

FREETHINKER

Registered at the
G.P.O. as a Newspaper

FOUNDED 1881 by G. W. FOOTE

Friday,
January 27, 1967

SHAME OF THE NATION

(Cathy, Come Home. Second showing: BBC 1, Wednesday, January 11.)

IN FILTH, misery, degradation and humiliation, Cathy displayed herself yet again on the goggle box to shock once more the comfortable millions, to outrage the senses of the affluent, to stir the thick conscience of near indifference. We saw her move through the emotions of love to the motions of love to the consequences of love to the apparent utter fulfilment of love and then on and down to disillusion, tension, fear, sorrow, sadness, sick sick ever more sickening despair, all the turmoil and toil and fight coming to a deadening halt at a noisy turbulent railway station, where her creations of love and hope are finally wrenched from her leaving her alone, her consciousness annihilated, her senses numb with grief.

We must all hang our heads as long as we bear this shame of the nation. Thousands of God's houses are empty six days of the week and almost empty on the remaining seventh and yet the children of Man must seek shelter in derelict ruins along with those other social outcasts, the wretched rats. Or else they must be herded like cattle ready for the slaughter of social rejection in communal family doss houses devoid of the "disruptive" influence of procreative fathers. Rumbustious rockets zoom to the moon. New and ever more sophisticated methods of destruction roll off the production line of murder, end products of millions of pounds of research into the ways of death. And whilst these carriers of death lie idle in stockpiles of superabundance awaiting only the cacophonous climactic call of fear and hate much needed houses for the living go by default.

There is no more to this editorial but silence. The silence which can only make us think for a few empty lines of the hapless homeless and weep in our hearts for the poignant tragedy of so many thousands who do not have the good cheer of a comfortable home, only the melancholy misery of terrible, terrible deprivation. For them hope and joy are silent. For them, who can do nothing, there is the mournful silence of emptiness. For us, who can do a great deal, there is the searing silence of shame.

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THE NIGHTMARE OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

B. T. Rocca, Sr.

IN THE *San Francisco Examiner* of November 11th the Knights of Columbus have a large advertisement entitled "WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?" One can only read it in utter amazement. It states that every day almost 100,000 human beings pass into the "beyond"; that no one can tell when his time will come and that no human being has ever been able to look into eternity and tell us what it is like.

Actually, the number of humans dying daily has increased to almost twice the figure given, which reduces to about 7,000 per hour or 116 per minute, or approximately two deaths for every second.

When they say that "no scientific knowledge or instruments can pierce the curtain that divides this world from that into which all of us must journey", they are of course speaking about that of which they know nothing. All living things pass through their life-span, be it long or short. The evolutionist, the biologist, has told us that we are all related to other animals having come up the evolutionary trail for hundreds of millions of years. Death is merely the end of life for all creatures, including Man. The advertisement goes on

"all we know about God's eternal plans for us . . . all we know about what lies beyond the grave . . . comes from the God that made us and to the extent He has seen fit to reveal it to us".

God has not seen fit to reveal Himself to any human in historic times, and we reasonably assume the legendary meetings reported in the Old Testament to be wholly untrue, so how could He tell anyone His plans? Furthermore, we now know that He did not make us, we evolved from tiny life forms which became ever more complex, producing millions of experimental creatures, many of which reached a dead-end and became extinct. A few went on and eventually the fortunate produced the fish, the amphibian, the reptile and finally the warm-blooded mammals, one of which is Man.

The Knights of Columbus continue

"we can face eternity without fear, for we have a definite answer to the mystery of death with the facts God has put at our disposal through the inspired books of the Old and the New Testaments". Adding, that "the Catholic Church always has given, and gives today, a definite answer to the questions raised by the fact of death".

Not to be trusted

Again we must state that no fair-minded, reasonable man would accept the unsubstantiated word of the Catholic Church, which offers no proofs and has been proven so terribly wrong in so many fields: in science at the time of Galileo, in torture and death for many, many thousands during the time of the Spanish Inquisition, and in their persecution of the Jews.

Continuing . . . this "ad" states,

"man's life in this world is a preparation for the world to come . . . a testing time which ends with our death, and whatever happens afterwards depends on whether death finds us loyal to God or opposed to Him and the way He expects us to live".

Again, reason tells us that no god worthy of the name would expect loyalty if he did not reveal himself. Can any reasonable person imagine how a Divine God could judge the souls (if such there were) passing by him at the rate of two per second? If He gave one minute to any particular one there would be 100 lined up waiting for his answer! It is, of course, all fantastic and in the realm of childish make-believe.

