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Why I Left The Ministry And Became An Atheist

By G. Vincent Runyon

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This is the true story of a Methodist minister in good standing who of his own free will and accord renounced Christianity and became an atheist. Naturally you want to know what manner of man he was and why he above a ll people should do such a thing. If you are bubbling over with questions here are a few you might ask: Was he really ordained? How long was he a preacher? What was his education and background? Did he have to quit? Who was he mad at? What was his motive? Profit? Publicity? Who is financing him? How can he be right when so many educated pastors remain in the fold? Since churches do a lot of good why can he not take

that into consideration and either compromise or keep his beliefs to himself? Finally is he a communist? This he will deny as his story unfolds.

The answered questions plus many others are all here so read on. Right off the bat he will briefly sketch his early background so that you can better get the picture. He saves a few replies including his denial of communism for the closing innings.

Be not amazed if in the course of this book he peddles his wares for he loves to pitch for what he aptly terms the best of all causes--Secularism and Atheism. He delivers the atheist ball with as much zip and zeal as he previously preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is still a missionary at heart so beware that he does not capture yours. His theme is that belief in god is a grave and terrible superstition harmful to you and detrimental to society.

Take Notice. For variety he uses the following terms interchangeably and synonymously: Atheists, Secularists, Humanists, Freethinkers, Rationalists. Their differences are so slight that the respective groups often join hands and work together. Runyon belongs to them all.

Having laid his foundation in the third person he will now (click) switch his pen to the first person and get going.

Background And Education

My late father George D. Runyon was for many years a successful newspaper publisher, church trustee, church treasurer and prominent citizen of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. His ancestors of French Huguenot stock came to America in 1665. (the Huguenots suffered bloody persecutions during the religious wars of the time). My mother Melvenia Lewis of Welsh descent was a devout Christian and active in good causes. I was first taught to pray at my mother's knee. I commenced going to Sunday School at kindergarten age and attended church regularly with my parents all through my youth. Church going became so much a habit with me that I continued to attend services when away from home. Natural love for her children caused my mother to do what she considered best for the m. Therefore she believed she was doing only her duty when she taught that God like a good shepherd constantly watched over each one of us. I recall how she in all sincerity told us that God had prospered father because he was a good Christian man. Now I believed this and never forgot it for he was a good man and seemingly prosperous. I also believed this because I loved my mother and trusted her. I am now ashamed of the fact that as a lad I was so credulous but I suspect I was too young then and too naive to question my elders. My world was a small world. It did not extend beyond the home. So the seeds of supernatural belief that were planted found fertile soil in which to grow. They became so rooted that they were difficult to extricate at a later date when I discovered to my dismay that some of the things I had learned in my childhood were not so. During my youth I do not recall ever rebelling or being bored with the church and its teachings. I loved the church atmosphere, its friendliness and its music. No wonder I wound up a preacher.

In 1917 I was graduated from Fremont Normal College (now Midland College) Nebraska with an A.B. degree. I taught the following fall and winter history and Political Science at the state school for teachers in Albion, Idaho. That is until I enlisted in World War 1 which was then getting pretty hot. I would not have been eligible for so good a job had not teachers been scarce. A much respected former president of Albion was a graduate of my school and that helped too. The work was most enjoyable but I was aware that I would need higher degrees were I to continue teaching at this level after the war. Upon discharge from the army (13th Balloon Co.) I had other ideas. Typical of youth, I was in a hurry to make money. Time lost in the service to my country had made me restless. My first job was with the New York Times in classified advertising. After taking a night course I wrote copy for Barron G.

Collier, Street Railway Advertising on 42nd street. I received promotions but not fast enough to suit me so I quit for a lesser known concern that paid me more. Religion had made me an introspective type of individual which I think will explain how at a youth religious conference in 1922 I became disgusted with myself and resolved then and there to cease my selfish quest for money and become a minister. Intuitively I felt that I had received the call from on high. I wanted to do good, to be more useful and even though I was only 26 I felt that so far I had contributed nothing to the world. After advice from my pastor I matriculated at Drew Theological seminary from which I graduated in 1925. In 1931 I received my master of Arts degree from Drew University where I majored in Sociology. By that time I was full time pastor of the Methodist church in Deposit near Bingham ton, N.Y. My thesis for this degree was "The Relation of Poverty to Crime." My research revealed that poverty was not as strong a factor in crime as I anticipated so I was glad to have made the study.

I do not think I had ever been introduced to skepticism until I attended the seminary where the students are wisely taught the heresies of the past. That is the best place to learn them. At private bull sessions in dormitory rooms where everything was discussed it was evident that some of the more advanced students had doubts about the virgin birth, the resurrection and the miracles. But I came out of the seminary with a sound faith in God despite some uncertainties about so-called fundamentals. Thus I became what is popularly known as a modernist preacher rather than a fundamentalist.

How Long A Pastor?

Twelve years in the pulpit. This included my student pastorates. Being young, energetic and well trained I advanced rapidly. My first parish was in Elizaville, N.Y. It was near Red Hook, where I was raised a Master Mason. The oath was taken in good faith as I was then quite orthodox. To be a candidate for Masonry you must, among other things, declare in whom you put your trust. The term God is not defined so may be interpreted broadly. Some famous Masons of colonial times were actually deists. The deists were not atheists but their god was not the orthodox Christian God. The deists were the rationalists of that day. If you want to know what one distinguished deist thought about religion read the famous classic "The Age of Reason," by the Revolutionary war patriot Thomas Paine. A paper back edition for students may be obtained for only 50 cents from the Freethinkers of America, 370 West 35th Street, New York 1, New York. Paine was in advance of his time.

My other parishes were Bangall, near Poughkeepsie, N. Y.; Harriman, near Newburgh; Deposit, near Binghamton and finally historic Old 18th Street Church [footnote: 18th Street Church has since been merged with Metropolitan Temple] in downtown New York City which was my last appointment. For three years I worked with enthusiasm trying hard to revive this once famous old westside church in Manhattan. It has been said that I was successful in attracting many young people. I talked their language. Youth are important to a movement so the quicker we rationalists find it out the better. At Old 18th Street Church I married and buried many people and I did a lot of calling. Calling on members and prospective members is good salesmanship so I recommend this technique too to my rationalist friends. I took my work seriously. Preaching was fun. There was generally a reporter in the audience. I was not prominent but the New York Times index records a few sermons.

Incidentally my church employed a deaconess who was comparable to an assistant pastor. Florence Armstrong was dedicated to her work. In her quaint garb she went about doing good bringing inspiration, clothes and groceries to the sick and unemployed. The depression hit many people hard. Capitalizing on my journalistic background I published a sizable church paper in all my parishes. After delivering my

Sunday night's sermon it was not unusual for me to sit up all night in my study typing out copy as fast as I could, to meet the printer's deadline.

Was I Sincere?

Was I sincere? No man walked and talked with God more than I. God was my constant companion. However I was not austere or straight laced. Judge for yourself.

Was I Paid To Quit?

Was profit my motive? No one was financing me. Nor was I in the employ of unscrupulous men. Some may innocently think that I had been paid by the devil or his cohorts to leave the ministry in order to confuse everyone.

Naturally I smile when I write this but since a lot of people in the year 1959 still believe that there is a devil I must in kindness recognize the question and deny it.

I want you to know I was doing well in the pulpit. I quit in my prime at the approximate age of 40. I was far enough advanced that I had security. It was in 1934-35 when secular jobs were as scarce as hen's teeth due to the aftermath of the depression. Actually after I quit I had a bad time financially while getting adjusted. I lost my savings through a California promoter and was up against it for food and got pretty hungry. But I stuck to my guns although I could have returned to the ministry back east without question as I was in good standing.

I have never been a professional atheist. That is I have never been in the employ of any of the various freethought humanist or secularist groups existent in our land. True in recent years I have written a few articles for rationalist journals but this was done as a labor of love. I accepted no money for my efforts even though I could well have used it. I have earned my bread and butter for almost twenty years as a nursing attendant at a large chronic disease and rehabilitation hospital in Downey, California. [footnote: Prior to this, after operating a physical therapy business in a fashionable Pasadena hotel, he sold it and tried to make a living as a free lance writer until his funds were exhausted.] I like my work here though the job lacks the prestige I previously enjoyed. However I am sure I do more good in this modest capacity than I did as a dignified and respected member of the clergy.

Was My Motive Publicity?

I slipped out of the profession without fanfare or dramatics. I have lived in obscurity keeping mum on my atheism for twenty-four years. It will be news to my friends back east. At first I did not want to hurt the churches where I had served nor the feelings of my many devout friends within. The older saints have passed on by now. Publicity? One does not expect favorable publicity or popularity espousing an unpopular cause. It is a lonesome road. Did not Jesus the mystic take that road too? Yes and he warned his disciples that there would be the sorrow of separation of close friends and loved ones to those who followed him. It is the price you have to pay when you are a non-conformist or in the minority. Many have found it out.

