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STRIKE IN PROTEST AT SALE OF SCHOOL TO CHURCH OF ENGLAND

About 700 teachers joined a half-day strike on 22 January in the London Borough of Ealing in protest at the plans to sell Twyford comprehensive school to the Church of England. At a meeting held in the Town Hall on that afternoon it was stated that it is rare for teachers to strike on a matter of principle which does not directly affect teachers' salary or conditions—and this indicates the strength of feeling about the sale of Twyford school. The protest was particularly strong, it was claimed, because there had been inadequate consultations and because a change of attitude from the Church of England towards selection procedure had taken place.

The proposal of Ealing borough to sell Twyford school to the Church of England at a price of £1½ millions has raised vigorous objections for two years. (The National Secular Society held a public meeting about the issue last year). Ealing recently confirmed Section 13 of the 1944 Education Act formal Public Notice of intention is being issued. This allows its decision to go ahead with the sale, and under two months for formal consultations and objection to the scheme.

The National Secular Society has already protested about the sale of the school. A report in the *Ealing Gazette* (Friday 18 January 1980) read: "The National Secular Society and the Labour Party's Socialist Educational Association have both protested at the £1.78 millions deal to turn Twyford school into a Church of England secondary school. The National Secular Society, which is opposed to all forms of religious control of schools, has called for a formal public inquiry.

"The secretary of the society, Mr Terry Mullins, claims that the sale of the school would set a dangerous precedent. He said 'Everyone would be opposed to a political organisation being able to indoctrinate children through their own schools, yet

here we have religious organisations doing the same thing.'"

At the public meeting organised by the National Union of Teachers, Peter Kennedy, Vice President of the NUT, said the local union members had been so frustrated in their attempts to discuss the scheme with the local authority that a national delegation had been arranged. He declared the education authority had been high-handed and refused to listen to reasoned argument. A deputation which was eventually met by "two councillors of junior status" failed to discuss objections and "only listened." Mr Kennedy thought this was "an insulting way to deal with consultation."

He said that he did not object to church schools in general, but this particular scheme would upset the whole balance of education in the borough. It was the worst way to reorganise at a time of falling rolls. The church had a responsibility to ensure that the school continued to reflect the multi-racial character of the area. The London Diocesan Board had changed their position with regard to selection and were now insisting that they would give priority to Christian families.

Obnoxious Consultation

The Chairman of the Staff Association of Twyford School, John Sieff, said that the so-called consultations with a steering committee of the London Diocesan Board of Education were not consultations at all, simply an account of the proposals. John Sieff said: "I found such consultation obnoxious." He explained that Twyford school had a good record of racial harmony, successfully catering to all groups, as well as a good academic record. The sale, he feared, would create a school for an elite.

Moira Cyriax, a Parent Governor of Twyford School, said that the majority of parents were against

(continued over)

the change. She thought the sale was at the wrong time, in the wrong place, and of the wrong school: the wrong time, because of a falling school population; the wrong place, because Ealing was a multi-faith area; the wrong school, because Twyford had pioneered educational efforts to emphasise cultural values of different ethnic groups within one school—and many parents had chosen the school for that reason.

During the discussion from the floor Hilary Benn, a Labour Councillor and Governor of Twyford, said that it was a tragedy that the comprehensive system should come under attack now that it was finding its feet. He asked whether the London Diocesan Board realised that they were bringing the whole question of the role of church schools into public debate, and creating an enormous reserve of ill-will.

The meeting concluded with Malcolm Horne, an Executive Committee member of the NUT, warning that the Church of England would destroy their credibility by "this form of piracy." He also attacked the Borough Council saying that their claim to have an electoral mandate for the sale could not be justified since it was irresponsible to include it in their programme before consultations had taken place.

The Schools Secretary of the General Synod Board of Education, Mr Clive Jones-Davies, when asked subsequent to the meeting, said that the issue was bound to produce "a vigorous and important debate." He claimed the London Diocesan Board of Education had acted with considerable good intent in having consultations before the Section 13 Public Notice was issued. The change in selection priorities was due to difficulties with the race relations legislation (which could make agreements on selection relating to specific racial groups illegal). However, he was confident that when the church school was formed the governors would give serious attention to reflecting the character of the community.

Teachers' Views

Teachers at Twyford do not share his confidence. In a questionnaire 75 per cent of those who answered thought the Church of England takeover would impair the education in the borough. There was also strong dissatisfaction with consultations so far (82 per cent) and with information regarding the intake policy of the proposed church high school (80 per cent). There was great reluctance to stay at the school, 73 per cent of the teachers would not wish to work at the proposed Church of England school.

Freethinkers do not favour church schools within the state system at all, but the sale of Twyford school raises outstandingly important issues. Is there to be an increase in the number of Church of England schools at a time of declining school popula-

tion? Will there develop a number of voluntary aided schools of other faiths and what effect would this have on community relations? (It is believed that already there are plans in England for Moslem and Sikh schools). Is the aim of church schools to propagate Christianity (in which case should they get support from the public purse?) or to serve the community as a whole (in which case why should their selection procedure be different from all local authority schools?)

Arguments Against Sale

The arguments against this particular scheme were cogently put by Stephen Novy and Martin Maycock of the Ealing High School Defence Campaign in a letter to the *Ealing Gazette* (6 December 1979):

"A school giving preference to Anglicans, and other Christians, would by definition fail to include a proper representation of Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, and thus (by the logic of definition) under-represent the borough's substantial Punjab/Gujerati community whose members adhere to these non-Christian faiths.

"Preference for children of church-going families would mean a socially and academically unrepresentative intake.

"If the most favoured religious group in our community were enabled to buy public property with public funds to use for its own purposes at public expense, then other religious groups might well wish to do the same. The result would be the division of the borough's adolescents in the years when it is most important that they be together."

The argument was more sharply put by teachers and schoolchildren in posters at the NUT meeting. One read "Suffer *all* little children to come to Twyford." The other quoted a child's poem:

"Sorry you can't come here
it's a Church of England school, my dear,
Twyford school has been sold
for the biggest bid of gold."

BIBLE BOOM

World sales of the Bible were more than 500 millions per year by the end of 1978. Two million were sold in Britain. The Bible Societies explain the record sales by the growth of literacy in the developing countries and the popularity of modern translations.

The South African Government have banned "Anna Karenina" by Tolstoy on the grounds that it may influence people to a Russian way of thinking.

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Mother Teresa—Sacred Cow

BARBARA SMOKER

If Barbara Smoker is correct, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta is indeed a "sacred cow", in the usual sense of a subject beyond criticism, then we may expect the punning title of this article to provoke a few protests, even from "Free-thinker" readers. However, here the NSS President gives her personal assessment of the world's most celebrated nun, laureate of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize.

The Beeb's television documentary, "Nobel 1979" (shown February 10), predictably concentrated on the Peace Prize laureate, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. And the good lady, equally predictably, used the opportunity of her globally reported speech of acceptance in Oslo to spout anti-abortion propaganda.

While she was denouncing abortion as the greatest evil of our time (worse, apparently, than torture, terrorism, warfare, or the proliferation of nuclear weapons), the camera's eye flitted about the sophisticated, Nordic audience and not a face among them betrayed any uneasy doubts about this message or the fanaticism with which it was expressed, though statistics indicate that most of those present would in reality disagree with her, and many would themselves have had abortions or been involved with abortions. But in Western countries it is simply not done to criticise Mother Teresa. Nowadays you can get away with open criticism of Jesus Christ, but not of Mother Teresa.

In the West, among people of all religions and none, Mother Teresa has become a sacred cow; though in India, the land of the literal sacred cow and the chief focus of the holy lady's most publicised charitable work, open criticism of Mother Teresa and her activities are certainly heard. Of the various radio and television programmes that have featured her in Britain, the only one I have heard that contained any word of criticism of her was one recorded in Calcutta, where people actually said "We do not want her charity."