We read on

"death does not bring merely a long unconscious slumber, but a quick awakening to the irrevocable judgment of our Creator . . . to determine if death shall be the threshold to everlasting life among the blessed, or among the lost".

What is the basis for such a dogmatic statement? Surprisingly, the Knights admit that some people scoff at the suggestion that an everlasting hell could be permitted by a merciful God. (Who could but scoff at such nonsense?) But they state that

"even though they may live a reasonably moral life, this is of little avail unless they pay God special honour, which is His due".

What possible honour could any human give to an all powerful Omniscient, just Divinity, who supposedly created all of us and the immense Universe besides?

In closing, everyone is asked if they want more information on Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, the end of the world and the resurrection and judgment of all men, because, if so the Knights of Columbus would be happy to send an interesting pamphlet . . . Pamphlet No. IS-14.

Words fail one!

2,000 years out of date

The Catholic Church has changed a great deal from the days of Galileo and Torquemada, but much of their thinking and religion is still 2,000 years out of date.

In summary, the Knights of Columbus, speaking for the Catholic Church, tell us they *know* all the secrets of life and death, of an Omniscient all-powerful God who has not only created us but the Universe Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. The head of this church claims to be the only true representative of God, so cannot err. Let us examine this for a moment.

Every witness must prove his honesty, integrity and reliability, and many of the Popes who have ruled this church have left a record unequalled in history for ignorance, superstition, intolerance, wickedness and unbelievable cruelty. It is hard to believe that a Pope, religious leader of millions, would sell "indulgences" on a commission basis to get the money to build St Peter's Cathedral at Rome; it is harder to imagine a Pope who would imprison a scientist such as Galileo, and burn Bruno at the stake, for their views of the movement of the earth, moon and stars, but no one can possibly think of a human monster so cruel as to order the refined and terrible torture unto death of thousands and thousands of helpless humans who disagreed with his beliefs. And it was not one Pope but a whole series of popes who ruled the Catholic Church for 300 years, who were guilty and all claiming to be spiritual "leaders" and speaking for their loving God! They have assumed for themselves the right to forgive sin, to offer God's blessings, to excommunicate one to bar the entrance to Heaven—in short, they have assumed divine powers but have been guilty of the basest of crimes in the history of mankind. So . . . reason and logic tell us we simply cannot believe *anything* emanating from the Catholic Church based on its mere say-so alone, as their record is shamefully tarnished; one might say, wholly discredited.

WANTED

PART-TIME ASSISTANT required (male) for preparation and dispatch of FREETHINKER and mail orders. Reply by letter to The Manageress, The Pioneer Press, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

THAT DIRTY WORD

F. H. Snow

WHEN THE TERMS "Atheist" and "Communist" have become no more approbrious to the general mind than Christian, Conservative, Catholic, Quaker or Democrat, we shall have arrived at a very advanced state of civilisation. We shall have learned to look beyond the extrinsic and discern the qualities of ordinary human beings in those who, under the first-mentioned designations, society has been conditioned to regard as enemies of order, probity, happiness and all that is good. We shall have learned to ignore mere labels, and use slow and careful reason in assessing the character and principles of our ideological opposites.

Genuinely reformatory causes are frequently branded as "Communist", which is used as a smear word to justify stern measures against resisters of despotism. It is a word which is employed to fan fires of prejudice, and condemn movements and individuals that oppose repressive orthodoxy. As a Freethinker, I detest that; as an atheist, I recognise the procedure as identical with the treatment accorded to those who profess ideas similar to mine.

There are other appellations unscrupulously used to stigmatise causes and their protagonists, but my chief concern is with that which states my sceptical philosophy. "Atheist" is a dirty name to the majority of people, if a little less so than of old. Even the non-religious believer dislikes hearing it owned. He may deride parsons and church-folk, but a frank avowal of atheism rather shocks him. It may even make him disagreeable. It is not so much disbelief in the celestial God he has not bothered about doubting that chills him; it's that nasty word, "atheist". He has grown up regarding it as worse than obscene. The mud sticks, for he has never seen reason to query its aptness. The word is ugly, and reflects ugliness on the person to whom it is applicable—that's all he knows about it.

To the devout, the designation is just horrible. The atheist is the enemy of all that is sacred—the holy God above, the saints and angels, heaven, eternal bliss, religious ecstasy. He's out to destroy them all with his wicked opinions, and must be a truly awful creature. "Atheist!" The word reeks of malevolent intent, blasphemy, immorality, disrespectability. It erects a social barrier between many Christians and those known by it. Others of the Christ cult, however short they fall in pious practice, look upon avowed atheists almost as criminals.