What Am I Rebelling Against?

Amateur psychologists will ask what am I rebelling against? My early home life was the best. I was not a problem child. I had a wholesome environment. I was successful as a preacher. I have had my share of frustrations in life just as you have. My reasons for leaving the ministry were intellectual and not emotional. I did not get mad and quit. Nothing like that. In fact I was presented with a substantial purse by my New York congregation when I took my leave.

Why Did I Turn My Back On God?

It would hardly be accurate to say that I turned my back on God or was disobedient to him. My conversion to atheism was as I have said an intellectual matter. Be assured that as long as I believed that a God existed I communed with that God. It was only when I could no longer intellectually believe that there was a God that this communion and fellowship with him ceased. How could I do otherwise? Believe me when I say that it was with reluctance that I let go. You might have advised me to hang on but for me to have done so would have made me an intellectual hypocrite. To pretend is dishonest. I fully expect some pious reader to malign me by accusing me of quitting the ministry in order to indulge in a life of sin. But this would be unkind and untrue. As far as I know after I gave up my superstitious belief in prayer, and became a rationalist my behavior was better, my attitude toward life and people improved. In short I was a better man. Being on my own, good behavior became voluntary. As a pattern for living I adopted the well known golden rule. Stated positively or negatively it is sound ethics. This formula for living, not original with Jesus, undoubtedly is far older than either Christianity and Judaism. It sums up every commandment that has ever been written. Try it. You can't go wrong.

What Events Led To My Conversion To Atheism?

First let me outline the events that directed me to atheism.

1. I had been taught to be a truthseeker.
 2. I took a sabbatical leave which gave me time to travel study and rethink.
 3. I came in contact with the Humanists who had a substitute for religion. Worshipping neither God, man nor beast their emphasis was on improving this world rather than preparing for the next.
 4. Impressed with the fact that the rationalists, humanists, secularists and freethinkers were superior people I was driven to my books in order to learn whether or not the supposed existence of God was a fallacy. With a hundred questions on my mind I did not stop reading until I was completely and fully convinced that my most fundamental beliefs were based on error. I finally had to conclude that future civilizations would be better off without belief in this nefarious practice of superstitiously attempting to contact the so-called unseen or invisible powers. I quit belief in ghosts.

Let me apply the four steps one by one:--

Step #1. Good professors made me a truthseeker. The motto of my old alma mater Fremont College was "The Light of Truth Leads." From her able scholars I early learned what a thrill, what excitement and what adventure there is in store for those who diligently seek the light of knowledge. Later when commencing my studies at

Drew Theological seminary my beloved and esteemed professor of theology Dr. Edwin Lewis startled the class when he in effect said (my words) "Young men follow truth wherever it leads. It may lead you in dangerous paths but have courage to follow it even if it takes you from your goal." Those were jewelled words of wisdom. Little did I then realize that in later years the continued pursuit of knowledge would lead me from the very profession for which I was then being trained.

Step #2. A sabbatical leave in 1934-35 gave me time to travel, study and rethink. Like most professional men up to my ears in work and busy with extraneous duties I needed to get away and see things in perspective. I was neglecting my reading. Too many college graduates make this sad mistake. Once they get their sheepskins they stop studying because of work pressure and social duties and club demands. Methodist ministers in particular because they change parishes more frequently, often are guilty of rehashing old sermons over and over. Let me emphasize my next sentence. HAD I NOT TAKEN THIS LEAVE WHEN I DID, I KNOW I WOULD STILL BE PREACHING. I would never have seen the light. I would have been blinded by the trees in the forest. THIS SABBATICAL LEAVE WAS THE TURNING POINT. Therefore I am glad I took it and I hope you will take one too. Not for a month but for a whole year. Ministers and professors are entitled to take one after ten years service. I had been preaching twelve years and would not have taken it then, had I not some private business to take care of. When I left on a tour to the west coast following a needed operation I had every reason to return if I chose, for there was nothing against me in the conference, and, I was on good terms with my bishop the Reverend Francis J. McConnell. I carried this and other letters with me.

RESIDENT BISHOP
The Methodist Episcopal Church
150 Fifth Avenue
New York City

Nov. 3, 1934

To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that the Rev. G. Vincent Runyon is a fully ordained minister of the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He is in good standing with excellent equipment and training---of conscientious and earnest spirit.

Francis J. McConnell
Bishop

Regarding Bishop McConnell. He was considered one of the more scholarly bishops of his day. He was author of "Is God Limited" and other Books.

In the west I observed in many churches, without revealing myself as a minister. Here were some of my reflections. I was appalled at the dry, antiquated "horse and buggy" sermons that the people had to listen to every Sunday. Some discourses were worse than others. During this period of my ministry I classed myself as a theological liberal. I was surprised to find so few. I thought that there were more. Though I was known throughout my ministry as a modernist or a liberal I did believe in a god and had a positive message; make no mistake about it. I may have preached a sort of pantheistic God but This God was existent everywhere and he was always available or accessible for he was universal and omnipresent and dwelled within you as well as without you. I taught the divinity of the inner or real self. I theorized that this was the ungrasped misunderstood message of Jesus. I made it a point to avoid the hackneyed language or nomenclature of most preachers.

Though a Methodist it seems that increasingly during my travels I was beginning to feel more at home in the Unitarian churches. As you know the Unitarians allow elasticity of belief offering considerable freedom of thought to their members. I consider the Unitarian church today as a good stepping stone for skeptics who are on the fence but not quite ready for atheism. It is a good place for those who though dissatisfied with orthodoxy still feel that they must cling to the God theory even if their God is nothing more than an impersonal power or force.

However we secularists are indebted to a forward and advanced group of Unitarians for again reviving the historic Humanist movement that had its birth during the renaissance period of enlightenment when there was a noticeable breaking away from ecclesiastical authority by those engaged in the arts and sciences. These Humanists were sick of the medieval suppression of free thought in literary and scientific writings. They were bored by the dominant note in art and literature of angels, devils and biblical legends. So thanks to the Humanists there was a revival of interest in the long buried pagan classics with their spirit of inquiry a spirit which though long dead must rise again. The contents of the classics written in days of less restraint came as a breath of pure air to a darkened world polluted with piety and superstition.

Among the early Humanists were such names as Thomas More, Erasmus, Lorenzo de Medici, Lorenza Valla, Petrarch and Boccaccio. The humanists were not atheists but they recognized the need for the secularization or humanization of knowledge. Piety was ruining it. In the same manner the more recent Unitarian humanists have attempted to humanize religion and bring it down to earth. I will speak more about the Humanists directly.

Step #3. Curiosity about the Los Angeles Society of Humanists headed in the late thirties by Dr. Lowell H. Coate [footnote: Dr. Coate presently is editor of the American Rationalist.] a former Quaker led to my enlightenment. Because this group left its stamp on me for which I shall always be grateful I will always advocate having more such meetings and forums organized throughout the country to educate the traveling public.

These humanists at first shocked me. They sounded sacrilegious just as this very book may sound to the uninitiated. Up until this time I had never considered atheism and did not know that the humanists went that far. It was like a bang on the head. No wonder they woke me up. They made me mad. Who wouldn't be? I was being robbed. No they were not pickpockets. They were not taking anything of intrinsic value. It was worse than that. They were stealing my long cherished precious beliefs that were priceless. On top of that they were filching my security. Visualize for a moment this Sunday gathering of men and women of varied occupations. None of their jobs were affected by their radical religious beliefs. They had nothing to lose in embracing agnosticism or a theism. But I did for my occupation was that of a clergyman. That was my bread and butter. If I should be foolish enough to go for their line I would have to sacrifice my profession. It would cost me plenty to kiss my years of specialized education and experience good-bye. Furthermore I thought this mixed group of humanists and freethinkers to be absolutely stupid to turn to atheism just because they held doubts about the miracles of Jesus as well as the Old Testament legends. Wasn't I a bit of a heretic myself? Wasn't I too a skeptic? Had not my school taught me that skepticism was normal and yet left me with a strong faith in god?

But nevertheless these secularists got under my skin. They stirred me up. As time went on I came to admire their cultured scientific approach to knowledge. I liked their aims and was impressed with their deportment. A novice might expect them to be irresponsibly but they were not. They had high ideals. There are many roads to atheism but I came in through the door of Humanism. My fellow rationalists let us open wide the doors so that others may enter.

Before long the humanist emphasis on man and the problems of this world, rather than the golden streets in the next, appealed to me strongly. I was particularly impressed with the volumes of published sermons of Dr. John H. Dietrich of Minneapolis and the writings of William Floyd of New York. Floyd's "Evolutionary Philosophy--A Substitute for Religion" was a honey. After reading him I, not yet an atheist, but certainly an agnostic, wanted to found a godless church or religion. This I figured I could do because of my institutional background but I did not do it because I lacked the financial backing. I figured that such a church with weekly lectures would provide a temporary or transitory home for the thousands of skeptical people including many agnostics who had not yet been weaned from the habit of church going, and, who therefore might welcome a constructive weekly service and training school for youth guidance. It would be a humanist church. There would be no worship.

