

wished to defuse a freely proliferating sectarianism and, either in society at large or as leaders of sects like the Baptists or Quakers, to bring religious speculation to its senses, place it under control, making the sects respectable, orderly, cautious—in other words, repressed. That repression could not have been achieved by a myth of practical Christianity, of levelling charity—Coppe's myth—but only by a myth of excess, of a collapse of theological and moral bearings, of spiritual disintegration, of, as it were, religious irreli-gion.

Who, one might finally ask, benefits then from the myth's resur-rection and inversion in our own time? Only those whose com-mitment to the notion of the people's history as a counter-cultural struggle against oppression outweighs their desire to understand the past in its own terms. In this sense, they may happily prove as mythic as the Ranters.

#### REFERENCES

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- 2 *Calendar of State Papers (Domestic)* 1649-50, p.563.
- 3 *Commons Journals*, VI, 354. The resolution was printed as a broadside (Thomason Tracts, 669 f.15 [11]).
- 4 *Commons Journals*, VI, 444, 474-5.
- 5 J. F. McGregor, 'The Ranters 1649-1660' (unpublished B. Litt. thesis, Oxford University, 1968), pp.82-3.
- 6 B. L. Lutt. II. 35.
- 7 See, for example, Derek Hirst, *Authority and Conflict: England 1603-1658* (London, 1986) pp.289-90; Alan G. R. Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State: The Commonwealth of England 1529-1660* (London, 1984) pp.353-4.
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- 9 McGregor, 'The Ranters, 1649-1660', p.47.
- 10 Christopher Hill, 'God and the English Revolution', *History Workshop*, 17 (1984), 19-31.
- 11 *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, entry under 'Coppe, Abiezer'.
- 12 Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p.210.