Not enemies of God

I remember that, during my stay at a Blackpool hotel, conversation in the lounge fell upon religious belief, and my remarks caused a middle-aged gentleman to ask: "Are you one of those ——— atheists?" Repudiating the insulting adjective, I acknowledged the title and assured my hearers that atheists were harmless, law-abiding citizens, like themselves. They were not enemies of God, because one couldn't be an enemy of that which didn't exist, and they believed God did not exist because there was no evidence that he did. The dreadful state of our world, with its famines, floods, eruptions and numerous other afflictions, which a loving deity would surely obviate, confirmed that disbelief. Far from being immoral and unspiritual ogres, atheists were sincere humanitarians, anxious for the uplift of their fellowmen. I went on to detail their objections to religious belief, and found myself listened to with respectful attention. By the end of that talk, my audience took a much less odious view of atheists.

All too often, the affrighting label to which I had ad-

mitted ownership effectively militates against its vindication. As I pointed out to my fellow guests at the hotel, it simply signifies anti-theist, an appellation that would perturb few people. The hostility its shortened form provokes, and the injustice it inflicts, reflect hideously on the mentality of our day and age, overshadowed by a fanatical past. Promotion, financial prospects, even the very means of livelihood, are frequently threatened or obstructed, for the known atheist. Because of this, the less courageous of our ilk resort to calling themselves agnostics, or hide their sceptical identity from those having power to persecute them. The long arm of mediaeval prejudice reaches after the intrepidly atheistic.

Atheists anonymous

The dread aroused in so many Christians and pseudo-Christians by the word atheist is indicated by the almost rigid exclusion of it from their writings on persons who have won popular esteem. Who would elicit, from their screeds about H. G. Wells, that he was an atheist? They do not want the noxious term in any degree generalised through association with public favourites, though not averse to applying it to sceptic notabilities whom they feel it safe to vilify, such as Tom Paine and Charles Bradlaugh. Press and broadcasting services maintain a virtual conspiracy of silence regarding the atheism of popular characters.

In face of the stigma with which Christianity has so successfully besmirched the name of those who uncompromisingly reject belief in God, how should they react? In these days of doctrinal shufflings, and disguise of the true issues between rationalism and religion, the temptation to avert the spleen of the righteous is subtly strong. One doesn't wave a red rag at a bull, and to fall in line with the ethicists and reverent humanists and adopt a disarming pseudonym would greatly gratify the Christian bull, and save us from the mire of his dudgeon.

But, the days of the stake and rack being past, there is only one course for thousands who prize truth above everything, and detest the silly lie that holds many millions in credulous thralldom—to proclaim and publicise our hated name to our utmost ability. We should challenge its stigmatisers, on every possible occasion, to show cause why it should not be as honourably regarded as any. We must make them live with it. Far from subscribing to their dearly-wishful assumption that the fundamentals of Christian belief have passed beyond the pale of forthright attack, we must sharpen up the sceptical sword. Only through familiarisation with the people will our title cease to be a dirty word. Relentless assault on faith-blind doctrine can alone ensure that and hasten the time, however distant, when atheist will be the general designation of the human family.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
PUBLIC FORUM

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

Speakers include—

BRIGID BROPHY Dr RONALD GOLDMAN
ALAN HUMPHRIES DAVID TRIBE
MOTHER MARY NORBERT

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10th, 7.30 p.m.

CAXTON HALL

Caxton Street, London, SW1

NEWS AND NOTES

THE SECOND showing of the strong documentary play *Cathy, Come Home* has created quite a furore. It has already resulted in action which will alleviate the misery of some homeless families and is thus a strong recommendation for more crusading television.

Our moral guardians

THE NATIONAL VIEWERS and Listeners Association has asked members to keep a record in the next three months of how television programmes deal with sex, religion, family life and other subjects affecting standards of behaviour. Viewers are to submit reports to the Reverend Reginald Doncaster, Rector of Pleasley, who will collate the reports with other members of the Association.

