Foote & Company, 698 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL, price £1.20 plus 13p postage.

TOMMY. On General Release.

Religion plays a part in this film, but with the worship of a pop-star rather than a Christ. The adulation accorded the young man (Roger Daltrey), who can sing "I'm a Sensation" at top pitch and move or run as Ken Russell directs him, is a close parallel to the worst excesses of religion.

In my view, the best part of the film was the first half, leading up to Tommy's breakthrough. He is a child of the Second World War. When his father returns, after having been believed dead, to find his wife in the arms of another man, he is murdered by Tommy's putative step-father. The small boy Tommy observes this, but is instructed, with hysterical blasts of rock rhythm, that he has seen nothing, heard nothing and will say nothing. The trauma turns him blind, deaf and dumb: you can at least say that Ken Russell has the courage of his symbolism.

Tommy then follows a child-of-our-time progress through the snares and fads of the pop world of the 1960s—including attempted seduction by an acid queen and destruction by a cousin sadist. One of the best scenes is when he is taken by his mother to a vast service conducted round the idol of Marilyn Monroe. This scene is shot with baroque bravura: a colossal Madonna-like Marilyn is surrounded by the maimed and sick, seeking healing from kissing a foot or touching her hem or just feeling the "vibes" of the service—all to shattering rock sound—while, at the altar, sips of whisky and valium tablets are religiously dispensed, and censers swung by crooning girls spatter incense around this grotesque parody of a healing service.

The second half of this film charting the progress of a pop-Messiah is interesting, but I found it less coherent, even though Ken Russell's images remain striking. The pop-Messiah, once he has broken through his childhood trauma to his own sensations runs by the sea, past fishermen's nets, past people who turn and feel different, walks on the water and secures his first baptism. His movement grows; people come to his house, which, as commerce expands, acquires many mansions; followers buy symbols, T-shirts, and tickets to paradise; all to a cacophony of cash-registers. Just as, for centuries, church institutions have fashioned Jesus in the image that suits them, so now, as it suits the pop scene, a pop-star is fashioned in the image of Jesus.

I would not call the film profound; it is brash, noisy and crude; but, even if Ken Russell seems to believe that nothing succeeds like excess, at least he keeps his excesses colourful and alive.

JIM HERRICK

THE SACRED

I should like to reply to the views expressed by Peter Cadogan in his letter published in the August issue.

Mr Cadogan wrote "... religion is a combination of beliefs and rituals concerned with the sacred. The sacred is what is held to be set apart, different to the profane, venerated. This definition fits all religions and does not mention the supernatural or the revealed personal deity." He goes on to say that the "most militant freethinker" would admit "... that there are for him certain beliefs, forms, people and objects that he holds to be sacred, i.e. personally inalienable."

Thus it can be shown (to Mr Cadogan's satisfaction) that religious humanists, repudiating theism and revelation, are nevertheless concerned with experiencing the category and reality of the "sacred". This assumes, as a self-evident fact, that "sacredness" is an objectively real ingredient of the world; that it is only dogmatic secularists who will refuse to "open themselves" to the exhilarating and spiritually revitalising experience of the "sacred". (Presumably, this is "the miraculousness, mysteriousness, uncanniness of life," the "awe and reverence" that man experiences when confronted by the universe, etc.) However, I would like to suggest that this unquestioning acceptance of the idea of the "sacred" is only another form of alienation—enslavement to a notion, subordination to an abstraction.

If religious humanists reject the idea of *any* supra-mundane (i.e. metaphysical) reality, where is the practical basis for classifying *anything* as specifically "sacred". Surely, the word means something infinitely superior to man—something utterly majestic, virtually unapproachable, possessing, in its excellence and dignity, unconditional worth and necessity? If one denies the existence of the supernatural, where is such an absolute thing or value or reality to be discovered? Certainly, humanists often have passionately held convictions, but to say that such convictions are "sacred" (and therefore, by implication, unalterable, irreplaceable) is nonsense. To entertain a rational respect for certain values is one thing; to attempt a deification of these by characterising them as "sacred" is another. Attempts to "consecrate" or "sacramentalise" the material world are ultimately unsuccessful, for one very good and very basic reason—the essence of the notion of the "sacred" is its transcendent value, the fact that it represents something not only "set apart" from the profane, but intrinsically "beyond" it.