Today if I am correctly informed the more advanced humanists for semantic reasons frown on the use of such words as church and religion in connection with their program due to the confusion that results from the traditional meanings of these terms. Lancelot Hogben in his book "Dangerous Thoughts," alludes to the modern emphasis of scientific Humanism. Oliver Reiser and Corliss Lamont, professors of philosophy in eastern universities may be said to be exponents of scientific Humanism.

Even though I noted atheists attending Dr. Coate's humanist meetings I was later to discover that the Humanist pattern of approach was more that of the agnostic. In fact many in the group prefer to soft-peddle their atheism so that people of all degrees of skepticism can feel at home. What the proper local approach should be has always been controversial. People of all degrees of skepticism certainly should be made welcome in all freethought groups. People have to crawl before they can walk. We should be patient with those who have not yet arrived. Some have had more time to read than others.

The humanist emphasis has always been on man rather than on god. Man is the unit. He is the measuring stick. As Protagoras said "Man is the measure of all things." Man having developed and coordinated his brain and hands has evolved into the highest form of life yet known. He is at the top of the ladder. His potential is high. He is still creating and like a flower will continue to unfold.

The chief goal of the humanists seems to be the improvement of society by man, instead of God, in the elimination of wars, poverty, disease and other social evils. Because of this emphasis the humanists are fertile soil for every "do-gooder" or propagandist who seeks an audience for his pet reform. You will find a few "cracked pots," just as you do within every other movement including the Christian religion, but by and large you will find that the humanist groups around the world are composed of well read and cultured people. The groups in college towns are on a high level. It is important that the local units be united and strong but unfortunately divisions do occur which always saddens me. It happens when a particular leader or member with a complex for his pet reform, peeve, or hobby, takes over and dominates the meetings, with the real goal of the society lost. Hence good leadership is essential.

Humanists And Atheists Drove Me To My Books

Step #4. I came to know personally many fine atheists and freethinkers. I mixed with them all. To my surprise these so-called infidels proved to be of as high character as my friends the Christians. In fact I gained so much confidence in their earnest thirst for knowledge, and their intellectual honesty which spilled over into their conduct, that I thought to myself many times that

were I an employer hiring help I would choose or trust an atheist above a Christian. That was saying a lot.

Driven to further search for knowledge, I became a passionate reader. Before I was through I read hundreds of volumes. But, mark you, I refused to be swayed by my new friends without considerable study. I knew that I could not afford to be wrong so I kept feverishly searching for the answers to innumerable questions that flashed to my mind. These questions had to be answered to my satisfaction before I would budge an inch. The field covered history of religion, origin of religious beliefs, comparative religions, philosophy, religious psychology and books on various branches of science. I tell you I was a hard nut to crack. It was a once in a lifetime decision for me. Tougher for me than for most people. Here I was by profession an ordained clergyman with much at stake. My security and my pride for one thing. It is not always easy to face the truth when you have something at stake. It takes courage. It is like jumping off a cliff or buying something costly. There is the temptation to ignore new truth, to run away from it all, or, to thrust one's head in the sand so as to blind one's eyes, or deafen one's ears or close one's mind to the facts.

What do you suppose haunted me most during this period of research? It was how could my lovable, esteemed and scholarly old professors at Drew be wrong? This bothered me no end. Later I did rationalize, as one must do, that they could be wrong, and why couldn't they? Like the rest of us they too had been moulded from their youth up by this much glorified and publicly accepted institution of society, namely the church. It was a part of the status quo. True these professors were rated as experts or specialists in various categories of religion yet no doubt had become too busy with routine classes and other chores to question or rethink their own beliefs. Furthermore it was their bread and butter and most of them were married. They were not one whit different than many pastors like myself who had become so busy with our multitudinous duties that the days, months and years rolled by without us ever taking time out to reappraise the beliefs we had been taught. These professors sit comfortably in endowed chairs and they must not violate them. Like Humpty Dumpty they have been elevated to a higher pedestal than most of us so they must be careful what they say. They have further to fall. They must not hurt themselves nor the institutions in which they teach.

I Renounce Religion

Finally I was forced to conclude that the alleged existence of god is but a myth, born of fear. That all gods including the Christian god are but figments of the imagination or outright inventions of the mind. I reasoned that the environment of primitive man which lacked a scientific explanation of nature's torments had every reason to be permeated with superstition but that we with our advanced scientific knowledge have no reason to appease imaginary gods. As I continued boring into my books the searchlight of knowledge was thrown upon my long cherished beliefs. I saw them for what they were worth. Reluctantly I shed them one by one. I did not label myself right away. I hardly knew what label to use. At first I called myself a Humanist. Sometimes an agnostic. Sometimes a Rationalist. Sometimes a Secularist. After many years of study and thought and assimilation I prefer a term that states my position clearly and positively. That is why I today declare myself an atheist. I evolved into an atheist not because I wanted to but because the evidence in all my books overwhelmingly pointed to a materialistic universe and against the plausible existence of supernatural beings or gods of any description.

The Most Important Day Of My Life

I shall always remember the day when I decided that I could no longer have the right to call myself a Christian. I shall never forget that exciting though sad moment when in the quiet of my study I first realized this. I am certain my pulse beat was faster. I had not been pushed. I chose my course.

My emotions were mixed. I was happy because of the release that came with the decision. I had found the rainbow. I was elated. I was as happy as a man who had found a jewel of great price. I knew of course, that that which I had lost was being replaced by something better. I felt free as a bird. I was now my own master. No longer a mental slave. The eyes of a dictatorial god were no longer upon me nor upon my fellow men. And that indeed was good. Good because it at once made me aware that I had a greater obligation to all living creatures since there was no longer a god to guard or protect anyone. Hence a natural brotherhood arose within me toward all men. I would like to see the day come to pass when all men will shake off their supernatural beliefs and recognize this natural brotherhood of which I speak. But despite my enthusiasm I fear that that day is a long ways off because religion is so entrenched in our society that it will be around for a long time. Even astrology a discarded science that once was held in high respect, is still with us.

As I said above my emotions were mixed. I was overjoyed to have found truth. But there was reason for sadness and disgust. What about my wasted years? The best years of my life were gone. They were spent in vain. My career was shattered. I spent years in training for a profession for which I had now lost respect and could no longer with conscience follow. Here I was in possession of professional experience so useless and impractical that it would ruin me for future employment. I had to change horses in midstream. This was before World War #2 when the country had not yet emerged from the effects of the depression. With jobs scarce there would be difficulty seeking work in a new field. Thinking it over it finally dawned on me that I was a victim of circumstances. I had been made a fool of. I had been gulped. I had been sold down the river. I had been sold a bill of goods to train for the ministry and all of a sudden bingo that training and twelve years of experience had to go down the drain. Who could I blame? I could only blame society for tolerating and legalizing through the centuries this great swindle upon the public. Why mince words? You people in the pews, you have contributed money lavishly week after week and expended so much time and effort you are the real victims. Though I had worked like a beaver for the church and had given my all, just look at the harm I did to people like yourselves. That is the sad thing. I preached fairy tales and legends as gospel truth. I told of a god. I magnified him. I built him up. I exaggerated him. I acted as his representative. I pictured him as a Santa Claus who could be easily contacted by merely muttering the hocus pocus of magic words. This act of magic was given a respectable name called prayer. Prayer is a one way conversation with the invisible world.

We poor mortals because of our ignorance and inexperience make many mistakes. The saddest mistake I ever made in my immature years was when I fell for this divine buncombe. It is not to my credit that I went so far as to make it my business or profession. The fact that I was sincere does not excuse me. Look at the mental damage caused.

By way of illustration I bred wishful thinkers when I urged my troubled parishioners to pray. All who hoped for an answer were wishfully thinking and waiting. I daresay some are still waiting and wondering why their prayers are still unanswered. It would help them if now they could know the stark truth that there was no god all the time and that their pastor was then too dumb to know it. When I taught those people to lean heavily on God's everlasting arms, I was unwittingly teaching them to be parasites and procrastinators. I was teaching them to stand still and dream day dreams. You have heard the old saying "Let George Do It." I taught these people to

let George (god) do things for them. No wonder young people thus brought up get nowhere fast.

Ministers And Priests Are Quacks

The seminary educated me to be a quack. What is a quack? A quack in short is one who pretends to have an inside wire or track. No priest, rabbi, minister or bishop or cardinal or pope has inside knowledge about heaven, hell and god but to hear me exhort you would have thought that I had influence with God. That is how all ministers sound when they pray (bray) with that old paranoid voice of divine authority, which so many clergymen quickly develop, while thundering and reechoing their god's fiendish and diabolical warnings of future punishment. Pause and listen some Sunday to these circus freaks peddling their wares over the radio and please notice at the same time how subtly yet how brazenly they beg for gold to carry on their quackery. Listen to the tent revivalists who are the high pressure artists of the world's greatest and cruelest racket. These pious swindlers prey on the aged, the widows, the poor and the sick. They deserve your censure. They should not be allowed to operate. If they were selling anything else but religion the police would be after them in a hurry. But our laws have made this racket legal.

