

# FREETHINKER

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## CHALLENGE TO FATHER GORDON ALBION

"ALL EVIDENCE IS AGAINST THE ATHEIST" proclaims the headlined title to one of Father Gordon Albion's latest articles. It was the Talking Point two weeks ago of that highly popular Catholic newspaper, *The Universe* (27.1.67).

Why does Father Gordon Albion believe in God?

"Because I cannot conceive how this world of ours, with all its order, harmony and beauty, its diversity in tinyness as well as in immensity could just come about by itself. Nothing in our human experience does: no skyscraper, no bridge. St Peter's and the Sistine Chapel needed their Michelangelo, their Raphael. A Ninth Symphony without a Beethoven? Hamlet without a Shakespeare? Even this little article needed me and my pen. The dozens of bits of metal that make up the watch on your wrist didn't just fly together by some magnetic chance. They had to be carefully cut and fitted by accurate fingers directed by a precise mind, before they worked to calculate the time correctly. So too the great timekeeper of our world, the sun, with moon and stars, and the laws that govern them, bespeak a mind infinitely greater than that of the human watchmaker. Everything that we know has its maker. Both evidence and argument are against the atheist. He has a much tougher task denying God than we who acknowledge Him. . . . 'Credo in unum Deum'. It is that or nothing, and nothing can only mean the denial of the reality which is ourselves and the cosmos."

Both evidence and argument are against the atheist, says Father Gordon. I suspect that his case against atheism is fairly representative of that put in many Catholic schools. If it is not I look forward to seeing its threadbare fallaciousness publicly repudiated by Catholic teachers. And if it is representative it represents the inculcation, at the taxpayers' expense, of either known falsity or naïve unenlightened error.

Parents should be allowed the freedom to encourage their children to believe in hobgoblins, pixies and elves, or to believe that Harold Wilson is a monster from outer space or to believe that the North Sea does not really exist but is merely a figment of a wet man's imagination. The procreators and financial supporters of children should

be allowed this freedom, distasteful though such exercise of it may be to many.

But it is quite improper for the State to use public funds to contribute substantially to what is not conducive to the public good by giving financial support to Church schools and consequent encouragement to the miseducation of children.

To say in such a widely read paper as *The Universe* that "all evidence is against the atheist" and then to cite as evidence fallacies long since exposed is itself tantamount to blatant miseducation of the masses.

Elsewhere in this issue of the FREETHINKER A. C. Thompson writes that "certain basic educational principles should be that it is the duty of a school to teach children truth, not falsehood; that where the truth is unknown or disputed, it is the duty of the school to declare this in all honesty; and that the teacher who does not respect truth is not worthy of his calling".

I charge you, Father Gordon, in your dualistic capacity as journalistic school and teacher, with contravening such basic educational principles. I fear that you are typical of many who read your article, concur with its contents and further propagate its falsehoods. I care to take you as the spokesman of these many concurers and as the champion of their views.

You call Malcolm Muggeridge "an earnest seeker after reality". Be that as it may, I ask you if you consider yourself one. If you do I challenge you to come seeking reality in a polemic confrontation on the searching battlefield of public discussion. I challenge you to accept as weapons three open letters a piece of up to 2,000 words each. The first blow to be struck by you in the form of restating your evidence against atheism along the lines of your article in *The Universe*. The counterblow to be struck by me in my first reply and the discussion to then open up in the last four letters.

This to be a trial by combat, Father Gordon. A bloodless trial of ideas and reality. Specifically to be a trial of Theism. I throw down the gauntlet. I look to you to pick it up and to defend as champion of Theism what I attack as its falsity.

Belief in Theism is no mere metaphysical nicety of practical insignificance, as some Humanists would contend. It is, nice or otherwise, being indoctrinated in Catholic schools largely at the taxpayers' expense, and it is unfortunately simply the beginning of a long, long chain. The Trial of Theism is thus not an antiquated issue buried in the grave of the 19th century. On this point at least both you, Father Gordon, and I are probably in agreement.

So forsake for a while if you will the safe comfort of *The Universe* where you are among friends and mount your heavenly charger to the joust.

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## NSS AND THE SCHOOLS

David Tribe *President, National Secular Society*

BEFORE THE STATE system of education was introduced in 1870, the National Secular Society was calling for "free, secular and compulsory education". Elementary schools became virtually compulsory in 1876 and virtually free in 1891. The early secularists were optimistic that, with the rapid spread of scepticism amongst professional people and artisans alike, secular education was imminent too. But they did not calculate sufficiently for the rising domination of the Labour Party by the Catholic Church, the resilience of an apparently crumbling Church of England, and the willingness of educators to be controlled by political rather than academic considerations.