I can well understand why more conservative members of the major religions look askance at the well-meaning attempts of "religious humanists" to engage in "dialogues" with them; to deny the existence of the supernatural and yet to insist that this in no way denies the idea of the "sacred" is to assert that the world *itself* (or certain aspects of it) is something of immeasurable worth.

This "natural mysticism" (for want of a more appropriate phrase) could, anyway, only ever attract a minority; the vast majority will either give their intellectual and emotional allegiance to a traditional religion, which equates "sacred" with "supernatural", or else cheerfully embrace a rationalist secular outlook, entertaining a deep respect for certain values but not going so far as to deify these, to put them "beyond question" and describe them as "sacred". May non-existent God forbid we shall ever see humanist "vicars" conducting "services" in which a secularised "sacred" is worshipped.

GEOFFREY WEBSTER

ELASTIC TERMINOLOGY

Philip Buttinger's letter (August *Freethinker*), replying to my article on religious humanism (June), states that there is a problem of terminology in discussing that subject and its constituents, religion and humanism. It is true, as he says, that there are numerous uses of the word "humanism". This is inevitable with a word whose derivation gives it a broad meaning attractive to a variety of groups that identify their position, with varying degrees of plausibility, with the total human situation. For our part, as secularists, we find the word appropriate for our position, which results from the discounting of a supernatural order exercising itself over mankind. The more prudent of us, however, constantly qualify the term by calling ourselves "secular humanists" to distinguish ourselves from the motley band of supernaturalists—"Christian humanists" and the like—who have seized on the once trendy, blanket term "humanist" to describe their position.

"Religion", however, is to most people a much more clear-cut term. (To its detriment, many people see humanism as a kind of religion, and steer clear of it for that reason), Philip Buttinger and Peter Cadogan (also writing in the August issue), by extending the meaning of the word "religion" as they do, would render it as meaningless as, in isolation, the word humanism has become. In every-day usage, a religion is a set of beliefs in the supernatural, worshipped by means of a set of rituals, the whole usually watched over by some allegedly supernaturally endowed medium (priest).

Mr Buttinger's definition of religion as a set of beliefs that "binds together" a group of people and leads to ceremonial celebration is (doubtful etymology apart) all very well. But presumably such a definition would include, say, the British Labour Party, as a religious group with a ceremonial consisting of the annual mumbling of *The Red Flag*. Such an extension of the meaning of the word is hardly helpful.

As for Mr Cadogan's use of the terminology of Durkheim, this is fair enough in his letter in *The Freethinker*, where it is clear what he is doing, but to put the jargon into general use without explanation would only cause confusion. See, for example, his "creed" as published in the August *New Humanist*, where he speaks of the "sacred", "inalienable" and "to be venerated". One immediately questions the validity of these concepts on the basis of "old-fashioned" scientific rationalism. Surely, it is one of the few tenets of humanism, in our sense, that nothing is such that we fall on our knees before it and put it beyond scrutiny. I don't doubt (or, at least, I hope) that this interpretation is a travesty of both Durkheim and Cadogan, but it seems to me to be the direction in which the terminology leads, and it is a destination for which, I believe, humanism has no need.

When I spoke in my article of the chasm separating religionists and humanists, this was one of the main things I had in mind. It is the religionists' exercise of faith in some elevated I-know-not-what transcending human understanding that I find totally unacceptable.

As far as I am aware, there is no evidence from history that the practice of religion has ever been other than superstitious. Mr Buttinger draws our attention to the would-be atheistic religions (Buddhism, etc.) but surely they flourished only by being degraded into superstitions. (Is humanism in danger of going the same way?) For this reason, I am amazed that many humanists strive so hard to fit themselves into a religious tradition, which was and is nothing but a disreputable disaster.

CHRISTOPHER MOREY

WHEN IS A JEW NOT A JEW?

My article "Why I am Not a Jew" (*The Freethinker*, April) was mainly for laughs, and F. C. Cohen (August) and I don't disagree fundamentally.

He helps me make the point that these things are no more than clubs. It wasn't his intention, perhaps, but it's clear enough. If you resign, you're accepted nowhere. I'm happy with Jewish or Gentile friends, but not in a religious setting.

Without practising Judaism, I wouldn't convert to Christianity on the rack. I want the Jews to win, as a psychoanalyst once told me. Better a non-God than the son of one through a human mother.

I think the root of anti-Semitism is not only, as Hegel said, the foisting of an alien religion upon peoples with whose landscape and ethos it had nothing to do, but also that Christians know they took the wrong side and conveniently forget the whole issue.