No doubt some of the recipients are pathetically grateful to this paternalistic—or, rather, maternalistic—emissary of alien affluence and an alien god, for the chance to postpone death by a few days or to die in less discomfort; while others resent the capriciousness of her help, too little too late, or at least feel ambivalent about it. Some of them may even perceive that their penury lends purpose to her life; some may be aware that she opposes the only possible long-term solution to their intractable problems—birth control. But it would require a knowledge of modern psychology and of Christian theology to understand the deep masochistic motivation of a woman who, as a lifelong "bride of Christ," sacrifices herself to a lost cause while es-

chewing the one chance of making any progress with it; and all for the passionate love and adoration of an all-powerful, invisible, aloof being, who apparently, chooses to create this colossal mess faster than she can mop it up, while "calling" her to dedicate her life to this Sisyphean task.

None of the other controversial issues on which I express an opinion from time to time ever provoke such horrified expostulation as does the mildest criticism of Mother Teresa—and this response comes from people of every creed and even from atheists. "But she does so much good!" they all say. But does she?

If a fraction of the resources she has deployed in Calcutta alone for the purpose of giving some of the dying paupers a little comfort and dignity in their last few hours had been devoted to providing free contraceptive facilities, the amount of human suffering prevented thereby would have been far greater. This, however, would provide no tear-jerking television scenes for the gratification of sentimentalists in the affluent West.

Dustbin Babies

After showing Mother Teresa receiving her Nobel award and making her anti-abortion propaganda speech, BBC2 showed a flashback to a visit made by Malcolm Muggeridge to Mother Teresa in Calcutta, when she showed him, and the television camera, that particular day's haul of newborn babies picked out of the dustbins by her helpers. Most of these babies, she explained, had been born to desperate adolescent girls, who simply left them in dustbins to die.

It struck me that perhaps some of the adolescent mothers placed their babies tenderly on top of the refuse just before the holy sisters made their known daily round of the bins, rather as desperate mothers in this country a century or more ago used to leave their newborn infants on the doorsteps of orphanages—and, indeed, one hopes this is so. Those who actually do leave their babies to die in dustbins fill one with horror—but so would similar cruelty to a dog or cat or any other animal. They could at least, one feels, snuff out the tiny infant life first. Indeed, the "crime" of infanticide, carried out instantaneously, would probably be the most rational, humane, and moral solution in these extreme circumstances. But abortion would, of course, be better than humane infanticide; early abortion better than late; and contraception better than abortion. The pious Mother Teresa, however, is uncompromisingly opposed to all these solutions. The only forms of birth control she would sanction are the uncertain rhythm method and the unrealistic counsel of perpetual abstinence.

She, together with many of her fellow Christians, would argue that the newborn baby, the foetus, the embryo, and perhaps even the zygote, have a "right to life." But apart from the mediaeval doctrine of "original sin" that puts the "immortal soul" of the potential human being in need of "salvation," there is no possible philosophical justification for the alleged right to life in the absence of consciousness of self-identity and a desire to continue. Of the modern moral philosophers who have dealt specifically with this question, Roger Wertheimer (in *Moral Problems*, ed. Rachels, 2nd edition) shows that the foetal right-to-life argument must depend on the irrational notion that a foetus is fully (not just potentially) a person, and thus a member of the reciprocal moral community of persons; and Michael Tooley (in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1977) goes further than this, arguing that a right to life presupposes consciousness of self as a continuing identity and a desire to continue to be, and that such consciousness is impossible in the foetus or even in the just-born infant. Tooley draws the conclusion that not only abortion but also infanticide is morally permissible, given strong reasons in favour of it, such as serious physical or mental defects. Social reasons alone could hardly qualify as a sufficiently strong argument for infanticide in an affluent country, where adoption is always a feasible alternative; but this would not always be the case in poor countries like India, and quick infanticide is surely morally permissible, and even morally preferable when the only likely alternative is slow starvation.

For millions of babies in India, starvation, sooner or later, is the order of the day—and it is beyond human ingenuity to feed them all. During the 1970s, the population of India rose by a hundred million—that is, by two entire Englands in a period of ten years. Living as she now does in Calcutta, Mother Teresa sees daily the appalling suffering caused by over-population, yet she refuses to accept the need for population control or the humane preferability of birth control over death control.

Obvious Sincerity

This is not to deny her obvious sincerity or her many other positive qualities. No one who saw that BBC film clip with Malcolm Muggeridge and the dustbin babies could fail to respond to the manifest maternal feeling with which she picked up one of these little scraps of human life, and the twinkling delight with which she declared that this one was surely going to live for it had the light of life in its eyes. She is certainly an amazing woman, a warm human being surging with maternal feeling. The normal outlets for this were thwarted by the contemplative religious life which, for the sake of her supernatural lover, was her chosen straitjacket from girlhood to middle age. Only in middle age—a time of life at which most childless women, and many

other people, face a crisis of vocation—she felt the "call of God" to break out of the enclosed convent life and found her own active religious order. Her subsequent career, especially its high degree of emotional involvement with the outside world and its public acclaim, must contrast very strangely with her past memories, while compensating to some extent for what she must now feel were her wasted years.

So Mother Teresa has, besides the minor virtue of sincerity, the major one of warm human feeling and involvement—but even this can be nullified by ignorance, and Mother Teresa's ignorance is frightening. Not only is her mind blocked to reason by orthodox religious superstition, but her long years of convent seclusion inevitably kept her innocent of a wide spectrum of common knowledge and experience. For instance, in the television film she used the give-away, emotive phrase "the cries of unborn babies"—indicating a completely erroneous idea of the size and nature of a human embryo. If only someone were to show her the little tadpole-like thing that it really is, or even the narrow diameter of the suction tube used for early abortions, she would surely stop talking such fanciful nonsense. What it comes down to is this: well-meaning people need to be guided by knowledge and reason as well as by feeling. The road to counter-productive action is paved with the best intentions.

The very week that the BBC screened the Oslo ceremony and the film of Mother Teresa fondling that appealing little scrap of new-born humanity, fired with motherly zeal for saving the tenuous little life and its supposed immortal soul, the Indian electorate gave Mrs Indira Gandhi a decisive mandate to implement a massive birth-control programme that could, in a few decades, begin to solve India's great problems, while Mother Teresa's sentimental tinkering with them earns her the Nobel Prize. Much as I deplored Mrs. Gandhi's excessive repression of civil liberties during her former premiership, I have no doubt which of these two women working in India today is the more deserving of international acclaim for attempting to alleviate the terrible human suffering in that country.

Mrs Gandhi is really doing something to save the Titanic, while Mother Teresa rearranges the deck-chairs.

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The Myth of the Resurrection

G. A. WELLS

Some recent Christian New Testament scholarship has accepted that the Jesus of history is distinct from the Christ of religion. Here Professor Wells, author of "Did Jesus Exist" and "The Jesus of the Early Christians", examines the dilemma faced by Christians to whom Jesus is, in effect, a myth.

Norman Perrin, who was Professor of New Testament studies at Chicago until his death in 1976, wrote a book, addressed to educated Christians and entitled *The Resurrection Narratives, A New Approach*, which SCM brought out in 1977. Like J.A.T. Robinson in *Honest to God*, Perrin wants to interpret the New Testament so as to make what it says acceptable to the largest possible number of intelligent persons. Accordingly, he holds that, although the gospel resurrection narratives are not literally true, they point to something which is more subtle and which may be believed. In fact this subtlety is no more than a form of words so vague and uncertain in meaning that anyone can subscribe to such propositions without feeling that he is saying what he does not believe. The gospels have lost their traditional halo, and, when coolly considered, show neither ethical novelty nor biographical distinction. Hence the tendency, typified in Perrin, to rely on mystical interpretation and an emotional appeal.

Perrin begins by noting the following facts:

1. In Mark, which originally ended at 16: 8, the risen Jesus does not appear to anyone at all.
2. In Matthew he appears to his disciples only in Galilee.
3. In Luke he appears only in Jerusalem and its environs.

These contradictions mean that it is impossible to accept all three versions as literally true. And Perrin decides that, rather than ask whether there was any resurrection at all, and if so what Jesus did subsequently, it will be more profitable to enquire what the evangelists believed happened, and how their beliefs differ. On this head, he argues as follows:

1. Mark understood the resurrection of Jesus as God having vindicated him out of his death by taking him up into heaven until he should return to earth to effect the final judgement.
2. Matthew too thinks of Jesus as having been taken up into heaven, but then as appearing to his disciples in Galilee "as it were proleptically, in anticipation of his final glory, having been given 'all authority in heaven and earth' (Matthew 28: 18) and as founding a church by virtue of his authority."
3. Luke thinks that the risen Jesus did not go straight to heaven, but first returned to normal

life in order to instruct his disciples in their new responsibilities of preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to the end of the earth.