There were many secular objections to this position: the denial of effective civil liberties to parents, teachers and children; the tendency to foster hypocrisy and conformism; the violence to pedagogic principles of entrenching what was at best unproven and unprovable and at worst bogus and false. But an abiding concern was the failure of State schools to provide for the moral and social needs of their pupils. From its origin in 1851, the secular movement had set about establishing secular Sunday schools, which until 1870 and beyond provided instruction in ordinary subjects.

Though these schools did not indoctrinate in atheism as the sectarian schools did in theism, there was a strong conviction in the NSS that separate schools, however good in themselves, were not in the best interests of community development. They might serve a useful interim rôle, and the society is about to set up a trust to provide secular schools (if the necessary financial support is forthcoming) in those countries where education is at present dominated by church missions of one sort or another. But the secular ideal has always been the community school, fostering community awareness, and the movement has set a lead in adoption of the principle that young children cannot understand ideological conflict and should be brought up in a loving and stable environment without indoctrination in theological or philosophical notions before they properly understand them.

With this end in mind it has concentrated on a steady campaign to demonstrate the desirability of secular education—impartial, universal in its handling of social morality and citizenship, united in its assemblies, honest in its admission that there is a private world of the individual where different beliefs and opinions flourish. For this purpose it has co-operated with all men of good will, whatever their ideologies, who have had the same vision. Unfortunately the community has not produced them in remarkable numbers, except for limited periods. In 1907, following the row in non-Anglican circles arising from the 1902 Education Act, a Secular Education League was set up with impressive support from Nonconformism, liberal Anglicans, writers and MPs, and from the rationalist, ethicist and secularist wings of the humanist movement. This united enthusiasm flagged and virtually disappeared in 1944, when Nonconformists and Anglicans supported the Butler Education Act almost to a man. In 1964, unknown to the NSS, the Secular Education League was wound up. But though everybody else had decided that "secular education" wasn't respectable and the *fait accompli* must be accepted to avoid further rows, the NSS continued its criticisms. Today even Plowden implicitly admits their validity.

## BHA ON RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

H. J. Blackham *Director, British Humanist Association*

WHAT IS the British Humanist Association's line on religion in schools? The Education Committee of the BHA is still working out a developed policy based on discussions guided by a memorandum drafted by the chairman which raises questions on every aspect of the problem. There is short-term and long-term policy. There are county schools and voluntary schools. There is the law and the practice. There are parents and there is public opinion. There are alternative policies on religion and alternatives to religion. With all this complexity, and discussion still going on in the Committee, a public statement is premature; but dominant trends of thought are discernible, and this interim statement cannot attempt to do more than indicate what they are.

It is clear that the religious clauses of the 1944 Act do not make sense in the country today and that no satisfactory policy nor practice can be worked out in conformity with them. Is it enough to revoke the statutory obligations? What happens then? Released time for RI according to the parents' wishes may seem attractive, but in practice it is likely to be more divisive and certainly more administratively disruptive than present conditions. One might have RI on the timetable as now, with opting in instead of opting out—which is what the signatories of the Note of Reservation to the Plowden Report seem to have recommended. Flat prohibition of the teaching of any religious faith as part of the curriculum, as distinct from teaching about religion, and prohibition of the practice of any religion as an activity of the whole school would certainly be the most decisive and simplest solution. In the end it will perhaps be the most acceptable. Negatively, it would remove at once all the real and increasingly vexatious difficulties so well set out in the Plowden Report. On the other hand, the churches (except the RC), parents, public opinion, and a great many teachers would seem to be solidly against it. As time goes on, however, the advantages of this solution and the disadvantages of every alternative are likely to recommend it with increasing force.

If this is the steady objective for the county schools, what about the voluntary schools in the public system supported largely by public funds? This large concession to parents and churches is repugnant to humanists on educational and social grounds, and there is no need to rehearse this part of the argument here. The number of children concerned is comparatively small, but they are important and the principle involved is important. Unless parental opinion is going to be summarily overruled (by whom, in the name of what?), it has to be won over or induced by majority public opinion to accept that religion has no place in the public school system. If religion were excluded from the county schools it might for a time increase the attractiveness of and justification for denominational schools.

For those who want secular education there is a long haul ahead of steady work on public opinion. The climate is far more favourable than it has been at any time since 1944, and it is likely to improve. Two main considerations should be borne in mind. Hostility to religion as such will not help in bringing over public opinion. Parents will have to be satisfied that their children will get the moral education they expect from religion.

## THE HUMANIST TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Dorothy Roberts

THE HUMANIST TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION, whose President is Lionel Elvin, MA, was formed in 1965 to provide for the needs of the many non-Christian teachers, both inside and outside the British Humanist Association. Since then one or two Christians, dissatisfied with the present teaching of religion in schools, have joined us.