Dealing with distant and unknown and invisible powers has been a profitable field for fakers and racketeers from time immemorial, and I am sorry to say that rabbis, priests and ministers must be included in this category. Everyone of them are quacks. You heard me correctly. The man in the pulpit who makes you think he is publicly praying to god is a quack. The man who comes to your home and offers to pray (or beg) to a god for a cure of anyone's soul or body is a quack. He may not know it but he is. When the priest does his mumbo jumbo for fee or salary he is indulging in quackery. No, I will not exempt the protestant clergymen. Of course most of them are sincere just as many quacks of medicine are when they try to sell you their pet remedies. Do not be taken in. Do not be fooled by the clergymen's neatly tailored black clothes and their cultured manners. It is all window dressing. Beware of these wolves (some of them are wolves) in sheep's clothing. Have you ever noticed that the women far outnumber the men in every church service? It is not hard to know why. But I am not going to stick my neck out and say. I will let you think that out for yourself. I only know that many men who do go to church are dragged there. A few are henpecked. These male wolves in their black frocks go after the rich as well as the poor bleeding them of large amounts of their financial blood. As for the widows they love to be fleeced and buncoed by their good looking pastors. Why should they mind writing out those fat checks for the church? They figure they will receive a mansion in the sky in return. These rich communicants may not know it but they are very unbusiness like. They are buying a pig in a poke, buying blindly, as the eastern suckers used to do when they bought distant Florida real estate by mail, only to find out later that they had bought worthless swamp land. These rich contributors eventually will die without ever a deed for their heavenly real estate which they bought sight unseen, and which actually does not exist. After death it will be too late for the deceased to come back to get even with their fast talking pastors, who by then will have moved on to other cities to reap additional harvests.

Newspapers and magazines, TV and radio give these pious swindlers and sellers of heavenly property free space and time to publish their gibberish and double talk. Local governments unconstitutionally subsidize the churches by exempting them from taxes. This should be stopped. Churches be it known are our largest landowners. That is one reason why your taxes are so high. They pay no taxes and the remaining taxpayers such as you and I have to make it up for the expenses of government are enormous. Politicians are no help for they bow and scrape before the clergy as though these hypocritical salvationists were better than ordinary men. We put these glorified parasitical quacks who enjoy begging for a living on a

pedestal. Yet they are on a level with fortune tellers and similar racketeers. Fortune tellers bad as they are do less harm because their racket is not so well organized nor are their teachings systematized to church proportions. The fortune tellers lack press agents to build up good will for them and to glorify their magic powers, and particularly the invisible supernatural powers, from whom they draw their secrets. These crystal gazers like the clergy are peddling mystical nonsense and false information. Both are pretenders of knowledge and both deal with the realm of the unseen and invisible. Did you know that fortune tellers in Los Angeles now operate under the cloak of religion in order to operate legally? They use the title Reverend before their names. Quite fitting isn't it?

Are The Clergy Better Educated?

Did I hear you say that the clergy are well educated and therefore not in the same category with the fortune tellers and other quacks who claim to do business with the supernatural powers? Ah yes there is the rub. Your pastor has been to school true, but he has never been taught to think. He is a parrot. Forgive him. He can't think for himself. His thinking has been warped because he has been indoctrinated with religious superstition. His education has been slanted. He has been told what to believe. It has been poured into him through a funnel. When he is graduated he is a beautiful bird who wears a colorful robe on Sundays and repeats the same lingo week after week. A moron could do just as well.

Actually the educational level of the average clergyman has always been low though slightly higher than the people in the pews. There are of course exceptions. His little education formerly never mattered as long as the people in the pews were ignorant but it matters now because church members today are getting higher education and they can be greatly bored by a 2x4 preacher who does not know what he is talking about. Some denominations have higher standards than others, but mark you, thousands of ministers have had no college education.

Many take non-accredited home study courses of required reading, designed to make them full fledged shouting robots. Some of these non-schooled clergymen when not too lazy to stick their noses in books do pick up a degree of culture and if they possess either literary or oratorical ability are able to put on a good show. Ministers of the literary type produce some brilliant essays. These essays if stripped of meaningless pious phrases would be worth listening to. Many of these men are creative and original. It is too bad they are confined to a mental cage. They should be on the lecture platform speaking their wisdom secularly. In my humble opinion all the good that is done in the name of religion could be done just as well if not better secularly. For diversion I attend the movies once a week. I have perhaps learned more good moral lessons from selected movies than from any other source in life. You do not need to go to church if you are a sincere seeker after that which is good. You can find it in books, in plays, in forums, in lectures, in night schools, in art galleries and music academies. You can waste your time in church. On Sundays both radio and television offer their best educational programs. Relax and listen to them. Improve yourself. The people in the pews are often fooled by the gift of gab of their pseudo-educated pastors who are nothing but ventriloquists' dummies speaking their pieces. Some of the pulpiteers in the nicer sections of the city dispense discourses that are polished with a little more veneer than the emotional sermons of the shouting ranting revivalists more often found in the poorer sections of town. This is how many people are fooled. The better class of trade must be taken care of.

What About Revelation?

Revelations are a dime a dozen. The further back in time you go the more apt you are to hear of them. Today the more superstitious you are the more apt you are to fall for them. Consider what sort of people among your acquaintances are most superstitious. Are they informed?

My research or adventure into books has taught me that these strange people who claim to have visions, dreams or hallucinations of the unseen world, past, present or future or who have revelations about god are either mentally sick or are deliberate fakers. The uninformed credulously believe these people. You should take the time to study this field but if you do not, at least verify or confirm what I have written, by questioning an expert or authority in the field of medical psychiatry.

The trouble with most people is that they do not orient themselves to new knowledge. Their fault is that they do not assimilate all that they have read or have been taught. They pigeon hole their findings when these findings conflict with their Bible even though that antiquated reference book is too ancient to be factually authoritative. Most books on library shelves are out of date after ten years.

A comprehension of evolution should make an atheist or agnostic out of anyone. It is over a century since Darwin published his "Origin of Species." Even though biological research, geological research and astronomical research has advanced considerably since then, with further confirmation of evolution, yet many stupid preachers mostly the unschooled ones are poisoning the minds of their hearers by prejudicing them against the acceptance of the evolutionary theory. Using the language of piety their narrow mindedness is a sin. This is an example of one of the many ways religion has long been a stumbling block to progress.

Why Not Compromise?

Some well meaning people suggest that I compromise. They say if I do not like the austere monarch type of God that I join a sect that subscribes to an impersonal type of god. In that way they smilingly infer that one can maintain respectability and our neighbors won't be lifting their eyebrows. In reply to that let me say first of all that this impersonal (not a person) type of god is just as impotent, useless and ineffective in prayer, as all the other gods who have ever been invented and dispensed by the dishonest money-mad hucksters of occult merchandise. My advice is to stop looking or shopping around to see who has the best god. None of them will function.

Incidentally why is a creator necessary? Is it not more difficult to account for a creator than it is to account for the earth's existence? The necessity of a creator or god is a delusion. True the world is marvelous and interesting. Yet nature though sometimes beautiful is also ugly and violent. Man has had to learn to conquer it for it so often has destroyed him. In primitive times man scared stiff personalized nature and tried to appease it with gifts and sacrifices. That's how the god idea got started and also how priest-craft got started. What an opportunity for a profitable racket!

So many people refuse to let go of the idea instilled in them during childhood that the earth and everything in it is fabricated by the hand of god. Many today hang on to this childish notion for appearance sake. They lack the courage to let go. This indicates what a superstitious hold the god idea has on them. The very word itself should be shelved with such words as witches, ghosts, fortune tellers, astrologers, etc. Rid your mind of supernatural beliefs and your brain will function more clearly. The mind that is cluttered with the cobwebs of religious superstition is incapable of logical thinking.

Someone is going to ask me what makes the universe tick? What keeps it alive? I may not know much but I would be a fool after having been to elementary school,

high school and college to not go along with the scientists who recognize the evolution of the stars as well as the evolution of biological life. I am quite aware that there has to be a fundamental basic material (perhaps chemical) in nature to account for the genesis of things. Energy or chemical whatever it is, it is potent and it sustains us. Scientists reportedly are on the track of it. When discovered this knowledge like all scientific knowledge will be significantly useful. As soon as it is announced by the researchers I predict that like vultures the clergy will pounce upon this materialistic secret of nature and will call it god. In desperation they will reach for a straw. The preachers will take this information, twist it around, tie it into knots and befuddle peoples' minds so that everyone will be thinking crazy just as they have a lot of credulous superstitious people doing now.