I am not primarily concerned here with the justice of this exegesis, and will merely note on that head that Perrin's interpretation of Mark seems somewhat forced. Although he is quite right to say that Mark records no appearances, this evangelist seems to imply that appearances in Galilee (of the type actually alleged by Matthew) will occur; for he makes Jesus say, at the last supper: "After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee"; and, at the empty tomb, the women are instructed to "tell his disciples . . . that he is going before you into Galilee."

Perrin supposes (following Lohmeyer and Marxsen) that "going before them into Galilee" means leading them (in spirit) as missionaries into the gentile world (of which "Galilee" is a symbol) where they will "see" him—not at a brief appearance, as in Matthew, but at his second coming when he will judge the world.

Re-interpretation

My main concern is to point out that Perrin does not expect Christians today to accept any of the three evangelists' views of the resurrection. They are three myths, which, however, can, he says, be interpreted as conveying three messages that are meaningful today. I will record here only his re-interpretation of Mark's myth:

"For me to say 'Jesus is risen' in Markan terms means to say that I experience Jesus as ultimacy in the historicity of my every-day, and that that experience transforms my every-dayness as Mark expected the [second] coming of Jesus to transform the world (p 40)."

What does such an interpretation leave except the name of Jesus and the organisation which depends on it?

In an earlier book, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1967), Perrin distinguishes "historical" knowledge of Jesus from what he calls "faith-knowledge" of him. The latter "introduces a reference to a . . . non-historical reality" i.e. "the idea of God and his activity." Religious or faith-knowledge "mediates the understanding of ultimate reality" (pp 237-241). The technique employed here is worth noting. Certain words (such as God) have, by long association with religious ideas, acquired a certain sanctity which is not at all diminished by any uncertainty as to meaning. Other words (e.g. ultimate reality) have, by use in philosophical contexts, acquired a certain air of rational and logical precision. By equating the religious word with the metaphysical word, inferences which appear justified from the

latter are transferred to the former.

Dennis Nineham (in his Epilogue to *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by J. Hick, London, 1977) summarises the position of many modern Christians, typified by Perrin, as follows: scholarship has made it clear that the Christ who preached in the New Testament (and subsequently) is not identical with the historical Jesus (about whom trustworthy information is difficult to obtain); Christians nevertheless continue to believe in the preached Christ because he "does something to them," as "the lens through which all the demands and promises of God to them are focused." But, says Nineham, this position is so

"highly sophisticated" that in fact "many preachers fall back on the implicit assumption that the preached Christ and the historical Jesus are identical" (p 200).

One can understand the Christians' dilemma. They cannot retain indefensible traditional views, but, on the other hand, if they drop the tradition altogether, they are left with no justification for calling themselves Christians. Chemistry has developed from earlier traditions which it has cheerfully abandoned. But if it had to call itself "phlogistology" instead of chemistry, it would be hard put to find a justification for the title.

Omar Khayyam—Proof of the Truth

SAM BEER

Islamic culture is not currently known for free-thought. But there was much development of philosophy and science in the Near East circa 900-1200 BC, which led to some scepticism. The blind poet Abu'l-ala-al-Ma'arri (973-1057) wrote a parody of the Koran and derided all religions alike as absurd in his poems. However, Omar Khayyam is better known in Europe as a result of Edward FitzGerald's versions of his Rubaiyat.

The present state of the Moslem world makes us easily forget that it once contained many free-thinkers. One of the few English writers to mention them was, strangely enough, Chaucer. In describing the doctor in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer says that the doctor not only knew Hippocrates and Galen but also Rhazes, Hali, Serapion, Averroes and Avicenna—all Arab doctors and philosophers.

By the curious accident that he attracted the attention of Edward FitzGerald, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131) has become the Persian freethinker best known in the West. He was born in Nishapur in North-east Iran. Khayyam means tentmaker but Omar was a famous mathematician and astronomer. Ali-ibn-Zaid was introduced to Omar when Ali was a child of eight. Omar asked the boy to translate an Arab poem and describe curved lines. Ali said Omar was narrow-minded and cantankerous, but, as Omar was not orthodox, this may have been prejudice.

Omar himself was only eight when the Seljuk Turks occupied Nishapur. This may partly account for the pessimism of the *Rubaiyat*. There was an old story that the great Vizier Nizamul-Mulk and Hasan Sabbah, founder of the Assassins, were school friends and each vowed to assist the others if they ever attained riches and power. This is unlikely as Nizamul-Mulk was 30 years older than the others.

Neither Avicenna nor Omar believed in astrology, but because we have Omar's horoscope an Indian writer, S. G. Tirtha, was able to work out that Omar was born on 18 May 1048. When asked to predict the weather for a royal hunt, Omar used meteorology instead.

Rubaiyat is the plural of *Rubai*, a verse-form as popular in medieval Persia as our limerick. FitzGerald made it appear that Omar was describing his day but in reality each *Rubai* is distinct. Over 800 *Rubaiyat* have been discovered but it is unlikely that more than one hundred are the genuine work of Omar. FitzGerald produced five versions, which range from 75 to 101 stanzas, but none of these are direct translations.

The idea that the *Rubaiyat* are about wine, women and song is popular but doubtful when the verses are closely examined. The demands for wine may well be a criticism of the Moslem taboo on it. The verses are clearly not erotic. Although we are constantly enjoined to delight in the present moment, Omar's motive in using the "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" theme is very far from that of Donne, Herrick and Marvell. Omar is obsessed by the natural process which converts corpses into roses and fingers into pots. In some respects he resembles Thomas Hardy, but does not have the malice which made Hardy always dispense with the happy ending.

A French translator of the *Rubaiyat*, M. Nicolas, thought that Omar was influenced by Sufi mysticism and wine should be interpreted as a religious metaphor. FitzGerald doubted this and commented on the frequent praise of wine in his introduction to the second edition: ". . . other readers may be content to believe with me that, while the Wine Omar celebrates is simply the Juice of the Grape, he bragged more than he drank of it, in very defiance perhaps of that Spiritual Wine which left its votaries sunk in Hypocrisy or Disgust."

FitzGerald admitted that his version was not a strict translation. He thought it might be found

"rather dangerous among . . . Divines" but considered adding some stanzas "which I kept out for fear of being too strong." In a letter to E. B. Cowell, he described the *Rubaiyat* as "most ingeniously tessellated into a sort of Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian Garden."

Omar is contemptuous of power, religion and military glory:

'How sweet is mortal sovranty!' think some:

Others: 'How blest the Paradise to come!'

Ah, take the cash in hand and waive the rest;

Oh, the brave music of a *distant* drum!

He is particularly contemptuous of those who think they have all the answers:

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discussed

Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust

Like foolish Prophets forth: their words to scorn

Are scattered and their mouths are stopped with dust.

This verse, suggesting the gravedigger's scene in *Hamlet*, indicates his view of death as an organic process:

I sometimes think that never blows so red

The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;

That every Hyacinth the Garden wears

Dropt in its lap from some once lovely head.

Other passages suggest Gray's *Elegy* and Shelley's *Ozymandias*.

The universe is compared to a shadow-show, a game of chess and a ball game. Omar is a determinist and has no faith in prayer:

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line

Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

(Not all freethinkers would accept this).

And that inverted bowl we call the Sky

Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die,

Lift not thy hands to IT for help—for IT

Rolls impotently on as thou or I.

The difficulty of arriving at a true view of Omar is due to the uncertainty as to which of the *Rubaiyat* are Omar's. Freethinkers will recognise a problem similar to that many Christians face when reading the New Testament. For example, are they to accept the illogical cursing of the barren fig-tree as typical of Christ's character? Omar lived in dangerous times and we do not know if some *Rubaiyat* were written for himself alone.

Omar was a follower of the Arabian philosopher Ibn Sina, Latinised as Avicenna (930-1037), whose Aristotelian approach could lead to a rationalist view of the world. The Sufi mystics and Ghazzali opposed Omar. There is a story that Ghazzali asked Omar how he could determine one point in the heavens but, when he heard the *muezzin* call, would not stay for an answer.