Critical review of the Dirty Programme of the Month

"THIS WAS a most unwholesome subject treated in a most unsavoury way. Children, in varying states of filth, could be seen with naked bottoms. My wife was obliged to turn away at the sight of one, particularly naked and particularly dirty. The houses and rooms shown were particularly filthy and the furniture in them was particularly lacking in artistic taste. The degrading conditions in which the dregs of humanity live ought not to be portrayed on television which, after all, is watched by many highly respectable families. At one time a man was seen coming out of a bathroom. The implications quite upset my elder daughter. She has led a very sheltered life and we have done our best to protect her from anything at all nasty. But I can hardly forbid her to watch television when my wife and I watch it so often. After all Purity is twenty-seven next March. My wife and I watch many of the programmes in which we are fairly sure in advance that there will be violence or sex or obscenities or just plain straightforward filth. We like to be well informed about the dirt on television so that we can expostulate and perform our social duty of trying to protect the millions of helpless people who may be misled or upset by such material. My daughter is particularly sensitive to these tasteless innuendoes that the TV degenerates put over. Getting back to this dirty play, there was that bit where they showed women with big stomachs. I mean, it's not decent is it? I counted no less than fifty-seven bad words and the name of the Deity was taken in vain on more than one occasion. In one scene washing was hanging on numerous lines in a revoltingly disorderly way and I am bound to say that it all looked quite dirty to me. Authority was ridiculed in this play and violence was depicted as an inevitable result of the dirty conditions in which these nauseating people live. My own view is that the whole thing should be cleaned up straight away. I don't mean their homes. After all, neither I nor my very delicate family have to put up with that dirty sight. We don't have filthy places like that near us, I'm glad to say.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY
CONWAY HALL
RED LION SQUARE, LONDON, WC1
SUNDAY, JANUARY 29th, 2.30 p.m.

A MEETING

to discuss plans for expansion of activities
and increasing membership

MEMBERS AND FRIENDS INVITED

But we do watch television and I insist that *that* is cleaned up immediately. Before finishing, I must not forget that dreadful scene where that young man and woman who hadn't known one another for very long were alone in that room with the bed in it. It quite disturbed me and I dreamt about it all night. In short, it was all extremely dirty and utterly revolting filth.

P.S.—It gives me a great sense of fulfilment to write critical reviews like this. Would you like some more?"

Ethical Union becomes British Humanist Association

AT a meeting at the Conway Hall on Saturday, January 14th the Ethical Union formally changed its name to that of the British Humanist Association. Plans were also announced for Campaign Year.

Avowed anti-religious humanist

IN ITS Comment on the News (13.1.67) the *Church Times* refers to Professor A. J. Ayer, President of the BHA, as "an avowed anti-religious humanist". I would be indebted to the editor of the *Church Times* if he would quote the chapter and verse from which this colourful information has been elicited.

Earl of Harewood

THE RECENT matrimonial troubles of the Earl have highlighted one of the advantages of being an unelevated mortal. The latter does not have to suffer the painful parading of his private life before the press, television and throne.

Sex equality for murderers

IN TEXAS husbands already have the right to shoot their wives' lovers. A State representative, Mr Bob Bass, says he is going to introduce a bill in the Texas Legislature to give wives the corresponding right. As we are often reminded, this is an enlightened age. Here we have real progress in the name of sexual equality. When the women have been further emancipated by this proposed legal reform they will likewise emancipate their husbands. One good deed deserves another. But in the name of sanity, how many husbands want to be emancipated from their freely chosen lovers by having them shot? Still, it will doubtless be all good clean fun. Just imagine, women of Texas, the thrill of being well furnished with a handbag-matching pistol and calling unexpectedly at your husband's office latish on that evening when he is working late and wondering whether you'll be killing a blonde or a brunette, or maybe even a redhead. What a wonderful sense of uncertainty. What sensual tingles the anticipation of legal murder must afford. Much better than vicariously enjoying violence and sordid love affairs by staying at home and watching it all on television.

The restive Nuns

IN 1947, Marilyn Morheuser entered the Roman Catholic Sisters of Loretto. Then after 16 years as a nun she left the order to become a civil rights worker (reports *Time*, 13.1.67). Of her convent life she says "I was happy. But it was like being in a box with windows in it. You can see things happening outside. You want to help, but you can't because you're inside the box".

She is not alone in parting from her convent. In the Archdiocese of New York alone 47 nuns left their convents last year, twice as many as in 1965. What particularly worries church officials (reports *Time*) is that 'many of the ex-sisters are not novices disillusioned by the rigours of their training but mature women who have spent ten and even twenty years in the convent'.

THE LATE ALMIGHTY GOD

Dr D. A. Rickards

OUR FATHER, which art in heaven . . . is dead!

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" . . . He's dead, too! The God of our Fathers, the God in whom we place our trust, the God with whom "all things are possible" . . . is dead . . . and gone forever. He has joined all the other Gods and Goddesses of mythology—Jupiter, Venus, Isis and Osiris, Mithra, Zoroaster and at least 2,000 other defunct Deities.