The crux of what I am trying to say is that scientific knowledge too often is not treated with respect by the religious element. The theologians warp it and twist it out of shape and put words in the scientists' mouths. There are a lot of ignorant folks who have more respect for what their pastors dig out of their half baked craniums than what the scientists have dug up with hard work and years of research. Pastors dilute, adulterate and prostitute scientific knowledge by the way they interpret it. Nowadays many of them will tell you that they believe in evolution but with a large BUT. They say BUT god stepped into the evolutionary process when the humans came along and gave man a soul. Just like that. But there is no evidence. Scientists know of no soul. The word soul is a religious invention. These glib talking pastors who pretend to know it all, hand out a lot of other pseudo scientific balderdash, with the result that many people are misinformed. So much so, that when they find themselves in the company of educated people, they are incompetent to discuss things that every school child should know. Folks who stubbornly hang on to an impersonal god, are only wasting their time and injuring their intellects. They are punch drunk from listening to theological claptrap. Life would be a lot simpler and a lot more understandable for these hesitant people if they would intellectually go all the way instead of half way and have the courage to reject once and for all their long held superstitious beliefs in a supernatural power.

Religion By Mail

What about the mail order religions? You have seen their cleverly written ads of pretended hidden secret knowledge which strangely no one else is aware of but them, not even the scholars. The ads may sound convincing but it is the same old indigestible "hash." With their free will offerings pouring in by mail, these racketeers make money hand over fist, just as the professional evangelists do. Instead of selling you orthodoxy they offer you garbled pseudo-psychology mixed with religion and designed to build up your ego. But do not waste your money on their books and courses. There are plenty of expertly written psychology books on success and how to make money, saleable in good book stores, that would be more useful and practical. Do not get involved. Do not let these mail order hucksters get their dirty hands on you.

Among the best sellers today are occasional books on success and happiness written by big name Protestant ministers, Catholic priests or Jewish rabbis. These fellows are merely opportunists out to make a fast dollar. These bartenders of religious concoctions like the religious mail order people mix and dispense a smattering of psychology with a large glass of religious bitters. It is supposed to tonic you. It should make every credulous person immediately success happy, and, eventually drunk with his own success. Bosh!

Psychology is a useful and fascinating study but why learn it from quacks? My advice is to take your psychology straight and not with a religious chaser. These pastors are not expert psychologists. It is not their field. You can buy any number of equally interesting psychology books written by experts in medical psychology which would

be more informative, and more reliable. Do not clutter your brain with junk. A safe rule to follow in reading is to avoid books that tend to adulterate scientific information with religion.

Knowledge Is Like A Sword

Knowledge like a sword conquers and destroys all error and untruth. If you hitherto have been forbidden by your priest, on penalty of hell, to read certain exciting books that should free or liberate you, I am sorry for you. You are not only missing the time of your life but you are losing something worth while.

No wonder the Catholic church jealous of its position and power, forbids its members to read books listed in its censored index. The church is engaged in big business. No wonder it puts pressure on bookstores and librarians who display books that they fear will undermine the beliefs of its members. Better read this booklet fast before it is put on the index and buy extra copies to mail to your loved ones. Here is what reading did for me. It revealed that everyone of my precious beliefs had been outmoded by some branch of science. I no longer believe in heaven and hell nor angels and devils, the creation fable, the flatness of the earth, the sun standing still, the serpent that talked, the ax that swam, the legend of the virgin birth, and other Biblical miracles, myths, and legends. All are utter nonsense. WAS THE BIBLE INSPIRED BY GOD? When your grandfather went to church he was told by his preacher that the entire Bible, word for word, was written by the finger of God. When your father went to church he was told that if the Bible was not written by God then it must have been inspired by him. That is what I was taught in theological seminary. But it is not so. All writers receive flashes of inspiration. That is where the fun comes in writing. The science fiction boys who invent the most amazing incidents which they dig from their imaginations are inspired like the rest of us. This writer was inspired when he composed this manuscript. But inspiration is a natural phenomena. It is deception to claim that it is of God. The bible contains a number of filthy passages, passages that would put "Lady Chatterly's Lover" to shame which I mention only because this novel was recently [footnote: This ban has since been lifted] banned from the U.S. mails. Many Christians swear that the Bible is God's word. If there is a god this claim is an insult to that god. This antiquated book several thousand years old, is so outmoded that it is not only unreliable for its teachings of science but also for much of its ethical and sociological teachings. Yes there are some truisms in the Bible as there would be in any old book of collected writings but the bulk of its contents are worthless except as a psychological study of the many childish beliefs held by the masses in those days before the advancement of science and universal education. The people of old time were gullible with no reading matter available. Tales were magnified and whispered one to another. The Bible is a book of many errors and contradictions and no one knows this better than the religious scholars. This is not the mere opinion of an atheist. It is the opinion of experts. The Christian Bible is not the only bible that had its characters do miracles. It was the literary custom for centuries. Kings as well as gods were magnified. It was a fashionable custom in pre-Christian days for kings who wanted to gain favor in the eyes of their subjects to have their biographers give them a "Hollywood build-up" and boast of their miracles. In ancient times a traveler wanting an audience in a city had a few magic tricks or miracles which he could perform to gain a crowd. When you know these things and how the public even to this day loves to be mystified you can better understand some of the fabulous stories in the bible. Our mass education today is only mediocre and that is why even in this modern age people are credulous enough to swallow the most incredible claims of the hundreds of existing cults each of which is trying to outdo its competitors with the tallest story.

What Harm Has The Bible Done?

Because you can prove pro or con just about everything with the Bible it has frequently led men astray and brought them to disaster. It has been dynamite in the hands of the insane. So many of the mentally ill have religious complexes. Newspapers frequently report murders that are either God inspired or Bible inspired. Mised humans have tried to help God punish. This reached mass proportions during the middle ages in the terrible persecutions of heretics and non-believers. The Bible was useful to slavemasters when they quoted from it: "Slaves (servants) obey your masters." Ephesians 6:5. How to thrust an identification hole through the ears of slaves was explained in Exodus 21:6. The Bible was useful to witchcraft when it was quoted "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Exodus 22:18. Thousands of innocent people were accused of witchcraft and quickly killed. Non-believers like myself would have been tried as witches. Entire books have been written to illustrate the harm done by Bible texts.

All through history the church jealous of her wealth and power has tried to muzzle the scientists because their discoveries came in conflict with the teachings of the Bible or the church. These learned men had to either recant which they often did in order to survive or else suffer death or in some cases be excommunicated in disgrace. To be excommunicated was tantamount to bankruptcy for one ostracized in the middle ages was unemployable and could die of starvation. Even today it is the church's most powerful weapon. The above should explain how the church contributed to the darkness (ignorance, sickness and squalor) of the dark ages. It should also explain why Christianity with all its evils has survived. It carried on not because the Christian religion had God's blessing. It survived because all the people were forced to subscribe to it or suffer the brutal punishments just mentioned.

The church had more power in those days. Church and state were one. The earthly kings ruled by divine right or by the pretended authority of God. The multitudes swallowing this fiction would grovel in the dust and touch the garments of their kings in oriental fashion expecting miracles. The pope is such a king in the eyes of his communicants. Today even in our enlightened country, Christians believe that the prayers of their priests and pastors are more apt to be heard because they received their pastoral orders by the laying on of hands or by divine right. Here is an example of one of the many superstitions that religion fosters. The public is told that these so-called men of god are middle men or mediators between the ordinary folks and the throne of god. All this makes for superstition and wishful thinking and the temptation to hoodwink and get money from the credulous masses. Where church and state are entwined people are forced by the government to believe these things. Be thankful that in America we have separation of church and state.

One thing that has helped the United States since its birth is the freedom it acquired by the separation of church and state. Thanks to our forefathers it is the law of our land. In colonial times men like Franklin, Jefferson, Adams, Washington, Madison and Paine were closer to the European scene than we who try to interpret history today. They knew the dangers that a new nation would face. Such men tried to prevent here the recurrence of such events as religious wars and persecutions which had strangled the countries of Europe for hundreds of years. Freedom of thought did not prevail abroad. Heretics were imprisoned. Jews were called murderers of Christ and were branded and had to live in ghettos on the outskirts of European cities. It is no accident that we in the U.S.A. have separation of church and state. It is to protect us from religious dictatorship. Our nation's founders insisted that what happened in Europe must not happen here.

Unfortunately many of our modern legislators do not know their history for many illegal bills have been introduced recently that favor religion in general or some church in particular. If we do not do something about this we are headed for a theocracy which is a combined secular and ecclesiastical dictatorship. If this occurs it will mean that the church in power will rule with an iron hand. Other churches will

not have a chance. We will be back in the dark ages again and history will repeat itself. Do not think it can't happen here. If separation of church and state is such a good thing for our country then separation of church and business, of church and radio, of church and the press should likewise be good for all concerned. I say beware of the grasping begging hands of the priests who ask for favors.

If The Churches Do Good Why Not Leave Them Alone?