It is known that many people in public life prefer to hide their doubts about Christianity for fear of arousing prejudice against themselves and of jeopardising their chances of success. Teachers are in a particularly difficult position since they are expected to inculcate the ideas of Christianity, not merely through the RI lessons and attendance at Assembly, but often in other subjects too. The Newsome Report, for instance, expressed the view that ethical teaching was not enough, that Christianity should be taught and should pervade every aspect of school life.

This is the view taken by many Head teachers, who thus object to having non-Christian teachers on their staffs. Diana Dewar in *Backward Christian Soldiers* quotes one Head as saying that she would ask such a teacher to get a transfer. Our own HTA members have experienced this attitude, one being told by her Headmaster that if she was not a Christian she should not be a teacher.

On the other hand, Humanists who are themselves Head teachers, or even Housemasters, are traditionally expected to participate in the religious life of the school and to take Assembly, and so cannot easily withdraw. Primary school teachers are usually expected to take their own classes for most subjects, again making withdrawal difficult, as this would mean asking another teacher to do the job for them. In the Infants' School it is quite unrealistic to expect another teacher to come in and take a class once a week for the RI lesson. In all these cases the alternative is hypocrisy.

Thus the provisions made in the 1944 Act for withdrawal by non-Christian teachers are often impracticable, and the teacher is faced with a conflict between conscience and the desire to support the Head and to participate in the corporate life of the school. Furthermore, the ambitious teacher fears that his chances of promotion will be affected as questions about religion are asked by interviewing bodies, even when the post in question is for a subject other than RI.

The first aim of HTA is: "To give mutual support and confidence by discussion of, and help with, the particular problems which Humanist teachers have to face". We have, for instance, discussed the various ways a Humanist teacher can deal with the problem of morning Assembly; we have advised teachers of their rights under the 1944 Act; we have written to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, to the teachers' organisations and to the press on behalf of teachers and students who have been put under pressure or attacked because of their views; we have sent out a questionnaire from which we hope to draw information about RI in the schools and to build up a dossier of discrimination as evidence for future action.

We are not only concerned with the problems of the Humanist teacher but also with those of the pupils. We are aware of the harm done to a young child by withdrawal and segregation, or of the conflict between home and school when the child of Humanist parents is not

withdrawn. We feel it absurd and wrong to force children of fifteen and more not only to attend Assembly but to participate against their conscience. Hence we gave our support to the VI Form of a boys' college when, after repeated requests to the Head for freedom of conscience they announced they were going to boycott compulsory chapel. They were threatened with expulsion, but courageously stuck to their principles, until the Head agreed to make chapel attendance voluntary, except for one service at the beginning of each term. The boys' form master wrote to say that they had often spoken of "taking action", but not until then had they been aware of any organised body upon which they could rely for support.

The second aim of HTA is: "To secure revision of the 1944 Education Act with regard to the teaching of religion in schools and the compulsory act of worship". As other writers will concern themselves with the arguments against these provisions, I will only say that we have been active in opposing the strengthening of denominational schools by increased grants.

Our third aim we consider to be of the utmost importance. It is: "To consider ways of replacing religious indoctrination by a reasoned approach to the moral problems young people must face in life". According to Diana Dewar, there is evidence that religion in the school is having little impact on children, and research has shown that they see only a vague relationship between 20th century living and what is taught in the RI lesson. It is imperative that some form of moral education divorced from RI should be given, and HTA has had a series of discussions on this subject. We came to the conclusion that in the Primary School it is social experience that transforms the young animal into a human being and that moral growth is encouraged by example and through relationships between the child, his fellow pupils, and the teacher. There should be opportunity for co-operative activities, with an awareness of our interdependence, and plenty of creative outlets.

For the Secondary School we have issued two syllabuses of Moral Education. One, by Colleen Young, has been used with a group of backward girls in a Secondary Modern School; the other, by Maurice Hill, is for the Comprehensive School and covers the age range eleven to eighteen. (They are available at 2/- for both, including postage, from the Secretary, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.)

Our next meeting in this series will be on Sunday, 26th February, 1967, 3.30 p.m., at the same address, when two members will open a discussion on Sex Education.

Our final aim is: "To offer advice to the British Humanist Association on educational matters, and to gain support from teacher members for BHA policy in this field". We are represented on the Humanist Education Committee and so are able to influence decisions made there, as well as to call upon them for advice and support.

We have discussed the joint Christian/Humanist statement on RE, *Religious and Moral Education*, but, whilst we welcome the move to a more open approach, we felt it did not go far enough and so could not entirely support

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## NEWS AND NOTES

### MCC and apartheid

THE MCC should not be a party to apartheid. If Basil D'Oliveira merits inclusion in the touring team due to visit South Africa next year he should not be excluded in deference to the political policies of the host nation. If South Africa will not allow him to play in the touring team then the MCC should decline the invitation to send one.