William James was so right. Religions should not be taken literally, and to throw the whole thing out because of some discrepancy is uncouth. I want an abstract religion. I have the good fortune to know, not merely believe, that Otherness is present. I am sorry to the heart that our nature includes so much triviality and snobbery, so much in and out, us and them, one-up and down-with-you. It's probably a survival thing, but it robs survival of meaning.

There is nothing but misconception about Jewry. Even Jewish food isn't Jewish (Jews got their taste for it in Europe where it was already established).

Israel has been good for Jewish status in this worldly world, but I fear that bad beginnings mean bad endings. Until 1948, Jews were legitimately in Palestine. They had paid for all they had and caused prices to soar. Probably they'd have been chucked out anyway in the end; others had the fruits. Still, UNO gave away what wasn't theirs to give. Certainly, the circumstances were compelling, and what could be done for the Jewish survivors? Zionists in their turn forget the whole issue—but it niggles, as two wrongs don't make a right.

TED MYERS

THE WASTED YEARS

I have no desire to dispute the right of F. C. Cohen to cultivate his own mind, but it does seem to me that for a professed atheist and secular humanist, he attaches too much importance to his Jewish ancestry and antecedents. There can be no legal obligation for any person born in England to call himself or herself a "Jew". There is no legal obligation for a person born in England to belong to the Church of England, although it is "Established by Law".

If such titles or labels as "Jew" or "Christian" are acknowledged, it can only be by the free and voluntary choice of the individual. If I had been true to the Roman Catholic faith in which I was born and bred, it would have ruined the whole of my one and only life, instead of merely a large portion of it. It took me 50 years of human error to become a free man.

Those long years of error cause me to feel a profound respect for militant atheists. I have not, however, become an atheist myself, as I still do not see how the cosmic process could evolve without a creator, and I still do not see how the creator of persons could be totally devoid of personality. I do, however, acknowledge the fact that the existence of God is not something that can be either verified or falsified by sense perception or scientific observation. And even if the existence of God could be demonstrated by rational argument, it still would not contribute to any proof of the divinity of Christ.

PETER CROMMELIN

Constance Dowman's retirement from the general secretaryship of the Rationalist Press Association last month meant the end of a remarkable career in the movement. Although Mrs Dowman has been associated primarily with the RPA, she has devoted much of her spare time to other groups and plans to continue with this work.

After 43 years of devoted service to the Rationalist Press Association, Constance Dowman has retired from her post as general secretary. I am certainly not alone in finding it difficult to imagine the RPA without her. In 1932, when she joined the staff at Johnson's Court, F. C. C. Watts was managing director and had scored one of the RPA's biggest successes, the Thinker's Library. Unfortunately World War II brought problems which even now have not been solved. In all the changes of staff, style and venue with which Constance Dowman had to cope, especially in recent years, she seemed to be as steady as a fixed star about which so much else revolved.

At all the Board meetings since I became managing director in 1953 I never ceased to marvel at her calm efficiency and effortless mastery of detail. Her first-hand knowledge of RPA history and her contacts with the founding-fathers enabled her to give invaluable advice on constitutional propriety and the varied aspects of publishing in a specialised field.

She was very happily married to George Dowman, who for many years played an important role in South Place Ethical Society, both as a singer and as editor of *The Ethical Record*. Her interest in South Place continued after his death and she has just been appointed a trustee. She will also continue to be active in the admirable work of the Humanist Housing Association.

All humanists and secularists will join in wishing Constance Dowman many years of happy retirement.

Order your books and pamphlets now and avoid extra postage charges which come into effect on 29 September.

Our list of current publications is shown on page 143

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Interim Report

thought to be guilty of "abuses", and the number expected to be approved—but no figures were available at all.

Most of the answers (including evasions) were given by the Chairman (Frederick Willey, MP) according to the compromise decisions reached by the Committee, thus successfully preserving a united front until the conference was almost over. An argument then erupted between two members of the Committee. The Chairman, stopping one of them in mid-sentence, hurriedly brought the conference to a close.

Freethinker Fund

Contributions to the Fund have remained steady but we need to receive much more financial support from readers in order to bridge the gap between income and production expenses. Although *The Freethinker* is produced and distributed in a largely voluntary capacity, and our printers keep their charges as low as possible, increasing costs (which have dealt a death-blow to many other journals) have resulted in an element of uncertainty about the future. We therefore appeal to every reader who values a monthly, independent journal of secular humanism to send donations regularly to the Fund. Humanist groups—particularly those whose meetings are announced in the "Events" column—are asked to organise collections and fund-raising functions in aid of *The Freethinker*.

