

THE ENGLISH FREE CHURCHES. By Horton Davies, M.A., D.D.,
D.PHIL. (Oxford: Home University Press; 6s.)

The internal divisions of Protestantism in the English-speaking world are distinctive. Today it is seen more clearly than ever before that the apparently endless number of Protestant Christian bodies in our civilisation really falls as simply into two main divisions as continental Protestantism does into Lutheran and Reformed. For practically all our Protestants are either Church of England or Free Church. I know that the Free Churches are still divided into a number of bodies, very distinct in history, ethos and prayer-life. But no one, either friend or enemy, will see anything incongruous in their being given common treatment in Dr Davies's little volume. I know that the day has not yet come when Methodists could merge their Methodist traditions into a common Free Church allegiance; and the same must apply to the other main divisions. But it seems hard to see any reason in the long run why these bodies should remain separated from one another. On the other hand, although this speaks a great deal of the growing rapprochement between the Church of England and the Free Churches, it must be generally admitted that the division between these two types is still far deeper than that between the Nonconformists among themselves.

It seems that the title 'Nonconformist' will eventually disappear in the same way as 'Dissenter' has done. They now prefer to see their common bond to consist in freedom rather than in nonconforming. The psychology is similar to that which is leading all Protestants to try to win back for themselves in common use the title 'Catholic'. I remember being told at a Methodist gathering that there are Methodist Catholics as well as Anglican and Roman Catholics!

Historically the principles which seem most to have characterised the Free Churches seem to be freedom from all institutional authority in matters of religion, whether it be hierarchical or civil or any other. Closely allied to this is their opposition to 'sacerdotalism' and assertion of 'the priesthood of all believers'. In their early history, they seemed almost equally opposed to any set liturgy, except such as could be discovered from reading the Bible. Dr Davies suggests that the Free Churches today have restored the liturgical principle, and no longer object to set forms of prayer on liturgical models, provided that room is still left for private and spontaneous devotion. But he thinks that the Free Churches are justified in continuing their 'witness' to the 'priesthood of all believers' and, in general, to the democratic principle in Christianity.

The present book is an admirably written history of the rise, problems, expansion and stabilisation of English Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Quakers. It deals less with their differences, and little with their peculiar doctrines,

though these latter were in some cases held with great fervour. Doubtless it was wise in so short an account not to over-emphasise doctrinal controversies which are no longer alive today. It cannot have been easy to bring the complicated history of these groups into so modest a compass, and to present it in so readable a form. For the book certainly will hold our attention.

A Catholic reading this type of book will notice a complete absence of any reference to the fact that Catholics and Non-conformists struggled together for several centuries, labouring together under common religious, civil and educational disabilities, crippled by the same Corporation, Conventicle and Five-Mile Acts. It is conceivable that a Catholic would be equally unconcerned with the common sufferings of Nonconformists, so marked has been the tradition of bigotry and antipathy between us. Persecution will often draw people together, as it drew together Protestants and Catholics in Germany in the recent war. Several factors seem to have prevented this in the case of Non-conformists and Catholics. One factor would be the ideology of the Free Churches, whose objection to the Church of England was always that they had not gone as far as they should in their rejection of Roman errors. Another would be the policy of the Nonconformists in favour of undenominational education. In this book this policy is depicted as a struggle for toleration against Anglican attempts to impose the Church of England. Since the Church of England had so many schools in which half or more would be Nonconformists, their struggle sounds reasonable. But it was of course in practice equally a struggle against Catholic schools for Catholics.

How far is it true today that the love of freedom in the Free Churches places them at the opposite extreme to ourselves? I venture to think, not so far as Dr Davies would seem to imply. Nonconformists are increasingly recognising the sound Christianity of doctrines and practices they once queried or rejected. Thus they do not all so wholeheartedly reject the priesthood of orders, in addition to a priesthood of the faithful. They are coming back to the liturgy, and many of them express faith in a visible Church. In matters of belief, as with most other Christians, many are returning towards orthodoxy, and many have never lost a simple faith in the Creed. Further, if they look towards the Catholic Church, they must be impressed by the growth of the Apostolate of the Laity, and the increased appreciation of a common priesthood of the faithful enabling everyone to have their part in common prayers and sacrifice. They must be impressed by the growth of Social Christianity under the guidance of the Popes, and with the co-operation of both the orders of clergy and the organs of Catholic Action.

Dr Davies in his little book has steered clear of all clash with Catholics, perhaps because of his wisdom in avoiding mention of

us. May it help us to appreciate a large and influential body of Christians, who have a history distinguished for the social work they have undertaken for the good of their neighbours!

H. FRANCIS DAVIS

FREEDOM AND AUTHORITY IN EDUCATION. By G. H. Bantock. (Faber and Faber; 18s.)

When a book starts out by claiming on its title-page, with Peacock, that the nonsense written on education in the past outweighs the nonsense written on anything else, we can be tolerably sure of a lively treatment of the author's theme. We can also expect that he will be speaking from coherent terms of reference, and that he will be constructive as well as negative; for otherwise the challenge on the title-page would rebound upon himself. Mr Bantock's book has certainly fulfilled its very bold task with flying colours. It is indeed one of the greatest merits of the book that the several chapters, most of them familiar to the readers of the various educational journals in which they have appeared, take on when reprinted together a unity which, on the one hand, will stand the closest scrutiny, and on the other hand could not have had its organic strength detected as they came out piecemeal before.

The theme is a reassertion of the need for *authority* in the education of our children. Mr Bantock joins issue squarely with the two characteristic features of the Progressive movement—'self-expression' and 'group activities', as both of them leading to impoverishment and barbarisation through an incomplete (and therefore false) view of what the human person is. At the very outset, then, the Catholic reader is attracted, since this is the crux of his own diagnosis of modern educational wastage and *malaise*. He reads on to discover what kind of humanism is going to be offered.

Mr Bantock's method is first of all to strip away some of the complacency of doctrinaire Progressives by attacking their fashions at the source: the ideas from which they flow. This involves a devastating analysis of the philosophy of planning, as mustered in the work of its most respected exponent in this country, the late Professor Karl Mannheim. The charge is not only that Mannheim's planning, if consistent, would lead to the discounting of personality in education altogether, but that it cannot in any case be consistent. 'The individual finds his protection in the future of the community and the anonymity which that implies; responsibility for the future is pushed on to the impersonal forces involved in the proper working of society that the plan implies, and is to a considerable extent removed from the care of the individual'. Yet the planners have to admit that there is no objective measurement they can apply to the plan, but only their own subjective assessment, and one moreover