A stock objection to such action is that it brings sport into politics. Regrettably it is South Africa which brings politics into sport. If the MCC excludes D'Oliveira because of the colour of his skin they will be playing a game of politics. They will in fact not only be playing against the South African cricket team but for the South African government in its political game to keep on the winning side of apartheid.

Apartheid is a most unsporting skinsport. It just isn't cricket, a well-bred Englishman would say. The MCC ought to be well-bred, English or otherwise, and as such refuse to take part in such an unwholesome game. Its position should be clear. Either the team selected on merit and availability goes or no team goes. Either way the South African government will have a wicket to defend—a sticky one.

P.S.—Since the above was written, MCC have demonstrated its sense of fair play.

### Anomalies

OF COURSE, the whole business of censoring and confiscating allegedly indecent material is anomalous. Prints of Beardsley's works are confiscated by the police. "Last Exit to Brooklyn" makes its exit here with the spirited assistance of Sir Cyril Black. And yet in almost every town in the country you can go into a host of retail shops and buy inartistic photos of nude women, albeit shamefully depilated in the pubic region. You can buy cheap poorly written American novellettes with a drop of sexual titillation on every page. You can buy glossy photo-magazines of scantily clad pretty young boys and strapping muscular men in a variety of imaginative poses. All this you can buy with ease. But if you want to buy low-priced copies of art you may find the Purifying Censor has been there before you. Just about as anomalous as being able to go to a concert on Sunday but not to the theatre. Only perhaps a little more crazy.

### THE HUMANIST TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

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it. We did give our support to David Tribe's *Religion and Ethics in Schools*.

Other activities include the setting up of branches outside London; producing an anthology of inspirational material for use by teachers; lobbying of MPs; providing speakers and writing articles for the educational journals.

In our short existence of less than two years we have gradually made ourselves known and receive a number of enquiries, requests for literature, syllabuses, book lists, speakers (even a demand for the title of a Humanist hymn book!).

Further information about HTA may be had from the Secretary, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8.

### The Purifying Censor

IT WAS stated in court in Edinburgh on January 23rd that copies of prints by the Victorian artist Aubrey Beardsley had been taken from an Edinburgh shop by police, who claimed they were indecent. The police acted a few weeks after the originals had been publicly exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

One of the police officers said that they had not taken all of the prints, only "those which we felt were indecent".

I should like to know how police officers come by this feeling for indecency. Is it a gift they are born with? Or is it a taste they acquire? Or is it rather a mechanical appreciation developed by long and thorough training?

The police force is grossly undermanned. I suggest it be supplemented by a special force for these particular duties. The following advertisement in the newspapers should evoke a substantial response:

#### AUXILIARY CONSTABLES REQUIRED for interesting duties.

Must have a feeling for indecency.

Dirty Pictures, films, books, shows. Stimulating work.  
No pay given as this job has special inbuilt satisfaction factors.

Apply to the Officer i/c Indecency at your local station.

### Defying her church

A ROMAN CATHOLIC MOTHER of six, Mrs Jemima Bullock, who appeared before Nottingham magistrates on January 26th on charges of ill-treating and neglecting her four oldest children said she wanted to be sterilised in defiance of her church.

She was said to have been pregnant most of the time since her marriage in May, 1960. Her husband had been in and out of employment and sent to prison once, so the family had had to be reared on a very limited income.

Her solicitor said that before her fifth baby was born she asked a Roman Catholic priest if she could be sterilised. She was told: "You are still young enough to have more."

At least this was a statement of fact.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

PUBLIC FORUM

### RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

Speakers:

BRIGID BROPHY

DAVID COLLIS, Editor, The FREETHINKER

Dr RONALD GOLDMAN, Principal, Didsbury College of Education

ALAN HUMPHREYS, Headmaster, King Alfred School, Hampstead

PETER JACKSON, MP (Labour, High Peak)

MOTHER MARY NORBERT, Lecturer in Psychology, Cavendish Square College, London

Chairman:

DAVID TRIBE, President, National Secular Society

CAXTON HALL, CAXTON ST., LONDON, S.W.1

Underground: St. James's Park

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10th, 7.30 p.m.

### ADVERTISEMENT

MAN, 46, seeks new employment. Ministry of Labour rehabilitated from 26 years HG driving to clerical worker in local government. Any interesting appointment considered. Honest and reliable person. Home Counties preferred. Replies to Box 33, The FREETHINKER.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A. C. Thompson

THE expression "religious education" may mean either of two things: (a) factual study of religion as a social phenomenon, with comparison of the world's great religions, the similarities and differences of their dogmas, their origins and reasons for existence, the influence of religious belief upon human life and society throughout all of history to the present day; or (b) indoctrination in religious beliefs, with reverent, unquestioning submission to dogmas, writings and other authorities, with prayers and hymns. Almost or quite universally, religious instruction conforms to the latter concept rather than the former, and it is the latter which is objectionable.