The field of theology has been shaken by a series of revolutions and things will never be quite the same. The best way to explore this interesting subject in depth, is to begin by examining the meaning of the word, *God*. God is a noun, a figure of speech in the English language. As such, the existence of God cannot be denied. Everyone from the True Believer to the Atheist thinks of the word *God* in one way or another. The question of the validity of the word is not really relevant. What must be examined is not our belief in God, but our interpretation of the word *God*. To simplify matters, the main attitudes about God can be divided into four groups.

First, there are those who think of God as a Supreme Being, who is moved by prayer. This is the position of orthodoxy or theism. God in this case is a personal God, who watches over you and hears every word that you say. He marks the sparrow's fall. He will intercede on your behalf to protect you from the Devil, or a hungry lion, or whatever. He will reward you for good behaviour and punish you for bad behaviour.

The second group thinks of God as a Supreme Being, who is not moved by prayer. This is the position of Deism. In this particular case, God is the creator of the Universe and all that is in it. He winds up the clock and lets it run by itself. He is respected as the Great Architect, the Great Lawmaker, but He is felt to be impersonal and beyond approach. He neither rewards nor punishes, but, in an abstract cosmic way, He watches as the world struggles along without Him.

In the third category, we find those who think of God as a personification of the forces of nature. This has been called the position of Pantheism. God—to a Pantheist—is not the old gentleman with a long, white beard. It is another word for Energy, Matter, Space and Time and has no free and separate existence at all. The Pantheist God is exemplified by the nature of the universe both inside and outside human experience. Men like Einstein and Spinoza could be called Pantheists. Einstein once wrote that God does not play dice with the cosmos,⁽¹⁾ by which he meant that the laws of nature were dependable and not subject to caprice. Einstein's God was not Jahwe or Jupiter,⁽²⁾ and it was not the personal God of Group 1. In his essay, *What I Believe*—Einstein mentioned that he could not "imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation".⁽³⁾

The fourth and final group are those who think of God as a myth created by man. To this group the word God has no corresponding reality in existence. It is like the word *dragon*, or *hobgoblin*, or the word *witch*. These are all perfectly good words, but they describe objects which people no longer believe to be real. They are, therefore, called fictitious or mythical. The word, God, has been used for thousands of years to explain the sun, the stars, the vegetation, the weather, life, death and every conceivable mystery which has confronted mankind. It was per-

fectly natural in days gone by that Man should thus try to account for his existence and for the world around him. However, in the 20th century, the word, *God*, has lost its meaning in all but the mythological sense. In comparative mythology these truths are held to be self-evident, that all Gods are created equal . . . Jupiter comes from the same stock as Jehovah . . . and Krishna is cut from the same cloth as Christ.

To summarise, the four groups are: 1. A Supreme Being moved by prayer. 2. A Supreme Being unmoved by prayer. 3. Personification of nature. 4. A myth created by man.

When we apply this formula to the history of the last 2,000 years, we see that nearly everybody was in group 1 until well after the Reformation. Those who were brave enough to speak out for groups 2, 3 and 4 were punished without mercy or put to death. There was no tolerance. The authorities gloried in orthodoxy and stagnated in mental fossilization. Scientific research was discouraged because it was sacrilegious and unnecessary. According to dogma, "Nothing was to be accepted save on the authority of Scripture".⁽⁴⁾

Religion versus Science

Religion and Science were at opposite ends of the ladder, with Science at the bottom, and the theologians had no intention of stepping aside. Nevertheless, as the years went by, science made headway. Copernicus and Galileo paved the way for a new and better understanding of the solar system and the universe. The flat earth was replaced with a round one. Physics and chemistry started to take the place of alchemy; study and honest enquiry were slowly being substituted for faith and authority. It was a long fight, but the trouble for orthodox religion had begun and things would never be the same.

Ponder for a moment the audacity and the significance of Benjamin Franklin's lightning rod! Consider the impiety of Jenner's ideas on vaccination. Try to imagine the effect of Darwin's evolutionary theory on the concept of special creation. And remember that this was just the start of the devastating effect which scientific knowledge was to have on the belief in a personal God.

By the middle of the 19th century, it was possible to come forward and say that you were in groups 2, 3 and 4. It was still risky, but it could be done. The scientists were a little reticent in speaking out publicly, probably because most of them worked in universities which were still dominated or strongly influenced by the church.

But such public figures as Robert G. Ingersoll, in the United States, and Charles Bradlaugh in Great Britain, spoke publicly and pointed out the inconsistencies of primitive belief in relation to modern knowledge. Their eloquence gained many admirers, but the basic beliefs of the churches and synagogues remained more or less unaltered.