One story about Omar asking for his salary is attractive. The minister asked what services he per-

formed. Omar replied that 1,000 years had to pass before another pioneer like himself could appear, whereas men like the minister could be found in every village. When the King heard about it he said "By God! Omar Khayyam is right."

No wonder he was nicknamed "Proof of the Truth."

WORLDWIDE

AUSTRALIA

The Anglican Diocesan Synod in Newcastle was told by Mr N. Spohr that homosexuality was a sickness and should not be discussed. "Ordaining homosexuals as priests comes next to ordaining women as priests," he said.

ISRAEL

There is a rumour in an extreme orthodox community of Israel that the Messiah is coming. Three leading rabbis are said to have dreamed on the same night that the last great battle on earth would be waged during April of this year, ushering in the new millenium.

SOUTH AFRICA

The minister, Dominee J. J. du Toit, at the Dutch Reformed Church in Germiton near Johannesburg, refused to conduct a funeral service at which blacks were present. The widow, Mrs Robina Smith, described his behaviour as "unchristian, insulting and thoughtless". Her husband was respected by blacks and Indians who worked with him at a local factory. Mrs Smith led a walk-out from the church and the funeral service was conducted by the undertaker in the open air. "We were very moved by the beautiful hallelujah songs my husband's staff sang at his graveside," said Mrs Smith.

AUSTRALIA

A challenge to State aid for church schools is expected to go to full High Court in March. The case is being mounted by the Council for the Defence of Government Schools (DOGS), who have been campaigning for over eight years.

According to DOGS the provision of state aid to church schools violates the Australian Constitution. DOGS argue that grants are invalid under Section 116, which deals with religious freedom, and claims that Section 96, which deals with grants to States, does not give power to help religious schools.

The campaign has already cost \$300,000 mostly paid by donations. If the case is won DOGS will have achieved a remarkable victory over religious privilege.

SALVATION ARMY "INFECTED"

The Salvation Army's new Commissioner in Britain has admitted that the Salvation Army had been "infected by materialism—but not as badly as other spiritual organisations".

The admission was contained in a *Daily Telegraph* interview with Commissioner John Needham, 61, who has been despatched from his native America to lead Britain's Salvation Army—a task he said which was not so much daunting as "terrifying".

Born in Ilkeston in Derbyshire, Needham went to the USA at the age of seven, and is a fourth generation Salvationist. He denied that he would try and Americanise Britain's Salvation Army.

THE DEVIL AND MR NIXON

At last the extraordinary truth about Richard Nixon's role in the Watergate affair is out — by courtesy of evangelist Billy Graham, a long time friend and apologist for the disgraced ex-President of the United States.

Graham, in a BBC Radio 4 interview, intimated that Nixon wasn't really the conniving crook the whole world imagined him to be after the Watergate disclosures—he was merely the innocent victim of devil possession.

What led Graham to this startling conclusion?

"Nixon," he told interviewer Gerald Priestland, "is not an easy person to know, but those who knew him well were astonished in the dramatic change in voice and vocabulary revealed on the White House tapes. It was as if it wasn't him talking."

Asked by Priestland if he was implying some sort of demonic possession, Graham replied: "The whole Watergate affair was in my view demonic, an attempt by the devil to destroy America."

One wonders whether the dramatic change in Margaret Thatcher's voice since she became British Prime Minister has sinister, supernatural implications . . . the destruction of the welfare state by demonic forces, perhaps?

GHG 2—CHRISTIANS 0

The recently-formed Gay Humanist Group has come out tops following two debates in London in which group members argued, in the first instance, that Christianity and homosexuality were not compatible, and secondly, that Christianity had nothing to offer gay people.

The two debates were respectively staged by the Streatham and Hampstead branches of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), and both events drew fair-sized audiences who came down firmly on the side of the humanist arguments put to them by GHG secretary Brian Parry and treasurer Barry Duke.

NEWS

The group reports a "slow but steady growth" since its inception in mid-1979, and hopes, through debates, public meetings, and talks to both gay and humanist groups, to be able to fulfil its key aim of bringing about a better understanding of gay people by humanists, and promoting an understanding and awareness of humanism among gay people.

If any humanist group would like to hear a speaker from the Gay Humanist Group, they should contact Brian Parry, 45 Telford Avenue, London SW2 (Tel 01-405 8572).

HOLY SMOKE

A clergyman is claiming more than £100 in compensation from Peterborough City Council for damage caused to vestments by a fire at the council's crematorium.

The Reverend Robert Taylor, rector of Haddon, was conducting a funeral service when his nylon surplice burst into flames when it touched a gas fire in use while the central heating was being repaired. The rector's claim for £109.80 for a new cassock and surplice has been sent to the council's insurers.

UNWANTED PRIZE

The National Viewers and Listeners Association offered producer Mark Shivas (who made "Glittering Prizes") their award for 1979. Mrs Whitehouse's accolade was given for the documentary play "On Giant's Shoulders" about a thalidomide victim.

VALA's trophy did not interest Mark Shivas, who turned it down. He said: "I'm afraid I can't take either her condemnation or her praise to heart. Some time ago I produced a series called *Cassanova* which the woman condemned out of hand without having seen it. Turning down the award is not a frivolity." VALA has been looking around for a new winner.

A DIGNIFIED EXIT

The sensational handling by "pop" papers of the news that the Voluntary Euthanasia Society was planning a "suicide handbook" has done the society no harm whatsoever. Indeed, the very opposite is true, for since the news broke that they planned to publish, strictly for members only, a booklet describing the safest and most painless ways of killing one-

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self, membership of the society has continued to soar.

What's more, the media appears to be adopting a far more objective attitude to the society's plan, and in several instances has examined in depth the whole question of voluntary euthanasia.

Most impressive coverage to date has come from the *Guardian's* Polly Toynbee, who wrote a sympathetic, two-part article on the subject for the women's page, one which was bound to stimulate further discussion and boost the society's fast growing membership figures.

Most important aspect of the Toynbee feature was that she went to great pains to explain that "at least half of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society's pamphlet, due to be published in the spring, will most likely be devoted to how *not* to commit suicide. It will also consider when suicide is or is not justifiable and how to avoid the nastier consequences for your friends and relations."

Barbara Smoker and Terry Mullins, President and Secretary of the National Secular Society, will be in Scotland at the beginning of March. Barbara Smoker will speak to the Glasgow Humanist Group and Edinburgh Humanist Group; Terry Mullins will be pleased to meet other freethinkers. They will be in Glasgow on Sunday, 2 March and Edinburgh on Monday, 3 March. For further information contact: Anna Maclaren, 6, Glassford Street, Milngavie, Glasgow G62 or Bill Farrer, 59, Fox Covert Avenue, Edinburgh EH12 6UH.

Freethinker Fund

We have to thank the following readers for their kind donations to the Freethinker Funds: —

H. A. Alexander, 75p; J. L. Allison, £1.60; Anon, £6.94; Anon, £20; G. H. L. Berg, £2.52; W. J. Bickle, £1; P. Brown, £1; B. J. Buckingham, £1; D. C. & F. Campbell, £12.60; A. C. F. Chambre, £1; S. & M. Clowes, £5; In memory of L. Ebury, £10; J. Galliano, £1; L. Hanger, 60p; E. Haslam, 60p; E. H. Kirby, 1; E. A. Napper, £3; M. O'Brien, £1; S. Smith, £2; G. Swan, £1; G. Vaughan, £2. Total for the period 18th December to 22nd January: £77.21.

Barry Duke, a regular contributor to "The Freethinker" and a member of the National Secular Society Council of Management, has agreed to edit the News and Notes section on a regular basis.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

ANNUAL DINNER

Guest Speakers:

JAMES CAMERON
MICHAEL FOOT
JIM HERRICK
NICOLAS WALTER

THE GUNNER (Near Cannon St. Station)

SATURDAY 29 MARCH 1980, 6.30 pm

Cost £7.50

Further details from National Secular Society,
702 Holloway Road, London N19 3NL

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

PUBLIC MEETING

TO COMMEMORATE BRADLAUGH'S
FIRST ELECTION TO THE COMMONS
APRIL 1880

Speakers:

CHRIS PRICE, MP
Dr EDWARD ROYLE
NICOLAS WALTER

APRIL 3 1980. 7 pm

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square,
London WC1.