Imagine, if you will, a teaching of Communism in schools. This might be either: (a) critical analysis of the writings of Marx, Engels and others, the story of the Russian Revolution, the subsequent history of the Soviet Union and other Communist countries, an account of the friction between Communist and Capitalist states; or (b) imposition of Communist doctrines accompanied by a pledge of allegiance to the Kremlin and the singing of the *International*. Everyone might be able to discern a difference between these.

Should schools teach religion to young children in the latter meaning, as it is now done? I should like to commence my reply to this question by seeking acceptance for certain basic educational principles: that it is the duty of a school to teach children truth, not falsehood; that where the truth is unknown or disputed, it is the duty of the school to declare this in all honesty; and that the teacher who does not respect truth is not worthy of his calling.

There are those who do not accept these principles. There are those who deliberately falsify history, for example, to secure some ulterior end. The saying is current among some religious people that they must cling to their religion even if the Bible accounts contain not a grain of truth. Paedagogical researches have been conducted by "scientists" on how most effectively to indoctrinate religion, ignoring entirely whether the matter taught is true or false. It is becoming increasingly necessary to plead for truth in education of children.

The falsity of religious doctrines is being revealed by science. Hardly any informed person, even a clergyman, any longer believes the Biblical account of the origin of the world and of its life, in the face of our modern knowledge of geology and palaeontology. And if there was no fall of Adam, there was no redemption by Jesus. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15, 22). The ultimate cause or mode of origin of the universe is yet completely unknown, although recent discoveries in astrophysics are beginning to account for the origin of elements. There is no religion which can supply a truthful explanation of the origin of the world and anyone, be he Pope, Archbishop, Cardinal or whatever, who attempts to teach another about the cause of the universe, is teaching a subject about which he is just as ignorant as anyone else. Spiritism, animism, religion are hypotheses which men grasped when they were unable to account for the mysteries of nature; they provided an easy and satisfying explanation when no other was available and to the mind of our remote savage progenitors were a substitute for scientific knowledge.

The progress of human civilisation has in fact been achieved by getting rid of spiritism. The ancient Greeks

banished it from philosophy and natural science, the Romans ejected it from law, and it is our task to separate it from sociology and ethics. The most primitive of the human species explained sickness and death as the vengeance of offended gods which were to be propitiated by prayer, sacrifice and other ritual. The Greek Empedocles, who offered the earth-air-fire-water theory of the composition of matter, which became the four-humour theory of sickness and led to the practice of blood letting, still was the first man in the world to propose a theory of disease which said not a word about spirits, which said that what makes sickness is in a man's body instead of in trees, in birds, in snakes or in the moon. Hippocrates, who followed him, maintained that the way to learn about sickness is to study sick people, and his accurate bedside observations earned him the title of "the father of medicine". Ancient law was proclaimed as the will of the gods, ascertained by various divinations. The person of the ruler was sacred. Roman law had no such pretence: it was frankly made by men, would be enforced by men and was alterable by men, and it has since been so in all Western countries. Throughout the whole history of England, there has not been a single Parliament which has claimed to receive its laws in a cloud atop the Pennines, or by dissecting pigeons atop the Cenotaph in Whitehall. The progress of science and civilisation has taught that, before knowledge can advance, superstition and error must first be cleared away. Hippocrates made no scientific discovery; he was probably no more successful in curing than any other physician; but he laid the foundation for a science of medicine.

Some people speak of secularists and humanists as "the people who do not believe anything". They regard us as the atheists who can successfully disprove traditional beliefs and who offer nothing in their stead. They regard our movement as based wholly upon scepticism and rebellion. We secularists are united in a search for truth. We are not satisfied with mythological explanations of the unknown. We do not claim to have a creed to replace religion. As conclusions of philosophy and science are offered to clarify the phenomena of the universe, we shall give them a fair hearing and appraise the adequacy of their evidence.