With the turn of the 20th century, came new methods of surgery and medicine, plus flying, radio, x-ray, psychology—to name just a few of the man-made miracles. On the religious front, the fires of hell were dying out. Adam and Eve became known as allegorical characters, and even Satan looked as though he was heading for retirement. Naturally, this trend was not universal. The Roman

Catholics wanted no part of it. Nor did the fundamentalists. They were both of the opinion that religion—like all things spiritual—could not be watered down and still maintain its original strength. They remained aloof, but the rot continued and by the thirties the attack was coming not just from the outside, but from within the church as well. Famous theologians, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a prisoner in Nazi Germany, pointed out that “It is becoming evident that everything gets along without God. Just as well as before.”⁽⁵⁾ He also wrote that “the only way to be honest is to recognise that we have to live in the world—even if God is not ‘there’.”⁽⁶⁾

Post-war patricide

In England, after the war, the Bishop of Birmingham, Ernest Barnes, introduced a critical study of religion, called, “The Rise of Christianity”. In this popular book for laymen, he took issue with most of the Christian miracles, including the Virgin Birth, and asked bluntly, “Why the Son of God should be born in a manner common among the insects rather than by a normal human process?”⁽⁷⁾ His book was serialized in a London newspaper and became very widely read.

About this time we find Paul Tillich, the German theologian, writing that, “You must forget everything traditional that you have learned about God, perhaps even the word itself.”⁽⁸⁾

It was not long before Episcopalians in America heard their own Bishop Pike, of California, reject his belief in the Trinity and the Virgin Birth.^(9, 10) He was accused of heresy but the case was dropped.⁽¹¹⁾

The Anglican Bishop of Woolwich added his voice to the chorus when he proclaimed⁽¹²⁾ in his provocative book, *Honest to God*—that he was “convinced that Tillich was right in saying that the protest of Atheism against . . . (the) highest person was correct.”⁽¹³⁾

This sounded like the end of the line, but the worst was yet to come. In 1965, at several different United States universities, a group of young, but highly competent theologians, came forward with a startling statement—“God,” they said, “is dead.”⁽¹⁴⁾

God—that much used and little understood word had lost all meaning for them. For the first time, we were hearing professional members of groups, 1, 2 and 3 speaking out openly for group 4, and very soon they were not alone in expressing their disbeliefs. All over the world, other clergymen joined in. Not a majority, of course, but quite a significant number. Christians were not the only

ones. Rabbi Sherman Wine, head of a Reformed Temple in Detroit⁽¹⁵⁾ came forth with similar views when he called himself an “agnostic”. He stated categorically that people would be better off if they never used the words *God*, *Soul*, *Afterlife*, etc. These words, he said, had no clear and definable meaning. They only served to confuse the people who used them.

These men should be praised for their intellectual honesty. They have spoken out because they could no longer contain themselves. Very well, but on second thought, where do we go from here?

There are some interesting questions which must be settled, before it is going to be possible to reconstruct Judaism and Christianity along atheistic lines. For example, at which point in history did God expire? Was it just recently? Did God die in the 20th century after a long and useful life? Or are the new band of atheistic Jews and Christians going to compose a suitable Doxology—that God never was, is not now and never will be? It would appear that they are in trouble either way. On the one hand, if they maintain that God has never existed, how can they wring any sense from the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark, Moses and the Red Sea? How can they get any meaning from the death and resurrection story in the New Testament? Granted that God is a myth—and I have never believed otherwise—what becomes of Judaism and Christianity? They appear manifestly absurd in every detail. The more that they are rewritten—the more ridiculous they become. To quote from Thomas Paine, “The sublime and the ridiculous are so close together that one step above the sublime becomes ridiculous and one step above the ridiculous becomes sublime again.”⁽¹⁶⁾

Problems to be solved

These are some of the difficulties which face 20th century Judeo-Christianity, but while theologians and others are arguing about the Death of God, it would be wise for the rest of us to remember that the problems of the world remain with us. Man is still very much alive, very much in need of help and very much too indifferent to the welfare of his fellowman. Robert G. Ingersoll once said, “It is a thousand times better to love your children than it is to love God, because you can help them.”⁽¹⁷⁾ It might be hoped that the so-called “Death of God” will do something to awaken mankind to the realities of life and existence. Already there is a trend towards ethical humanism, that is to say, an honest concern for the problems of Man. It matters not what you call yourself—what does matter is that you care and that you are prepared to do something besides work, play, watch television and sleep. That something could consist of writing letters, discussing your ideas, doing social work or one of a thousand other efforts at the personal level. The world is throbbing and alive. And, God is dead. The slums are teeming with misery and disease; the birthrate is soaring; crime is on the increase. India is starving; Africa is in revolt; Latin America is in turmoil. The jungles of Vietnam are covered with the bodies of men, women and children. The Pope and Billy Graham may be on their knees at this moment, but God is dead. It is no longer their business, or God's business. It is up to you and to me. It is up to all of us. The sheep are bleating, but the shepherd has gone. The lame are limping but the crutches cannot be found. The angels are singing Hallelujah—but the throne is empty.