Gay Humanist Group's President

MAUREEN DUFFY

will speak on 17 March, 7.30 pm

at Conway Hall, Library

All humanists welcome

Freethinker Jack Bond, from Birmingham, gave his portrait of Darwin to Russia on the celebration of the 120th year of "The Origin of the Species" in 1979. There is a Charles Darwin Museum in Moscow.

OBITUARY

JACK WALTON

We have received news of the death last year of Jack Walton, aged 71. A lifelong secularist and *Freethinker* reader, he took an active role in the thirties and played a leading part in establishing the Federation of North-Eastern Branches of the National Secular Society. He shared a platform with Chapman Cohen, whom he invited to speak in the North-East. He was a vigorous trade unionist and dedicated vegetarian.

"The world holds two classes of men — intelligent men without religion, and religious men without intelligence." Abu'l-ala-al-Ma'aarri. Poet and agnostic, (973-1057)

BOOKS

THE WORLD OF THE RANTERS: religious radicalism in the English Revolution. By A. L. Morton. Lawrence and Wishart, £2.50.

Of the Levellers, Diggers and Ranters who formed the radical wing of the Parliamentary cause during the English Civil War, the words of Edward Dowden seem appropriate: "Sometimes a noble failure serves the world as faithfully as a distinguished success."

The Levellers, on the whole, were radical in politics but in religious matters were comparatively orthodox by the standards of their day; however, the Ranters—"that host of democratic sects" as A. L. Morton calls them—went a great deal further in terms of popular dissent. In them:

"Rationalist humanism and mysticism, a strange but powerfully effective unity of opposites, combined to provide opposition to Calvinist orthodoxy . . . A movement rather than a sect, they combined a variety of seemingly contradictory views from a mystical pantheism to a robust plebeian materialism."

When I first read about the Ranters in any depth I found them a compelling fascinating assortment of people. As in all radical movements during a period of upheaval, they attracted a proportion of disturbed and schizoid personalities. But at their lively, argumentative and compassionate best the accounts of their meetings and supporters reminded me vividly of the great, self-educated old-timers in the freethought movement—a case, very probably, of similar personality types gravitating towards their natural milieu in different ages. Reading Dr Morton's book has largely affirmed, for me, this similarity. It could be argued, indeed, that secularism can trace its roots to some of the Ranter groupings; the same has been said of Quakerism, but its evolutionary course was naturally different.

Even the propaganda put out by the orthodox seems familiar. Virtually all *Freethinker* readers know the myth about the secularist orator (usually Bradlaugh, but others as well) pulling a watch out of his pocket and challenging God to strike him dead in five minutes. This compares rather well with A. L. Morton's anecdotes from publications telling how a Ranter preacher, in the face of a hostile audience, "called for . . . a pissepot, and in an instant, upon a great flash of fire, vanished and was seen no more." In another case, a Londoner called Kendall, "having made an assignation with a she-Ranter, 'was suddenly strook dead in the place to the great amazement and astonishing of many beholders'."

By the end of the 1640s Parliament, composed of an uneasy alliance of Independents and Presbyterians, was debating legislation for the suppression of atheism and other heresies. The weakness of

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both Levellers and Ranters was probably their simplistic optimism about human nature and sectional interests. In May 1649 the Levellers were politically neutralised and what was left of both movements was driven underground at the restoration of King Charles II. They left a mass of very scarce, but fascinating, literature; but their ideas, like a dormant bulb, remained to flower again at the end of the eighteenth century.

The World of the Ranters does not offer a detailed analysis of each of the Ranter groupings and leaders: rather it sets the scene in which the Ranters flourished, and it therefore devotes considerable space to Levellers and to the opponents of both movements.

An interesting account is given of Laurence Clarkson (or Claxton), a preacher-of-fortune who advocated several doctrines throughout his busy life. He and his wife made a brilliantly witty defence against sexual innuendoes brought against him by a committee of inquiry at Bury St Edmunds. On his later travels Clarkson was not averse to sharing his bed with some of his attractive women followers, but "I was still careful for moneys for my Wife, onely my body was given to other women."

I particularly enjoyed the chapter, "A Still and Soft Voice," about the kindly, rather domesticated radical, William Walwyn, whose views on "bastard Scholastik knowledge," the doctrine of Hell, civil liberties, the jury system and the expedition against Ireland, did little to save him from vitriolic and prolonged abuse. He was, says Dr Morton, "equally opposed to the hierarchical conceptions of feudal society and the devil-take-the-hindmost ethic of growing capitalism." Falwyn infuriated the Calvinists, with their idea of a predestined elect, with simple questions like, "How can you *prove* the Scriptures to be the word of God?" Accused of being a Jesuit, because he liked classical writers (in translation) he answered: "Such a wise Jesuit am I, that with all my skill I cannot construe three lines of any Latin author."

The final chapter of the present book, "Leveller Democracy—Fact or Fiction?" is devoted to the question of how far the Levellers (politically more powerful than the Ranters) wanted to extend the franchise under the Commonwealth. Some historians have argued, on the basis of Leveller manifestoes and statistical estimates, that the Leveller franchise would only have included financially independent heads of households. A. L. Morton, however, points out that the statistics involve a good deal of guesswork and extrapolation, and that the categories involved are, in his opinion, very far from clear cut.

REVIEWS

His conclusion is that while they made tactical exceptions—servants of one man, apprentices, (permanent?) recipients of alms and relief—the Levellers' ultimate contention was that the vote be given to "the free-born commons of England," even "the poorest that lives."

One minor criticism of this book is that, in common with several others dealing with the period, it tends to omit the year in dates over long stretches. This means that from time to time, when a month and day are given, the reader, if he or she needs to check on the context, has to wade back through numerous pages to be sure of the year. This can often be awkward.

A word of praise too: in this book the many verbatim quotations have not been rendered (as they often are by historical writers) in modern spelling. Instead the obsolete low-case medial *s* is changed, but the original spelling preserved. This makes the passages fractionally longer to read, but the gain in style, colour and authenticity seems well worth the effort.

The supporters of Parliament in the English Revolution have had a generally bad press. Writers, particularly novelists, have depicted them as sombre, vindictive, humourless bigots. A few of them were, but the same could be said of some of the Royalist party. Christopher Hill put it very succinctly when he said of this book: "It will be a revelation to those who think of the Roundheads as Puritan kill-joys." In fact the Levellers and Ranters, in terms of innovative ideas about political practice, civil rights, popular education, science, philosophy and sexual mores, were one of the most colourful groups of people in British history. *The World of the Ranters* has served them justly and well.

NIGEL SINNOT

WHITEHOUSE by Michael Tracey and David Morrison.
Macmillan Press, £3.95.

Whitehouse opens with a vignette of our heroine applauding a weeping homosexual as he retreats from a students' meeting she is addressing after telling her: "I go in fear and trembling for my life. I know that I'm going to be killed. It's all your fault." Why did she clap? As she explained, "You've got to do something for the poor fellow, he looked so dreadful."

The paradox of Mary Whitehouse's crusading career is that it could be motivated as much by fear and the hatred fear breeds as by courage and love. These authors—academic students of mass

communications research—discern in her and her NVALA followers "fear and insecurity among even those who proclaim their faith the loudest . . . it would be a rich irony indeed if the woman who has come over the past decade to be the very embodiment of the interfering busybody was really all the time merely asking no more than that she be left alone."

It would indeed. But, of course, she is asking for far more than that. She is asking, in the name of her concept of the God of Love, that the British people shall be *forced* to be good (as she sees goodness) if they will not be good of their own free will. She appears to have no notion of the necessary link between freedom of choice and genuine goodness. It does not seem to occur to her that—as a distinguished Conservative philosopher, Lord Hugh Cecil, put it around the time she was born—"virtue is attained in proportion as liberty is attained; for virtue does not consist in doing right, but in choosing to do right." Nor is she sensitive to the warnings given by Lord Melbourne that "the danger of religious zeal is the spirit of ill-will, hatred and malice, of intolerance and persecution, which in its own warmth and sincerity it is too apt to engender. Toleration is the only good and first principle, and toleration for every opinion that can possibly be formed."