Thanks are expressed to those readers who have sent donations to the Fund in recent weeks. I. Barr, £1.44; J. L. Broom, £1; Miss R. Bush, 60p; I. Campbell, £4; A.E.C., 30p; A. R. Cook, £1; W. Gerrard, £5; T. Myles Hill, £10; P. Hinchliff, 53p; E. J. Hughes, £1; S. E. Johnson, £2; W. Lewis, £1; A. F. M. MacLennan, 44p; J. Manus, £2.40; B. W. Mills, 44p; A. E. Morris, £1.44; R. Pyne, £1.44; R. B. Ratcliffe, 44p; Miss M. R. Rayment, £1; A. Schopenhaur, 30p; F. G. Shaw, 44p; Miss B. Smoker, 70p; G. Stewart, 44p; E. West, 44p. Total: £36.79.

A commission has recommended, by a large majority, that the state church of Norway should be disestablished. It has advised the Government that the Church of Norway, which is Evangelical Lutheran, should be governed by its own members, and not be part of the state establishment. The commission's report is now being studied, but a final decision will not be made for two years.

PUBLICATIONS

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EVENTS

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Brunswick House, 11 Brunswick Square, Hove. Sunday, 5 October, 5.30 p.m. Matthew Bennett: "The Problem of the Single Homeless".

Havering Humanist Society. Harold Wood Social Centre. Tuesday, 11 September, 8 p.m. Roger Franklin: "Back to the Land".

Leicester Secular Society. The Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester. Sunday, 5 October, 6.30 p.m. A. L. Morton: "The Radical Left in the English Revolution".

Lewisham Humanist Group. Unitarian Meeting House, 41 Bromley Road, Catford, London SE6. Thursday, 25 September, 8 p.m. Barbara Smoker: "Thank God I'm an Atheist".

London Secular Group (outdoor meetings). Thursdays, 12.30-2 p.m. at Tower Hill; Sundays, 3.7 p.m. at Marble Arch. ("The Freethinker" and other literature on sale.)

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 28 September, 3 p.m. Annual Reunion.

From the Grass Roots

defended by Erskine, only to find himself later in a French prison under the threat of the guillotine.

My other exhibit of great historical value, which also serves the purpose of providing a memorial, is the presentation watch of Tom Jones. He was the first Organising Secretary of the London Trades Council of 1861; also, he was a part-time secretary of the London Tin Plate workers, and he compiled the First Directory of Trade Unions and Trades Councils throughout the country. Only two copies of this are known to have survived.

There are about 140 books and 150 pamphlets in my collection, all set out in a Schedule to the Walter Southgate Foundation Trust Deed, available for

inspection and reading on request. Many items cover the formative years of my early life as a socialist, a secularist and a trade unionist—and not an armchair advocate, either. There are also books of my drawings, calligraphy and designs, and my original diaries of 1906 onwards, foretelling the coming of the first World War and commenting on current political and industrial affairs. Other articles of interest include a handbill of a 1908 meeting on the evils of the living-in system, at which Bernard Shaw and Lady Warwick were speakers, and a leaflet of 1907, which is an appeal to all unemployed Boer War veterans to attend a demonstration. The handbill states *Work or Revolution*. The many interesting books include a debate between G. J. Holyoake and Reverend Brewin Grant (1853).

It will be clear that the opening ceremony of the collection on 19 May last was a very proud moment for me: the culmination of nearly seventy years' persistent effort, collecting money and material to achieve one of life's ambitions. I am also conscious, nevertheless, of the support and hard work which have been contributed by Henry Fry and my other colleagues in the Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative Democratic History Society.

● **The National Museum of Labour History, Limehouse Town Hall, Commercial Road, London E14; telephone 01-515 3229; nearest Underground, Mile End.** The museum is open every Tuesday to Friday (inclusive), 11 a.m. until 4.30 p.m. Admission free.

"The Forum", a conservative Catholic national weekly published in the United States, has sent a petition to Pope Paul warning him of "alarming deviations from papal teachings". According to the petition, America now faces a religion of "naturalistic humanism" which has publicly displaced the "Christocentric humanism" of the gospel. The petition states: "A sort of reprobate sense that enjoys ridiculing religion is spreading in public life, belief is rapidly on the decline and young people seem content to ignore the Church." Man alone has become the measure of truth and morality.

THE FREETHINKER

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