What is the basic motive for teaching religion? If Mr Smith is a religious man, why should he want Mr Jones also to be religious? Why can he not worship his god and practice his faith without striving to impose it on others? There must be some strong reason, for throughout the centuries societies all over the earth have compelled their members to assent to the traditional religion and to worship whatever god or gods were popularly upheld. Many societies have waged war for religious beliefs. Indeed, with the possible exception of Islam, Christianity has been of all religions the one most propagated by dungeon, fire and sword. It has surely been of all religions the most intolerant, the one which has tortured with the rack and burned at the stake. The Jews have been a most persecuted people because of religious dissent. Today's law does not permit unbelievers to be put to death with rope or faggot, but it does permit them to be deprived of the right to earn a living in certain schools: write to a Scottish education authority, if you will, to obtain from them their form of application for employment and note the specific stipulation that a declaration of religious belief must be

entered. The right to indoctrinate has ever been the right to persecute, and it is still so to this day, even in lands which boast of freedom. With the possible exception of France, perhaps no country on earth more than England has been so bathed in the blood of religious bigots, and it ill behoves this, of all lands, to continue legal indoctrination of religion.

The reasons for religious indoctrination are these: (a) religion, in every society, has always been a chief tribalism which welds individuals into a cohesive group for social interaction, defence and war; (b) religion, although it started as a means of explaining the mysteries of nature, was soon turned into a tool for the enforcement of law, a tool which was very useful to the primitive chief or king who must rule in person without the complex administrative organisation of modern governments; and (c) religion is declared and is believed by many to be the basis for morality and that hence irreligion produces crime. Whether these motives are valid or not, whether religion once achieved them or not, it can not continue to secure them in an age of enlightenment and science.

The world now needs new social concepts which will counteract the tribalistic religions and sects that unite factions and divide mankind, that provoke wars between Hindu and Moslem, between Arab and Jew. Religion, in an age of scientific enlightenment, loses its power either

to declare or to enforce morality. It is becoming more widely agreed that morality is not the will of a supernatural spirit but a logical necessity for the survival of a society.

Religion is taught in schools, not with reason, but with inducements and authority. The danger has often been pointed out that if a religious morality is imposed by social pressure, a child who does not accept religion has no reason for morality. This was my own experience: I was taught as a child that all morality is from God; and when I decided in adolescence that on logical reasons I could no longer accept religion, I was completely without morality. Now that I have developed for myself a rational, natural and fully logical system of ethics, I regret many of my youthful acts.

For progress towards truth, it is first necessary to dismiss error. Just as a science of medicine could not grow until the unseen-spirit theory was discarded, social science may progress by discarding supernaturalism and recognising that the social-survival theory not only provides a useful explanation of the basic principle of morality, but also accounts for the origins of sex morality, of crime, of race-prejudice, of war, of all ethical interaction of people in society. Solutions for social problems have been sought in religion and prayer for centuries and have not been found; let us turn now towards reason and science.

## JOHN BROWN'S SOUL (Part 2)

I. S. Low

THE GENERAL who really won the American Civil War for the North (thus ending the struggle and making sure the United States remained united) was W. T. Sherman. At least I think so—and so does the military expert Sir Basil Liddell Hart, who wrote a book called *Sherman; Genius of the Civil War*. It was Sherman who realised more clearly than anyone what an important part industry plays in modern war, and that the increased power of firearms made frontal attacks difficult and dangerous. What did he think of religion?

According to Liddell Hart, Sherman thought the moral beliefs of Christianity good, but in practice he relied on himself. "Since I left home six years ago I have practised or professed no particular creed, believing in . . . the necessity of its existence and practice (the Christian religion) to assure peace and goodwill among us. Yet I cannot . . . attribute to minor points of doctrine or form the importance usually attached to them. I believe in good works rather than faith". Liddell Hart says: "Religion and sentiment are the most frequent moral compasses, but (Sherman) distrusted them both, from seeing so many ships that had relied on them now drifting as derelicts on the surface of history". In summing up his characteristics Hart mentions: "his lack of any definite religious beliefs, but increased beliefs in righteousness of life". When his son became "some sort of Catholic divine" Sherman said "This is all directly antagonistic to my ideas of right. He ought . . . to take part in the great future of America. I feel as though his life were lost".

Of course Christians might argue that Sherman is not a man whose life story suggests it's a good thing to abandon Christianity. In his famous "March through Georgia" Sherman deliberately destroyed every farm and factory he came across, and many people have therefore considered him the last word in ruthlessness (though the Duke of Marlborough did exactly the same in his much-vaunted

Blenheim campaign, and nobody says a word about that). Several things can be said in reply. First, if Sherman's behaviour was barbarous, that pious Christian Stonewall Jackson wanted to do exactly the same. Henderson in his classic *Stonewall Jackson* says that after the Confederates won the Battle of Bull Run at the beginning of the war, Jackson wanted to invade the North and "destroy industrial establishments wherever we find them, seize the coal mines, . . . destroy the manufactories and commerce of Philadelphia and of other large cities within our reach . . . make unrelenting war among their homes". Further, if Sherman was ruthless, his ruthlessness did at least bring the main slaughter to an end (more than could be said of the Duke of Marlborough's activities, by the way) and helped to prevent more slaughter in the wars which would have taken place had America become disunited. Mitchell says: "That this march (through Georgia) and the next one through the Carolinas shortened the war by many months is undeniable". Finally there is plenty of evidence that though Sherman could be ruthless, he could also be humanitarian. When at last the South was defeated, he was one of the very few people who had the courage to stand up and say that it should be fairly treated (the nation was howling for vengeance at the time in a way that suggests the later McCarthyism). While he was being glorified as a conquering hero, he wrote, "I am sick and tired of fighting—its glory is all moonshine; even success the most brilliant is over dead and mangled bodies". Later in life he liked to go to balls because he "liked to see young people happy".