Assiduous Whitehouse-watchers will learn little that is fresh from Tracey and Morrison, but the cumulative force of their exposition of Mrs Whitehouse's all-embracing and overweening intolerance makes their book worth reading. It is also the least partisan, most comprehensively documented book yet written about her. As a sociological analysis of her significance, it remains on a superficial level. The authors seem naively unaware of the characteristics of Moral Re-Armament—that "salvation army for the up and ins" from which Mary Whitehouse derives her idiosyncratic brand of Christian belief—and her vaulting ambitions to bring Britain "back to God" seem to have taken them initially by surprise. Having made this 'discovery,' however, they spare no pains to spell out the impact that increasing influence for the views of Mrs Whitehouse, NVALA and MRA is likely to have on us all: much more rigid control over not only the entertainment content but also the political views allowed to be expressed through the media (it is significant that Mrs Whitehouse once explored the possibility of using the Race Relations Act to prevent the appearance of the black radical, Stokely Carmichael), and a crackdown on "the forces of evil": Godless humanists and communists, liberals, 'permissives', intellectuals ("men with minds but without morals"), pornographers, homosexuals and other 'perverts' are all lumped together under this heading in her demonology.

The Whitehouse rhetoric is redolent with the apocalyptic rallying-cries of a holy war. Mrs White-

house and her friends see themselves as Daniels rolling back the forces of Satan. These are hydra-headed—especially in the media. For fifteen years, Mrs Whitehouse has applied herself tirelessly to the task of “cleaning up TV,” and has pulled herself up by her own bootstraps in the process from a provincial laughing-stock to a self-appointed national nanny.

She is fuelled by conspiracy theory. All who oppose her must—by definition—be the Devil’s agents, working to destroy the true Christian religion and subject the Britain she loves to Godless communist dictatorship. She has “a deeply felt, all encompassing, all-guiding sense of Divinity.” So, no doubt, has Ayatollah Khomeini. Their common error is to equate Godlessness with totalitarianism whilst utterly failing to perceive that their own God-led-ness could produce it too. Is not this the Sin against the Holy Ghost?

Whether or not you still think Mary Whitehouse is a laughing matter, read this book.

ANTONY GREY

JOHN F. KENNEDY: CATHOLIC AND HUMANIST by Albert J. Menendez. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, \$12.95.

“Most of the writings on presidential religion have sought to conform the president to the image that the author held,” says Albert J. Menendez. His own slim volume on John F. Kennedy is no exception.

Students of religion in America will find this book useful for the background it gives on the “Catholic issue” in American politics and the extraordinary emotions this could arouse in fringe parties and paranoid evangelicals. One Lutheran minister, for example, reportedly warned that if Kennedy were elected president “Protestants would be hanged in the town square of Levittown.” In earlier periods reactions to Papists were even more frenetic. The book also contains interesting information on the religious allegiances and attitudes of former presidents. To the general reader, however, and probably to most humanists, it is likely to appeal on the basis of its success—or failure—in sustaining its central thesis. Here I must give an emphatic thumbs down.

Before dealing with this central issue I should record that the author makes other gratuitous claims for JFK: claims that his own volume does much to cast doubts on. On the strength of reading six books a week and winning the Pulitzer Prize, Kennedy is hailed as an intellectual. Yet his scholastic record was mediocre to a degree; he gave no evidence of profound thought or reading (he had done a speed-reading course, by the way) in any subject; his prize was for *Profiles in Courage*, “a biographical study of political integrity”; and the authorship even of that must be suspect since ghostwriters featured so prominently among the “aides” that constantly surrounded him. Incredibly Menendez seems to endorse

a statement that JFK “spoke as a doctor of the Church”, and he himself compares him with More, Acton, Erasmus and Maritain, though Kennedy’s knowledge of Catholic teaching was so parlor that he admitted to Billy Graham he didn’t know what were his church’s views on the Second Coming. He is also saluted for “devotion to excellence” on the basis of his appointments, though they gave him some disastrous advice (eg, on the Vietnamese War) and he appears not to have fostered unknown talent (save sexual on occasions) but, like his scalp-hunting father Joe, to have gratified his ego by hobnobbing, even at breakfast, with celebrities.

His claim to humanism is asserted rather than argued, but the following “evidence” is given in one short section and by implication elsewhere. He is said to have been noted for “idealism”, a “willingness to jettison the uncreative anti-Communism of US foreign policy”, a “recognition that civil rights was a moral crisis” and, above all, a devotion to the separation of church and state. Yet in his much-praised Houston speech and his address to the Catholic Youth Organisation a week before his assassination (both reproduced as appendices) he gives pride of place to “uncreative” — one might almost say obsessive — anti-Communism. This ties in with his support of (apologists say his inability to prevent) Vietnamese War escalation, the Bay of Pigs attack on Cuba and, probably, covert plans to assassinate Castro. He said lots of fine words about the poor and the ghettos, but it was left to Lyndon Johnson to do anything significant about urban renewal and civil rights. Admittedly Kennedy’s record on the religious issue was far better than hysterical critics foreshadowed, but he ensured that “private and church-related colleges might receive some indirect, peripheral public aid” at the behest of the Catholic bishops, while publicly declaring that both he and they were devoted to the secular Constitution.

Perhaps aware that JFK’s record on specific issues leaves something to be desired, Menendez protests that, anyhow, his hero was a humanist because of his “concern and reverence for human values, an emphasis on the ethical in religion, and an orientation toward improving the human condition”. This rounds off an implicit *leitmotif* that he must have been a humanist because he was a bad Catholic. One might go along with this argument if it meant only that he opposed the hierarchy by supporting the pill: an issue that some theologians believe is not a question of “faith and morals” and which is certainly a humanist concern. Humanists may also view more tolerantly than most religionists his dedication to one-night (or, if reports are true, one-minute) stands and to dangerous longer affairs, which included a suspected Nazi spy, unstable film-stars and the moll of Mafia boss Sam Giancana, or the circumstantial evidence that he was previous^{ly}

married and divorced (none of this, of course, in *John F. Kennedy*). But who can regard the cynical and unscrupulous way in which he and his clan took people up, used them, dropped them, bribed them or fixed them in pursuit of political power or personal indulgence, and all behind a facade of masses and moralising, as "concern and reverence for human values"? A bad Catholic is not my idea of a good humanist.

DAVID TRIBE

THE SUICIDE CULT by Marshall Kilduff and Ron Javers. Bantam, £1.25.

This is not the big book that will no doubt appear in due course about the awful tragedy of Rev Jim Jones and his Peoples Temple. The authors are staff reporters on the San Francisco Chronicle. Ron Javers received a bullet wound while accompanying Congressman Leo Ryan on his investigation of the Peoples Temple in Guyana. Marshall Kilduff was one of a team of San Francisco journalists who had been researching the case for over two years before the expedition at the end of 1978.

"It all happened so fast" is one chapter opening and the book has the breathless style of a paperback hastily put together by journalists immediately after the event. For all that, it recounts with vividness what actually happened in Guyana, something which it was not easy to picture clearly while the front page newspaper stories delivered the events piecemeal garnished with headlines. Many will now only vaguely remember the horror of the mass suicide, for it is one of the paradoxes of the speed with which world news is spread by the media that it is quickly forgotten.

Congressman Leo Ryan, a politician who had gained a reputation for aggressive fact-finding missions, had been disturbed by reports of the Peoples Temple community in Jonestown and contacted by concerned relatives. He organised an expedition to Guyana determined to find the truth and to give an opportunity to leave to any disciple being held there against his will. After much delay they obtained access to the Jonestown community, spoke to Jim Jones, and began to appreciate the despair behind the patina of happiness being presented to them when they were approached by a few members asking if they could get out with them. While boarding a truck leaving for the airstrip, the expedition and a number of escaping members of the sect were shot at by Peoples Temple gunmen. Leo Ryan and others were killed.

Then Jim Jones gathered his people and told them that the time had come for them all to go to heaven. Cyanide-laced lemonade was sipped by almost the entire community and over nine hundred died in the mass suicide. Jim Jones was shot—it is not clear by whom.

The book describes these events, partly in the words of a reporter who was there: the delay in Georgetown, a city "like the setting of a Graham Greene novel of tropical intrigue, a place where nothing happens most of the time but where anything can happen sometime"; the isolated Jonestown clearing in the jungle 150 miles from the capital; the interview with Jim Jones; the dormitory where women tried to disguise their fear; the final carnage. It makes grim reading.