Ring down the curtain for the show is over. Man has come of age. No longer is it a virtue to be as little child-

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

61st ANNUAL DINNER

HORSE SHOE HOTEL

TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD, LONDON, W1

SATURDAY, APRIL 8th, 6 p.m.

Speakers:

BARONESS WOOTTON

MARGARET KNIGHT LORD WILLIS

Chairman: DAVID TRIBE

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ren. The time has come to put away childish things and to assume, at last, the full responsibility of Man.

Let us be both proud and sincere—aware and concerned—mature and benevolent, and let us work together to build a better world.

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BHA COMMENT ON THE PLOWDEN REPORT

WE welcome very warmly the main tenor of the Report and its informed concern for the needs of children of primary school age. We welcome particularly the proposals for improving contact between schools and homes, for special measures to help schools in deprived areas, and for the abolition of corporal punishment. Especially, we welcome the stress on the integrated curriculum and on the school community as the basis of moral education. The section on religious education sets out existing difficulties very fairly, but does not, in our view, face them with enough realism, and we cannot therefore accept its recommendations as adequate. It empha-

Para. 577 sises for example, the right of excusal for children whose parents do not wish them to receive religious education, asks whether this is practicable if this 562 education forms part of an integrated curriculum (as recommended elsewhere in the report) but answers that integration would not be possible where a good many parents did not want their children to receive religious education—and of course where there were only a few the legal right of excusal would be nullified in practice by integration.

568 It rightly urges that "the school should be a community within which children should learn to live a good life", but it does not say whether or how this should be related to religious education in a school 569 "composed of individuals, teachers and children from various religious backgrounds". If that is what 570 schools are, how can the Act of Worship have "great value as a unifying force" even if it sometimes 571 "derives material from other than Christian sources"?

572 The Report asks that "children should not be confused by being taught to doubt before faith is established", but we cannot accept the implication that it is the duty of the primary school to establish a religious faith in its pupils irrespective of their home background. If religious education remains in the curriculum, we strongly support the recommendation made later in the same paragraph that "neither the believing nor the unbelieving teacher should try to conceal from his pupils the fact that others take a

different view". But even in an overall progressive atmosphere this openness of approach may well be difficult with young children, and all this leads us to support the view expressed by Professor Ayer and

P.492 five colleagues in a Note of Reservation that "religious instruction is not a suitable subject to be taken 9(a) in primary schools". Religious beliefs when they were unquestioned could provide a suitable basis for society and for education, but in a society like ours in which they have become highly controversial they no longer provide a suitable basis for society and for education, least of all for young children. Indeed any attempt to treat them as still suitable for this purpose is bound to occasion conflicts between home and school or in the minds of children or in the consciences of teachers.

The Note of Reservation goes on to recommend that the schools should be freed from the statutory obligation to give such instruction, but we doubt if this precise change in the law can be more than a first step. If the law is to be changed, and we think it should, it would in our view be better to make clear that it was no longer the business of county primary schools to try to establish the Christian faith in their pupils for this is what religious education in the spirit of the Act of 1944 amounts to. Freed from this task, the schools could find their own ways of teaching children what they need to know about the Christian and other religions, and could develop their own forms of education for living, and for responding with sensitivity to the world of experience. Moral education in direct and immediate terms and in the school community set free from divisive issues would be more effective, we believe, than it has been or can be when bound up with religious instruction. We believe that parents can and should be helped to see that this is what they really want for their children.

That is why we hope that the questions about religious education raised in the main report and the more thoroughgoing criticisms in the Note of Reservation will be widely discussed and will lead to a general demand for a thorough amendment of the religious clauses of the 1944 Act.

FREETHINKER

Published by G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd.
(Pioneer Press)

103 BOROUGH HIGH STREET, LONDON, S.E.1
Telephone: HOP 0029
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone: HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Holidays. Hastings: Thursday, March 23rd to April 1st. Burton-in-the-Wirral, Cheshire: Painting Holiday, July 29th to August 12th. Details from Mrs M. Mephram, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone, Vigilant 8796.

Humanist Letter Network (International): send s.a.e to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, McRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platts Fields, Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.: Messrs COLLINS, DUIGNAN, MILLS and WOOD.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

INDOOR

Havering Humanist Society (The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood), Tuesday, January 31st, 8 p.m.: A speaker from the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, January 29th, 6.30 p.m.: K. LEIGH, "Advertising: How Effective is it?"