On the assumption that churches do good some well meaning friends suggest that I "soft pedal" my radical religious beliefs. I say that the little good that is accomplished is outweighed by the harm. The minds of little children are being contaminated by religion's superficial unrealistic philosophy. What injures the children of today injures the world of tomorrow.

Of course the church does some good. Its charitable enterprises are commendable. It would be a pity if an institution so long established had nothing to show for its efforts. In organization there is strength. So by virtue of its organization the church cannot help but do some good. Tammany hall in its heyday even when it was under attack for its corruption did a lot of commendable charity work among New York's poor. Doing good has often been a front for individuals and groups. Gambling on the race tracks and lotteries in foreign countries are often condoned due to the huge contributions to charities by these groups.

If the church's foundation is unsound and based on error are we going to perpetuate its harmful superstitions just because the institution does useful charitable work?

Let us hope that the world of tomorrow will not need these charities but if by then science has not yet made community charity obsolete, some secular organization or agency will certainly take over and do a better job. Rest assured that the good in religion will never die. "Only the bad will be interred with its bones." (I apologize Mr. Shakespeare). The world of tomorrow will hold on to that which is good. Religion despite its stake in a fallacy has made its contributions to society so history will be kind to it. Of that I am certain. The supposed good that it accomplishes in the field of morals and behavior will be treated next.

The Problem Of Behavior

Having formerly been both a clergyman and a teacher it is only natural that I consider the topic of morals and behavior highly important. Improved individual behavior means improved national and international behavior. What then is the medium outside the home best equipped to improve individual human behavior? Is it the church? Many people think so. Many adults who themselves never attend services, financially support the church because they have been told that the church is the only place they can send their children to learn to be good.

Years ago I was of the rash opinion that once all the peoples of the earth were converted to Jesus Christ world peace would prevail. This dream was an impetus to my preaching. If the idea was only sound or true it would be one of the best arguments for supporting world wide missions. But it is not true and I am sorry to report that I no longer subscribe to that point of view. Today it is my firm opinion that the whole batch of religions with their aims and claims are a barrier to world peace. Religion does not unite people. It divides them. Religion is not only a barrier to world peace but a thwarter and a stumbling block to world progress.

Imparting the knowledge of how to behave is a teaching problem that requires the best of techniques. Who is best able to do this? For ages society has solely turned

this important job over to the church. It got started in the middle ages when the church and state were united. But you know as well as I do that the church has not and can not do the job well for two reasons. 1. It is not equipped for the task. 2. It does not reach enough people. The basic teaching of the church school is so inferior, so out of date, so childish that academically and pedagogically it is unfit to function. Yet we insist on supporting it. Is it not high time that something be done about it? In our country where we have strict separation of church and state there is no logical reason whatsoever to assign to the church this responsibility. It is a hangover from the old world.

What is the technique of the church? The church teaches behavior by the old fashioned method of fear. Children are taught that they are being watched and that they will be rewarded or punished in the hereafter according to their deportment. All this is done by an invisible unseen god. Some churches have tried to improve the emphasis but that is the basic idea. Children are taught of hell and heaven and of devils and angels and miracles. For such teachings there is no basis in fact. It leads to superstition. It makes some children neurotic and warps their personalities. It is an antiquated ineffective technique. The idea of piety is repulsive to normal young minds. Boys do not want to be thought of as angels. It makes them ashamed to be good.

Another reason why the church should not be entrusted with this responsibility is that it is a private institution and it does not reach half the children. It reaches only a small fraction of the population. How can you prevent or cure delinquency that way?

What do I suggest? I recommend that some individual or some agency other than the church take the bull by the horns and enlighten the nation to the necessity of turning over this job of teaching behavior to the public schools where it rightfully belongs. To achieve this will be a long battle. Behavior should be taught secularly because it is a legitimate secular subject. And it should be taught competently as a prescribed course of study. Constitutionally the public schools are not allowed to teach religion but note I do not suggest that the public schools teach religion. Juvenile delinquency is one of our biggest national problems. We can no longer afford to use the horse and buggy methods of the churches to help prevent it. The best is none too good. The teaching of behavior should be put in the lap of the public schools instead of in the voluntary incompetent hands of an antiquated private institution such as the church which is a hindrance to the cure. The church is in the way in this instance as it has always been in the way in every important reform in history. I ask that behavior when taught be stripped bare of its pious trappings. I ask that the public school authorities teach behavior scientifically to children. I ask that it be taught as an art or skill. When this is done this generation and coming generations will like the subject. They will have respect for it. They will take pride in practicing it as there will be no pious nonsense attached to it. Arts and skills appeal to youth. Teach the kids enthusiastically how to live successfully and happily and how to get along with others. Certainly cheating, stealing, dishonesty and other anti-social behavior does not pay. Teach the young boy how to be accepted and approved not by god but by strangers. Leave god out of the picture. Remove piety from the course of study and watch youth change its pattern of living. Watch them go for this subject in a big way.

What about parochial schools? Naturally they will not buy this. They will oppose it bitterly. But it is too bad for Catholic children deserve something better than the old fashioned techniques they are now exposed to. I offer this suggestion as a small contribution toward the big task of curing juvenile delinquency and crime.

The kids who go to Sunday school are not properly taught how to face the frustrations and vicissitudes of life. Instead they are taught that God will look after them. What is wrong with that? I'll tell you what is wrong. Later the smarter ones find out that this is not true. Newspaper headlines of accidents, catastrophes and fires

confirm that their god does not look after his own sweet innocent children even when they are on their knees praying for help in the time of disaster. Anyone of intelligence should know that prayers fall on deaf ears. But the trouble is that from their youth people have been conditioned to think otherwise. The reports of answered prayers that you and some cultists cite are but coincidences. Billions of prayers are sent up. Naturally there would be a considerable number of favorable answers without "god" moving a finger because of the law of averages. Most of the worries we bring to god in prayer never materialize as any psychologist will affirm. So there is no need to pray in the first place. So why give prayer credit for stopping what was not going to happen?

Our jails are filled with young men and women who profess belief in god. Each one of them will tell you or confess to the prison chaplain that he believes in god. You will seldom find an atheist or a rationalist there. Before you contradict me make sure you understand what an atheist is and what he is not. Your minister may have incorrectly told you of atheists who have confessed their sins and returned to God. More than likely these men were not formerly atheists at all. For instance a backsliding Christian is not defined as an atheist. He is a Christian even though he is a poor one. A man who ignores or defies his god to do wrong is not an atheist. He is a Christian. An atheist has no god to defy or turn his back on. An atheist is a rationalist and he lives by that code. He is what he is on intellectual grounds. He is an atheist because his study gives him no evidence that there is a god.

In regard to prisons there are statistics to show which church has the highest percentage of inmates per population. I will not embarrass that particular church in this book. Let us cease to frighten people through superstitious beliefs into being good. For the sake of the young people let us find a better way.

Am I A Communist?

It is unfortunate that this question has to be answered. If asked in the right spirit and with good intentions I do not mind. Realizing that many people jump at conclusions when they are not in the know I will not ignore the question even if asked in the spirit of doing me injury. My more intelligent readers are aware by now that the word communist has become a popular smear word, frequently used by the opposition, and aimed ignorantly or maliciously against all reforms and reformers. Please keep that in mind in the future when bigoted critics lambaste my book.

Regardless of the merits or demerits of communism I am happy that I can truthfully say that I am not a communist nor have I ever been one nor have I ever knowingly associated with one. All that I know about them is what I read in the papers. I want no truck with them. They seem to split up every organization which they infiltrate. I am a rationalist and secularist. I do not want the great cause of atheism to be weakened or adulterated by the injection of communism's economic theories.

But I want to be fair! The philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) in his voluminous writings made a casual statement about religion that I can and do earnestly endorse. He said "Religion . . . is the opium of the people." Looking back on history Marx apparently was cognizant of how religion had acted as a drug on people's minds for over a thousand years. It was this tranquilizer that kept the dark ages dark. Ignorance, squalor and disease prevailed because people's minds stupefied with the fallacies of religion held to the fixed idea that the existing social evils were in accordance with god's will. Therefore they did nothing to remedy social conditions for fear of offending god. Marx no doubt saw how religion had paralyzed and narcotized the minds of people thus retarding and impeding their progress.

Atheism was not original with communism. This is something a lot of unread people do not know. Lest you forget men doubted the existence of god long before Marx, long before modern socialism or communism. In fact atheism existed in ancient times before the Christian era. It is not a new development. Therefore it is not logical to accuse an atheist of being a communist. None of my atheist friends are communists. It seems that the ones that I know best are outright capitalists who buy and sell on the market. Of course I am aware that all of the old time socialists most of whom read a lot are familiar with the evils of religion. Many are atheists I am sure. Most reformers including socialists have found religion in the way. They have claimed it is impotent, pharisaical, and inclined to pass by on the other side of the street, when social courage is required. The pattern of religion has been ultra-conservative. The atheist or freethought movement like any other forward movement draws its members from all ranks of society, so there are bound to be many different philosophic and political views represented in the membership.