The book gives valuable background into the life of Jim Jones and while much more will certainly emerge there is enough information here to give clues to understanding the self-styled religious leader and the sect which he created. Jim Jones was without doubt initially motivated partly by philanthropy. But he was also inordinately vain, wilful, sex-obsessed, cruel, and above all able to convince followers that he would lead them to a better world (many of them came from a pretty bad, deprived world) and to deflect potential critics with charm and subterfuge.

He was born in 1931 in a small town in the mid-West. His father suffered ill-health throughout Jim's childhood and was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His mother supported the family and shocked the townfolk by being the first woman to be seen smoking a cigarette in the main street. No doubt Jim's genuine concern with racial integration in the early part of his career as a preacher was a reaction against his childhood background. (To speak for racial integration in Indianapolis in the fifties could lead to unpopularity.) His determination to make an impact on people, which so unfortunately took a religious direction, was also stimulated by a desire to escape American small town life.

The details of his career can be read in the book—how he set up his first church, moved to San Francisco and expanded his influence. Religion is pervasive in America and like everything else tends to be big and extreme. (At Niagara falls recently I saw a waxworks which offered a view of the "largest crucifixion in the world".) What is amazing is the extent to which a sect, whose religious content is minimal, based on the power of one man, can deviate so far from its original good intentions. Equally disturbing is the fact that it can become so corrupt without outside interference.

Although there was criticism of the Peoples Temple, both the press and local politicians were loath to believe that the Temple was not either another typical evangelical set-up or the happy family Jones' supporters kept on saying it was. Jim Jones had even briefly gained political support: he had helped mayor George Moscone get votes in a tight election and was rewarded with a position on the San Francisco Housing Authority commission. His career at that stage reads like a model example of *How To Win Friends and Influence People*. The way

in which religious and political lobbies intermesh in America is also shown.

A most alarming aspect of the story of the development of Jim Jones' sect is that it illustrates how such a sect creates the conditions for its own distortion. There is dependence on one leader to such an extent that the man cannot remain balanced, but as he veers away from sanity it is too late for members to escape from the sect. Slowly as beatings, sexual control and interrogation sessions are incorporated into the life of the sect, the world outside is kept at bay. The more the outside world is shunned, the more the sect loses touch with normality. Many sects have followed this pattern to some degree; the move of the Peoples Temple to Guyana to create its own jungle world is the ultimate in this development. And the disastrous consequences were the ultimate tragedy of this vicious spiral in which a sect's development may be trapped.

The Suicide Cult is not definitive and it leaves many questions unanswered. But it provides some of the pieces to puzzle out an understanding of this egregious example of how religion may damage mankind.

JIM HERRICK

CINEMA

WISE BLOOD (AA) at the Camden Plaza, London.

John Huston's new film *Wise Blood*, is a relatively faithful adaptation of Flannery O'Connor's short novel of the same name, written in 1952. The hero, Hazel Motes, is demobbed, and returns to the Bible Belt of America (Jimmy Carter country), determined to ". . . do things I never done before." His grandfather, as we learn from flashback sequences, was a hellfire preacher, and Hazel's childhood was fraught with quenched desire, fear, guilt and self-punishment. Hazel meets Asa Hawks, a street evangelist, who claims to have blinded himself to prove his faith. His amanuensis is his 15-year-old daughter, Sabbath, sullen, plain and predatory. Hazel develops a consuming love-hate for the pair, and establishes a rival church, that of "Truth without Christ, where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way." Conscience, he declares, is "a trick for niggers." He buys a ramshackle car ("Nobody with a good car needs to be justified") and preaches from its bonnet. While Hazel is harassing Asa and Sabbath, Enoch Emery, a friendless simpleton, batters on to him, as does Onnie Jay Holy, another street preacher, who like Asa, is out to make a fast buck.

A woodland tryst with Sabbath is dampened by Hazel's discovery that she is a bastard, Hazel is nonplussed, unable to square this with his image of Asa the pious martyr. It troubles him almost as

much as his car's increasingly skittish behaviour.

In an attempt to propitiate Hazel, by finding what his church needs, ". . . a new Jesus! . . . one that's all man, without blood to waste . . . one that don't look like any other man, so you'll look at it . . .", Enoch steals a grotesque, doll-sized black mummy from a museum and presents it to the delighted Sabbath. Hazel, unimpressed, smashes the little idol to pieces.

In the style of Greek tragedy, the hero can no longer delude himself, and he is punished for his hubris. Hazel finds out that Asa is a sham. His beloved car is demolished by a vindictive speed-cop. He blinds himself, and, snubbing his greedy, sweet-talking landlady, puts gravel in his shoes, winds barbed wire round his chest and walks out into a storm to die.

In my view, Hazel's tragedy, and that of many like him, is that he cannot shake off his upbringing. His attempts to rid himself of Christ, of ". . . the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind" stem from a morbid obsession with Christian belief. He cannot reject the traditional Christian package of confusion, guilt, tenuous hope, expiation. His clutching at straws (Sabbath's purity, Asa's blindness, his car's roadworthiness) prevent him from embracing the realism and generosity of humanism. Nor is there anyone in the decaying, listless South who can help him grapple with his faith and become free. Self-styled evangelists and religious graffiti and neon signs ("Call on Christ," "Jesus Loves") abound, but blacks, foreigners and the lonely get short shrift—unless, of course, they can be exploited for cash.

This is a masterly film, very true to Flannery O'Connor's distanced, quirky style. It is a fluent, pithy film (so much so, in fact, that I had to turn to the book afterwards to get a full grasp of all the intricacies of plot and motivation. Each location is right and each face—Brad Dourif (Hazel), with his bitter, rather equine face, Amy Wright (Sabbath), doughy and cunning. It is raw and intelligent. But it does lose, deliberately, some of O'Connor's sense of mystery and a lot of her sympathy for Enoch and Hazel. Huston has taken an essentially religious book and turned it into an anti-religious film. Flannery O'Connor said in her note to the second edition: "That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying to get rid of the ragged figure . . . For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to do so." Huston in an interview has said of the film's blasphemous ending: "I suspect that, if they have their wits about them, any audience with the least religious conviction will feel outraged. At least, that is the object of the exercise." You pays your money . . .

VERA LUSTIG

LETTERS

EVOLUTION DEBATED

I am astonished and fascinated (as many notable scientists throughout the world must be) to learn that Tom Cavalier-Smith ("The Freethinker", December) has unravelled the mystery of the origin of life and presumably is now creating life forms in test tubes, like the "Magician" in Somerset Maugham's novel.

Some of these scientists are so cavalier (sorry!) as to maintain still that Darwin's theory of evolution is challengeable, as of course was that of his grandfather Erasmus Darwin (which no doubt influenced Charles' initial thinking). Could it be that humanist scientists (pace John Sutcliffe) are just as prone to wishful thinking as religious ones in their biological analysis? I am a sceptic, not a humanist.

Mr Cavalier-Smith's analysis of the DNA of apes and men leaves out the important point: that whatever the physical similarities of life forms, the gap in brain-power between an Einstein, a Shakespeare or a space technologist and any beast remains so colossal as to be an inconceivable development in the few million years since the first ape-bones have been traced. This is the significant factor in the three per cent DNA difference.

When I read Von Däniken's first two books my impression was that one of his theories (he claimed no more for them) was that space-landers on earth could have allied with the most developed form (perhaps *homo erectus*?) they found, thus creating a biological leap. If, as Mr Cavalier-Smith claims, one species can develop into another, this theory ought to be more acceptable to him than it is to me. One objection to it and all such inter-relations of species, of course, is that a horse-donkey alliance produces a mule, which is infertile.

The other Von Däniken implication was simply that the space-landers taught some of their technology to early man.

Lamarck's theory also was of a biological leap, but within the human species, as dramatised by Bernard Shaw in "Back to Methuselah".

With DNA as with the Big Bang, we are still up against the unsolved mystery: what started it? What chemicals came before the Big Bang, and caused it? An explosion cannot come out of nothing: nor can matter. Perhaps the Rev Michael Bourke would find this problem has some analogies with that of the Shroud of Turin; and his hope, on the available evidence, cannot be dismissed any more than the speculations of myself or Mr Cavalier-Smith, if we are truly honest.