### Lincoln the deist

In considering the Civil War one inevitably thinks of Abraham Lincoln. He was the statesman who saw clearly that the attempt to break up the Union must be resisted. He was the person who persuaded the people of the North to stick to their task till it was accomplished. Had he lived,

he would have treated the defeated South generously. What religious views did he hold?

The truth is—nobody knows. In his speeches he sometimes referred to God—for instance, when he announced the Abolition of Slavery, he spoke of a promise made to “my Maker”. But the probability is that he was a Deist and supported Tom Paine. D. W. Brogan says that “he was immune from the religious passions which were often the only diversion of the frontier” and speaks of

## A REPLY TO MR QUIOGUE

MR QUIOGUE is very confused in attacking agnostics as he does. He believes that absence of evidence for God's existence proves that God does not exist. This position is quite irrational, unless another premise is added. The position was well summed up by Professor Broad in his *The Mind and its Place in Nature*:

“Finding no evidence for a proposition is evidence against it only if the proposition be such that, if it were true, there ought to be some observable evidence for it.”

This means that absence of evidence for God would only prove he does not exist if, were he to exist, there would certainly be evidence for him. And this latter qualification cannot be assumed.

Let us consider some examples in science. Not very long ago there was no available evidence that definitely pointed to the existence of viruses, electrons and many distant stars, but in time the evidence was discovered and the things were found to exist. Evidence may come to light that would prove that God exists. I personally believe that we are just about as likely to prove the existence of fairies or leprechauns. But to be fully rational we cannot ignore the possibility, however remote and seemingly absurd.

One of the clear consequences of Mr Quiogue's position is that nothing could ever be discovered. Consider the following argument: If something were unknown there would be no known evidence for it; lack of evidence would prove that it did not exist, according to Mr Quiogue; therefore it could never be discovered.

Lack of evidence points nowhere (except in Broad's instance). If it did, Englishmen would have “proved”, in 1200 AD, that America did not exist; in 1300 AD that the circulation of the blood was a myth; and in 1900 AD that the planet Pluto did not exist.

Similarly, it is suggested that because the arguments put forward to prove God's existence are invalid this proves that God does not exist. Consider the following argument:

If President Kennedy was killed by shooting he would be dead.

President Kennedy is dead.

Therefore President Kennedy was killed by shooting.

Here the conclusion is true (and the two premises), but the argument is invalid (if in doubt, substitute “Caesar” for President Kennedy—in which case true premises will yield a false conclusion). This shows that if an argument is invalid it cannot be assumed that the conclusion is false. In particular, if the arguments for God's existence are invalid this alone does not mean that God does not exist.

Mr Quiogue is quite wrong to say that the agnostic is “coddling another superstition”. The agnostic is only irrational when he lets his agnostic views inhibit the secular orientation of his life; but it certainly cannot be assumed that this will happen just because one is an agnostic. Mr

“Abraham's refusal to be converted to any of the religions available on the frontier”. “He was probably a Deist of the eighteenth-century type”, says Brogan.

Anyway, if he wasn't an atheist at the start of the war, he probably was one by the time it ended. No-one could believe in a Divine Purpose who had to rely on General McClennon!

(Concluded)

G. L. Simons

Quiogue's argument in no way points to the agnostic's suggested need for enlightenment. The argument points nowhere except to the logical incompetence of the people who believe it.

However, applying Broad's principle to the Christian god, we can say rationally that such a god does not exist—simply because if there were in existence an omnipotent, all-loving being, the world would certainly be a happier place.

But God may be feeble, or cruel—and this would be at least consistent with our evidence. Of course we have no evidence whatever to believe in any kind of god. But lack of evidence can only point to the finite nature of man's mind. Mr Quiogue worries that we may have to suspend an ultimate decision on “the God question” for ever and ever. So what? I have no particular hankering after infinite knowledge. Why cannot Mr Quiogue admit that there are some things which he will never have a complete answer to?

The practical attitudes of the atheist and agnostic to society and human behaviour are clearly identical in most circumstances, which is why they can both be united under the humanist banner. But the superficial atheist (there are some) should beware that he does not weaken humanism by stating its philosophical position in a way that can be undermined by any intelligent religious person (there are some).