Whatever is evil in Russia is not due to her atheism. If there is any good in Russia that is it. Russia's atheism may be the factor that contributes most to her intellectual advance. More so than her economic system for all I know. I wish the people of my native land could grasp this. I want to be understood. I only hope that I make myself clear when I say that if our free western world is advancing rapidly today it is doing so not because of her religion but in spite of it. In other words the renaissance period of enlightenment with its divorcement from religion which began in the 14th century is still at work and has gathered momentum. Our poor old world is still fumbling and stumbling but slowly and surely freeing itself from the shackles of supernatural beliefs. We have emerged from the dark ages only because we have put religion in the background paying only lip service to it. Our scientists have broken loose from that stranglehold grip which the church held on them throughout the middle ages. In those earlier days the church thwarted all the sciences that interfered with its teachings. Even medical science was stifled when surgical operations were forbidden on grounds that physicians were encroaching on god's territory. Later anesthetics were forbidden because it was thought god wanted people to suffer. It was superstitiously believed that suffering was sent as punishment. Do you not see what I meant when I earlier said that superstitious religious beliefs prevent people from thinking clearly and logically? Do you not see what the philosopher Marx meant when he wrote "Religion is the opium of the people"? Later the church was against painless childbirth for the same reason. The church still opposes birth control. Most of the reforms that have taken place in history have been led by religious skeptics. The church with the passing of time eventually gives in under public pressure but it never takes the lead. Like a dog's tail it is always behind. This little book is too small to tell the whole story against religion but perhaps I have given you an inkling so far as to what I am driving at in my offensive against the ecclesiastical system. I wish I could afford to publish a larger volume.

In our antagonism with Russia we have tended to create hate by unfairly injecting the religious issue in addition to the economic and political ones. A few of our syndicated columnists in order to stir up emotionalism against Russia, have used smearingly such words as atheistic and godless, making something evil out of something good. Similar writings and speeches by diplomats and statesmen only reflect our national ignorance. If we really are sincerely interested in world peace there is something that we will have to do in a hurry. Our leaders, men who sit in high places, including our presidents, will have to make a new appraisal of our country's unsound attitude on religion and treat atheism with the respect that it deserves. Who knows but what a changed attitude on religion could prevent a war? Religion as an emotional weapon has caused too many wars already. Let us not have another hundred years war. Who knows but what we as a nation could be very right on everything else but wrong on the score of religion? If I did not think so I would not be writing this manuscript. Let me repeat that I am not a communist and I will file suit against the first person that makes that charge.

A Word To My Brethren In The Ministry

I love everyone of you. I have pleasant memories of past fellowship with you and I hope we can always meet on a friendly personal basis even though we may not see eye to eye on the subject matter of this book. I have been rough with you. I have called you quacks, racketeers and swindlers. Individually you are not that but collectively you are. You do not mean to be because the majority of you are sincere just as I was. Brethren you will have to admit to yourselves that most of the professional independent roving evangelists are in this category. A few of them have gotten so filthy rich they have started world churches of their own in order to better feather their nests.

What I have been saying so far is that there is no evidence factual or otherwise that a god exists. A claim based on revelation is not convincing. Myths and legends are not reliable. There is no scientific evidence that a god exists and philosophers for centuries have just about beaten their brains out trying to prove there is a god and they have failed. Therefore any endeavor on the part of the churches to accept a fee or offering for falsely teaching the cruel superstition that there is such a god and furthermore claiming that this unseen invisible deity can be contacted and will perform miracles constitutes a fraud. As far as I am concerned you pastors being local agents for the churches are party to this gigantic hoax, which, with the blessing of kings and queens and the help of politicians, has been able to flourish and operate through the centuries in many countries until now it has reached racket proportions and has become a veritable international Frankenstein of wealth and power. The fact that the church has acquired respectability because of its political influence makes the charges against it no less true.

I trust that by now you know why this particular ordained Methodist minister gave up his belief in the supernatural. I refused to remain in the pulpit and be an intellectual hypocrite. I renounced my religion even though it was the unpopular thing to do. I gave the church my best years. I was forty years old when I woke up. It is too bad I did not wake up sooner. Fortunate circumstances made it possible for me to make the break when I did. I am by no means the first for there have been many priests, rabbis and ministers before me who have done the same thing. The woods are full of them. Who knows you may be next. This may make you shudder but be a thinking man and decide for yourself.

Agnostic Or Atheist?

One should not declare himself an atheist until he has satisfied himself through study. But after you have satisfied yourself through intensive study, and then have the audacity to claim that you do not know whether or not there is a god, you must be stubborn indeed. If you are logical you have no basis for hiding under the cover of agnosticism. It is no sign of scholarship to say that you do not know when the facts are clear. If it is a case of reserving your opinion because of humility or modesty I accuse you of false modesty. You are hedging when you say that you do not know and it is indeed cowardly to reserve your opinion for the rest of your life. Why die with that hesitant attitude hanging over you instead of taking a courageous stand? After you have made an exhaustive study of this subject and have thoughtfully studied the countless books on the origin and psychology of religious beliefs, as well as the bloody history of religion's wild and cruel practices, you are entitled to form an opinion, especially on the negative side, (the atheistic side) as that side does not have to be proved. It is the theist who must prove his theory that a god exists. So far it has never been done even in philosophy. As for science that precise field does not even consider the question of god as worthy of attention and don't you think that science would not consider the question if there was any evidence or probability of a god's existence. It would be necessary to consider the hypothesis for science deals with anything that

relates to natural laws and since gods allegedly are coaxed by means of prayer into changing natural laws the scientists would find this line of pursuit most intriguing. However since there is no evidence of a god the matter is not pursued. Professors are under censorship and dare not lose their jobs by denying the existence of god so they tabu the subject by politely alluding to it as exclusively a religious matter.

Cheer Up! It Is Not So Bad

My dear friends if I have shocked you forgive me. If I have taken away your lord fear not. You will gain something better. Naturally people feel gloomy when they fear they have lost something precious. You have survived many disappointments in life and it is too bad that you must suffer another but you can take it and you will be the better for it.

You may think that when I deny that there is a Lord that I spread a note of pessimism. You are mistaken for I bring you tidings of great joy. Let me loudly proclaim my message from the housetops. Let me shout it up and down the land. Rejoice! Oh rejoice! Let me repeat I bring tidings of great joy. I bring you the exciting good news that there is no longer a hell with licking scorching flames, to painfully sear your friends and loved ones, day in and day out, throughout all eternity, which is indeed a long time. Neither are there ghosts nor devils nor eerie monsters to frighten the little babes in Sunday school. Their nervous systems will be the better for it. There will be no more nightmares as a result of these frightful teachings. And there will be no more wars of man killing his fellow men because he has been taught a different religion. He who would deny all this is the bearer of bad news. He it is who is the pessimist. He who tells you that god sentences people to beds of sickness and pain or who sends floods, earthquakes, fires, epidemics and famines as punishment. He it is who is the real pessimist. What a gloomy character he is. Deliver me from the bearer of such tales. He is poison to me and my children. He is a mad man. He should be tied up. He is not safe running around loose. My friends your atheist may be a realist but he is not a pessimist. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. So I say again rejoice! Rejoice that the atheist is abroad in the land fearlessly and courageously declaring in the highways and byways that the venomous mutterings of the money-mad evangelists are truly false. Turn a deaf ear to their ignorant rantings. The atheist has come to save you. Rejoice! Was it not Schopenhauer who wrote, "to free a man from error is to give no t take away." That is what we atheists are aiming at. We are not rascals. My friend, The Hon. Culbert L. Olson [footnote: Mr. Olson presently is President of the United Secularists of America], ex-governor of California recently said "Emancipation from the mental slavery of religious superstition and its exploitation by charlatans is as essential to the progress of civilization as is the emancipation from physical slavery."

Keep your chin up! It is not so bad. You can get along without god. Actually you have been getting along without him right along. You thought that god was protecting you but he wasn't. Those prayers that were not answered remember them? You knew not why your god kept you guessing so often. You wondered why he permitted so much suffering. Now you know why. There was no god all the time. When you asked your pastor about those unanswered prayers remember what he said? Like a true salesman he had to alibi and think fast. Of course he had a stock answer. According to him it was not God's will. You were told that god knows best and that god is more discerning and that his ways are higher than man's ways. Priests and ministers tell many white lies to assuage you. I did it myself many times when consoling people. Silly wasn't it?

Perhaps you have been puzzled by the suffering and misery you have either experienced or witnessed. You have wondered what sin a certain innocent party committed to deserve such suffering. I have seen some real nice patients worry

about this question. It is pathetic. I am sure if you were god and consequently able to do miracles your heart would respond quickly to alleviate the pain and misery of helpless people. Of course you would. "You would be on the ball" immediately. You would not wait to be pleaded with in prayer for you would know as any first class god should know that some very sick people are in such misery that their minds are too confused to formulate a prayer. You would not be guilty of cruel neglect. Yet the Christian god not only permits earthly suffering but threatens more torture later which makes him a sadist indeed. No human father would treat his children that way. Now of course this writer does not blame god for his seeming neglect, for one very simple reason, and that is the good news that he does not exist. There you have in that sentence the kindest explanation for god's inconsistency and cruelty that can be given to the world by a former minister of the gospel.