AUDREY WILLIAMSON

CATHOLICISM AND NAZISM

Peter Brown's statement that Hitler and Goebbels were Roman Catholics is an understatement. Hitler was Germany's fourth Roman Catholic Chancellor: his predecessors, Schleicher, Papen and Brüning were Roman Catholics. Germany was ripe for a Jesuit take-over. (Isn't Britain very nearly ripe?) The Nazi Party was born in RC Bavaria: its headquarters were in Munich, Germany's Dublin. While Hitler was building up the Nazi Party in Munich, Pacelli, later on Pope Pius XII, was Nuncio there.

The following stars in the Nazi galaxy were Roman Catholics: Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler, Heydrich, Neurath, Frank, Kaltenbrunner, Ley, Streicher and Seyss-Inquart. RC Papen was Hitler's Deputy Chancellor: and Bormann's son became a Jesuit priest. Every Fascist dictator, Salazar, Franco, Hitler and Mussolini had a Concordat or "Treaty of Harmony"

with the Papacy. No sooner was Petain lodged in power by Hitler than two things happened: (1) Petain passed anti-Jewish laws for Vichy France, and (2) the Pope blessed his regime. The first post-1918 Fascist dictator was not Mussolini, the first was the RC Pilsudski.

The RC hierarchy in Germany was wildly behind Hitler—just as the ecclesiastics, including the Pope, were behind Mussolini, the Pope decorated Mussolini and the well-infiltrated Lutheran Church supported Hitler too. The German Lutheran Church was as infiltrated with Jesuitism as the Church of England is, posing as "Anglo-Catholicism".

Roman Catholicism has always been the font of anti-Judaism: a "Black Mass" has Roman Catholicism stamped all over it, it means nothing to a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Salvation Armyist: Luther was brought up a Roman Catholic and that part of his "faith" he never discarded. It is not necessary to teach anti-Judaism to a Roman Catholic child. The figure of an impaled bleeding Christ on a crucifix does that. The Reformers knew that, hence their rejection of it.

THOMAS GOODISON

LET'S SING A SECULAR SONG!

After reading Mr McIlroy's article about secular activities, may I put forward the suggestion that we should try to introduce community singing into our meetings and also have special song sessions. There is great appeal in music and singing together is a joy, a stimulation and a friendly activity.

Human societies have used the community song at all stages of their existence. So the suggestion is not a poor imitation of church hymn singing.

All early societies, including my native Scots, used songs for work and for play. The religionists did not disdain to use music in their ceremonies—or shall I say—misuse it after the Reformation and particularly when Presbyterianism, Methodism, Baptists and so on began to "popularise" religion, there came a thousand and one hymns and religious songs—many of them very beautiful. Indeed, going to church for many was going to a singsong. The sermon was boring, the singing was fun.

There seems to be no reason why secularists cannot continue a social tradition in their own way. I remember there used to be a Secular Song Book, with verses that looked strangely like hymns. I don't know if I want to suggest its revival—we would need to have a new look at it. But I do seriously put forward the idea. And if young secularists want to rock it up or pan it out (or whatever the phrase is), then we should encourage them. And we old ones should add our voices to the chorus. Why not?

FRANK MAITLAND

SPREADING THE WORD

I am writing to tell you and your readers how pleased I was to receive the copy of "The Bible Handbook" edited by G. W. Foote and W. P. Ball. I have greatly enjoyed reading it and although the price is to be increased it is still worth every penny. It is clearly written and well presented and I am going to ask our library to buy a copy. I am also going to ask a local prison if they would like me to send on to the prison library my copy of "The Freethinker". Do any of your readers have any other ideas as to how we can spread the word?

JOHN WATSON

It is always worth asking your local library if they will take "The Freethinker". Also if you know of an "Alternative" type bookshop in your area they might agree to put "The Freethinker" on display; show the

(Book Request)

manager a copy and ask him or her to contact G. W. Foote and Co for supply arrangements.

Of course, word of mouth persuasion of friends to become subscribers is sometimes the easiest and most fruitful way of increasing regular readers.

—EDITOR

I would be most indebted to any reader of "The Freethinker" if they would get in touch with me if they have a copy of Charles Bradlaugh's book "Humanity's Gain from Unbelief".

JOHN BOYLE

21 Dunham Grove, Leigh, Lancs, WN7 3DS

The sale of two works of the theologian Hans Küng has increased by 21 times in recent weeks. Professor Küng's views lost him the right to teach Catholicism at Tübingen University as reported in "The Freethinker" (January).

The Age of Enlightenment Co, an arm of the movement for transcendental meditation led by Maharishi Yogi, put in a bid for the Liverpool Meccano factory when it was threatened with going out of business. The Age of Enlightenment Co was set up last year by the World Government of the Age of Enlightenment and its English base is Mentmore Towers.

The Minister for Information and Inspiration, Mr Peter Warburton, said they were looking for a factory of about 750 people to establish a British centre for coherence. He said that if they were starting a manufacturing operation from scratch meditation would be a condition of employment.

EVENTS

Belfast Humanist Group. Dr D. Alcorn: Friends of the Earth. Thursday, 14 February, 8 pm. 8a Grand Parade, Castlereagh Road, Belfast. Secretary: Wendy Wheeler, 30 Cloyne Crescent, Monkstown, Co Antrim. Tel: Whiteabbey 66752.

Berkshire Humanists. Richard Halsall: Humanist Good News. Friday, 14 March, 8 pm. Friends' Meeting House, Church Street, Reading.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group. Stuart Hood: Censorship in Broadcasting. Sunday, 2 March, 5.30 pm. Imperial Hotel, First Avenue, Hove.

Harrow Humanist Society. Hermann Bondi: Energy. Wednesday, 13 February, 8 pm. Gayton Road Library, Nr Harrow on the Hill station.

Havering and District Humanist Society. Dr George Gray, FRAS: How the World will End. Tuesday, 19 February. Richard Phillips: The Evolution of the Legal System. Tuesday, 4 March. Both 8 pm. Harold Wood Social Centre (Junction of Gubbins Lane and Squirrels Head Road).

Lewisham Humanist Group. Terry Liddle: The Humanism of Karl Marx. Thursday, 28 February, 7.45 pm. Lee Centre, 1 Aislobie Road, Lee, SE12.

London Young Humanists. Christian Wolmer of Shelter: The Housing Crisis in London. Sunday, 17 February, 7.30 pm. BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8.

Merseyside Humanist Group. AGM. Michael William: Campaign Against the Arms Trade. Monday, 18 February, 7 pm. (Talk 8 pm.) 46 Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Open University Humanist Society. AGM. Saturday, 23 February, 2 pm. Room 47, Friends Meeting House, Bull Street, Birmingham.

South Place Ethical Society. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday Morning Meetings, 11 am. 10 February, Beata Bishop: Whatever Happened to the Feminine Principle? 17 February, Joyce Marlow: Fact and Fiction in History. 24 February, Sir John Whitmore: The Inner Game. 2 March, Professor Peter Self: Social Science and Social Wisdom. Sunday Forums, 3 pm. 10 February, Ronan Bennett: What is Anarchism? 24 February, Professor Claire Palley: Rhodesia. Tuesday Discussions, 7 pm. 5 to 26 February: Theme—Health.

Sutton Humanist Group. John White leads a Literary Evening. Wednesday, 13 February, 8 pm. Friends' House, Cedar Road, Sutton.

Tyneside Humanist Society. Rev P. W. H. Eastman: Campaign Against the Arms Trade. Wednesday, 27 February, 7.30 pm. Friends' Meeting House, 1 Archbold Terrace, Newcastle 2.

Warwickshire Humanist Group. Members' Forum. Tuesday, 4 March, 8 pm. 69 John O'Gaunt Road, Kenilworth.

West Glamorgan Humanist Group. Mrs Sheila Lockhead: Penal Reform. Friday, 29 February, 7.30 pm. 4 Gloucester Place, Swansea.

Worthing Humanist Group. Professor J. H. Sang: Fundamentalism v Evolutionism. Sunday, 24 February, 5.30 pm. Burlington Hotel, Marine Parade, Worthing.

THE FREETHINKER

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