To me, belief in God is an irrational superstition, responsible for much misery and little good, both historically and today. I firmly believe that religion should be exposed as old-fashioned, immature, dangerous nonsense. But I would consider it irresponsible on my part to attempt this with invalid argument, as Mr Quiogue does.

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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. Mepham, 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

Belfast Humanist Group (War Memorial Building, Waring Street), Monday, February 13th, 8 p.m.: ROBERT SHIELDS, "The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament".

Bristol Humanist Group (Folk House, 40 Park Street), Wednesday, February 15th, 7.30 p.m.: Mrs B. BOWEN-JONES. "Youth Counselling".

Glasgow Secular Society (Grand Hotel, Charing Cross), Sunday, February 12th, 2.45 p.m.: Speaker, DONALD McRAE.

Havering Humanist Society (The Social Centre, Gubbins Lane, Harold Wood), Tuesday, February 14th, 8 p.m.: "The 'Baha'I Faith".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, February 12th, 6.30 p.m.: H. J. BLACKHAM, "Humanist Talks with the Vatican".

Merseyside Humanist Group (Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool), Friday, February 10th, 7.30 p.m.: The Very Rev. EDWARD PATEY, Dean of Liverpool, "Christianity and Humanism".

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall Humanist Centre, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, February 12th, 11 a.m.: Baroness STOCKS, "Youth and Authority; Tuesday, February 14th, 6.30 p.m.: Mrs BINDLEY, "Primary Education".  
South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday, February 12th, 6.30 p.m.: Ilse Wolf, Martin Isepp and Georgina Dobree. Admission 3/-  
West Ham and District Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead Green, London, E11): Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

## LETTERS

### The Unknown

IN YOUR ARTICLE on the British Humanist Association and its alleged synonymity with intellectualism, I think you greatly overestimate the reputation of the BHA. From my own small view of the world I would say that no more than 1 per cent of the general public has heard of Humanism and even less has heard of the BHA.

During the last eight or nine months I have worn a tie with the Humanist symbol. Only five people—all office colleagues—have shown any interest and asked about the symbol. When answered, they have shown no more than a polite interest in the subject, which, obviously, they had not heard about before. Three of my wife's relations to whom I sent Humanist greetings cards at Christmas didn't read the back of the card and thought the design was some sort of puzzle.

It seems to me, therefore, that a person seeking to be classed as an intellectual—because a Humanist—would first have to make sure that his circle of acquaintances had heard of Humanism. I suspect that the people who do know about Humanism are already intellectuals so there would be no point in a member of the circle joining to prove something that was accepted anyway.

The academic world I would think to be such a group of people, but I learn on good authority that many school teachers, although Humanists, are anxious to hide the fact, not boast about it.

As regards carrying any message to non-sympathisers, I think the chances are very slim indeed.

Several years ago over a period of several months I tried introducing mention of philosophy in the office. Almost invariably the reaction was one of uncomfortable silence. The attitude was one of "what shocking bad taste mentioning things like that". Sometimes there would be a pause and then someone would say, "I see United won again on Saturday", and that was that.

Incidentally, when I ordered a copy of the FREETHINKER from my newsagent, who has been in the trade for 18 years, he thought he had heard about it several years ago, but he seemed very vague and was just trying to be polite, I thought. "It's some sort of political paper isn't it?" he said. K. UNSWORTH.

### Aunt Sally

MR TEAPE, in criticising my article on the Aberfan disaster, stated that he knew plenty of Christians who would deny God's almightiness. Is that to assert that God was unable to avert what happened at Aberfan? If he was responsible for Christ's miracles, as Christ said and as Christians believe, and held back the waters of the Red Sea, how can Christians disbelieve in his almightiness, or that he had not the power to hold back the slag mountain? Mr Teape implies that I put up Aunt Sally's for the fun of knocking them down. Is God an Aunt Sally? I did not put him up. Are the Resurrection, Heaven, Angels, Salvation, God's omnipotence and omniscience, Aunt Sallys of my erection—What drew the great audiences at Billy Graham's fundamental meetings?

As for my "storming forts which have been abandoned, from an intelligent point of view", that was not an intelligent remark, as the "forts" haven't been abandoned by Christians, and it was Christians my article attacked. I am accused of whitewashing man about Aberfan. In my article I stated that the disaster could have been averted by reasonable precautions, and by no means exonerated those responsible for the slag tips. When the tragedy occurred, however, human beings would have averted it, had they had power to. God, though having the power, chose not to, or is myth, which all the lessons of history demonstrate.

I hope Mr Teape will re-read my article, "from a reasonable and intelligent point of view" to quote his own words.

F. H. SNOW.