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, January 29th, 11 a.m.: ELIZABETH MONKHOUSE, "Rhodesia"; Tuesday, January 31st, 6.30 p.m.: JOHN WHITE, "Indoctrination or Moral Education".

South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, January 29th, 6.30 p.m.: Arraga String Quartet. Haydn, Bartok, Dvorak. Admission 3/-.

Worthing Humanist Group (Morelands Hotel, The Pier), Sunday, January 29th, 5.30 p.m.: Lord SORENSEN, "The Human Weaving of Theological Patterns".

THEATRE

David Tribe

AMONG seventeenth century highbrow gossips, Pepsys and Evelyns are schoolboy names, but few adults are familiar with John Aubrey. In what is the most remarkable monologue I have seen in the theatre, *Brief Lives* (Hampstead Theatre Club) scoops him unforgettably into the twentieth century. From his memoirs, *Miscellanies* (essays), *Short Lives*, letters and notes, Patrick Garland has compiled two hours of reminiscence, rich in humour, delicate vulgarity, sensitivity, historical illumination and palpable immediacy. The action of the "play" takes place in Bloomsbury lodgings in the chronicler's year of death, but Aubrey (1626-97) preferred to record personalities of his youth and of his elders' recollection, so that the figures here are Jacobean—that seminal period when empiricism struggled with scholasticism, science with superstition, medicine with mumbo jumbo, authenticity with courtliness, Puritanism with Anglicanism, literalism with the after-birth of Elizabethan literature. All of this is obliquely sectioned and served with scabrous or touching anecdotes of the leading and many minor figures of the day. There is Edward de Vere, self-exiled after flatulence on bowing to Elizabeth; Thomas More, dead awaiting canonisation; Walter Raleigh, noble in execution; William Harvey, ostracised as a crackpot after discovering the circulation of the blood; Ben Jonson, named as Marlowe's murderer; Francis Bacon, potent and pederastic; the Dean of Hereford, given to parading in procession round his cathedral on a mare, till one day a stallion ran wild.

Designer Julia Trevelyan Oman has been helped by donors to produce a set sprawling with genuine period pieces and wonderful props like an antique chamber-pot, phlegm stick, mulling tankard, fourposter bed curtains, supposed mandible of Thomas More, volume of Seneca, real fire, milk warming pan, stick, horoscope chart and stuffed animals. In timeless woollen tunic and leather gown, Roy Dotrice looked twice his 41 years. His superb sense of timing and gesture, outbursts of petulance, ancient chuckles and shuffling gait made most King Lear's I have seen look amateurish. No one more deserved his thunderous ovation.

LETTERS

A case for joint action

I SEE from *Humanist News* (January) that a letter has been sent to the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the BBC "to discuss what provision might be made for the allocation of regular broadcasting time for the BHA on radio and television"

For many years the NSS has been in regular communication with the BBC, and this contact has intensified over the last year or two. It has not hitherto pressed organisational claims, but has asked generally for a freethought and secular humanist alternative to the religious programmes.

It seems highly undesirable that the BBC should be pressurised by a number of isolated "sectarian" claims in the humanist field. Now that a liaison body has provisionally been formed, I suggest that it discuss the advisability of a joint approach to the BBC.

Another avenue where joint action is desirable is parliamentary lobbying. The NSS, BHA and perhaps the PL and other bodies have a list of MPs and Lords known to be sympathetic to various causes, who have rendered most valuable service in an informal way. If this is to be organised along the lines of, say, the Parliamentary Civil Liberties Group, it would be better if such a Parliamentary Secular Humanist Group could be jointly constituted and briefed.

DAVID TRIBE, *President, National Secular Society.*

Lord's Day Observance Society

WITH A PATIENCE foreign to my nature I have purposely waited before replying to critics of my letter concerning the Lord Willis v Legerton "debate" ("debacle" is a better word, I still think) so that I'd have time to read—not scan, as so many obviously do—the opinions of others who attended the meeting at Caxton Hall.

May I suggest that my three critics, and any others so minded, turn their guns from me and re-direct their fire against the activities, the tyranny, and the dictatorship which they, the LDOS, are seeking to re-establish in this country, and not without a measure of success, I might say! The ultimate collapse of this Puritanical body can only come from organised action against them. We of the Sunday Freedom League are trying, with some success, to do this, and we still want help and look to Secularists to give us this, and leave the *enemy* to try to hinder us—we can manage them!

JOHN and DAVID SHEPHERD, *The Sunday Freedom League.*