If you have had doubts about god in the past followed by feelings of guilt for which you repented let me assure you that your "forbidden" thoughts were normal and intelligent and not sinful as your priest may have warned you. You should have followed it through. If you want happiness and enjoyment in this world give me your hand my friend so that I can lift you up from the swamp of superstition that has engulfed you and made your life miserable. Then you too can build yourself a new and better philosophy- -a philosophy uncluttered with the cobwebs of church dogma. After that I predict you will think more clearly and reason more wisely. It will take time. It will require much analytical reading. You will have to break old habit patterns such as I did. In other words you will need to adjust just as others have done after so radical a change. After twenty-four years of being an atheist I have built myself a philosophy far superior to that which I have ever had before. Life for me now is more adventurous. I remember when I used to lean on god's everlasting arms just as the church hymns said I should. But at last I have thrown away my crutches. How else can one learn self reliance? Stop leaning dear friend and try ever so hard to stand alone on your own two feet. I used to believe that a man was an heir of god in the same sense that a rich man's son is an heir to his father's wealth. But now with no heavenly father to draw on I have had to learn what many tycoons wish their young heirs would more quickly learn. **STOP LEANING AND DEPENDING ON THE OLD MAN.** In short acquire self reliance. See what I mean?

As I inferred above the Sunday school hymns will harm you if you don't watch out. For example "Trust and obey for there is no other way." Or, "God will take care of you" and similar hymns condition the youthful singers by auto-suggestion. How is your boy thus mentally "brain washed" going to learn to shift for himself? Do you want him to grow up to be a mollycoddle and a weakling? If your youngster is taught that god will provide food, raiment, a passing exam, a job or a mate, he will do little or nothing to improve himself and he will evolve into a wishful thinker or procrastinator, always putting things off and continually lacking in initiative at home and in business. I tell you religion is no good for your child. Not if you want him to succeed. After youth truly believes that god will take care of him he is apt to be a "dizzy brained" happy go lucky optimist and careless with his life. If god is looking after him why should he worry? No wonder he is careless and reckless or indolent. Optimism based on such a flimsy foundation is false optimism. My good friends is it not better to teach your offspring that there is no god to look after him and that he is definitely on his own? He can take it and you would be doing him or her a favor. Let him grow up. Teach the child that it is a realistic world where anything and everything can and does happen. Teach your sprout that it is a world where people really need to be brotherly for they need each other and without brotherhood they stand alone.

If you are one of those who still stubbornly insists that the world just must have a god all I can advise is to modestly **PLAY THAT ROLE YOURSELF.** It may bring you happiness and cause people to believe in you a little more. Get a better education so that you may alleviate men's sufferings and injustices. But never, O never, think of yourself as a god. Let that word be obsolete in your vocabulary. Belief that men are

gods is a dangerous doctrine to bat around. Like the doctrine of kings by divine right, it breeds dictators and despots. Gods imaginary or human have caused enough misery in this world already. Let us be rid of them.

Cheer up friends. Do not be appalled if life seems to have no purpose. If there is no apparent purpose in evolution or in the scheme of things and you are despondent about it you can do something about that too. You can put a purpose into your life. You can go about doing good. Do something that needs to be done. Without a god there is plenty to do. The world needs you. Have a goal. Have a philosophy. No religion or church has a monopoly on morals or ethics despite what the clergy say.

The World Is In A State Of Flux

The writer is of course a materialist. It is no doubt fitting because of the unusual circumstances surrounding my life that I have embraced the philosophy of change as a part of my philosophy pattern. In so doing I am not committed to all of Heraclitus nor of Bergson. In building our private philosophies we can and should sift and borrow in part or in toto what we like from the philosophies of others. The world though seemingly static is in a constant state of flux. Aside from its application to physics and chemistry I have found change likewise to be true of one's environment. We may be rich today and poor tomorrow or vice versa. Time is the great factor. With apologies to those who preach dogmatically that prayer changes things I say that TIME changes things. If the world is dark and you are down in the dumps given time the situation will surely change for the better. Nothing stands still. So if you are contemplating suicide wait my unhappy friend for the tide to change. Do not be hasty. The astute financier does not get panicky when his stocks go tumbling down in a bear market for he knows from experience that the market like everything else is in a state of flux. It fluctuates. It will rise again. In our economic system many lost fortunes have been regained.

"Know thyself," said Socrates. To that I would add know thy environment and know the law of change and be prepared for changes be they for better or worse. If you are born rich do not always expect to be fed with a silver spoon. Be realistic. Anything can happen. If you are a rich man's son some day you may have to get out and hustle. If you have accumulated a fortune through your own efforts a change for the worse can even happen to you. This is not pessimism. It is realism. Knowing and understanding the natural laws of cause and effect it is not such a bad world after all is it? Isn't it better and more exciting and more adventurous to operate under these natural laws, than to have the fear that there is a dictator god somewhere in the universe, arbitrarily interfering with your actions, with you wondering what this fickle unpredictable god is going to do next? In this book I have tried to offer you something more sound than such a childish superstition. "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, the proper study of mankind is Man." Pope's "Essay on Man."

Books For The Novice

"Reading Maketh A Full Man."--Bacon.

"Reading Is To the Mind What Exercise Is To the Body."--Addison.

Some of you are in for a session of serious reading. You may have read your pastor's books, now read the other side. When you have read these liberating books I hope you will feel like shouting as I did "Eureka." That is to say "I have found it."

Read Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not A Christian" and Hector Hawton's "The Thinker's Handbook," both published by Watts Co. of London. Read "The Origin and

Evolution of The Idea of a Soul" by Paul La Fargue. Also "The Evolution of the Idea of God," by Grant Allen.

The great Robert G. Ingersoll was so far ahead of his time that his lectures are still worth reading. Catch his spirit. Thomas Paine with his "Age of Reason," written in colonial times likewise was way ahead of his time. He will amaze you. "The Golden Bough" by Frazer is another old classic. But a more recent book along the same lines and more up-to-date is Homer W. Smith's "Man and His Gods" which has a foreword by Albert Einstein. This book is a must. It is an education in itself and should be useful as an all around reference book for professors in all branches. Little Brown & Co. of Boston publishes it. It is also available as a paper back by Grosset & Dunlap, New York. "The Riddle of the Universe" by Ernst Haeckel should be in the library of every materialist. I value highly the large Rationalist encyclopedia by Joseph McCabe. Excellent for reference. Naturally I have read just about everything that this former Catholic professor and priest has written. Besides being a popularizer of science he is an authority on the history of the Catholic church the mother church of Christendom. I have always felt indebted to the late Haldeman-Julius who despite his shortcomings expressed the meaning of democracy better than most writers that I have read. His great contribution was providing good literature cheaply. I greatly value his 26 volume set of "Questions and Answers," which may be hard to get. I have read every word. "The Shackles of the Supernatural" by William J. Fielding is another book that impressed me. It too is useful for reference. One of my early favorites was "GOD AND MY NEIGHBOR" by Robert Blatchford. He is one of the most orderly writers it has been my pleasure to read. He writes a book like you would build a house. After laying a solid foundation he proceeds step by step expertly driving home every nail. You will love it. Space will not permit me to mention the many books that have thrilled me. My good friend James Hervey Johnson of San Diego has written a 192 page paperback called "Superior Men." Superior Books, Box 2832, San Diego 12, California. It presently sells for one dollar. It is a good book to start with. It is non-technical, written in popular language, big type therefore easy to read. It is better to buy books than to borrow them. They make good companions. Take pride in owning a good wall to wall library. Your author or his publisher will help you find lists of useful freethought books. Also be sure to subscribe to a rationalist, humanist or freethought magazine. Here are a few: Age of Reason, 257 West 38th St., New York 18, New York. American Rationalist, 2218 St. Louis Ave., St. Louis 6, Mo. The Humanist, 117 1/2 Glenn St., Yellow Springs, Ohio. The Free Humanist, 5526 Westford Road, Philadelphia 20, Pa. The Open Mind, 55 Orchard St., Newark 2, N. J. The Liberal, 5223 North 5th St., Philadelphia 20, Penn. Progressive World, Box 75605 Sanford Station, Los Angeles 5, Calif. The Rip Saw, P. O. Box 3002, Station B, South Bend, Ind. The Truthseeker, 38 Park Row, New York 8, New York.

[1996 Note: The addresses given above are mostly out-of-date.]

"Not one man in a thousand has either strength of mind or goodness of heart to be an atheist. I repeat it. Not one man in a thousand has either strength of mind or goodness of heart to be an atheist."

--SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

[Publisher's note]

Addenda For The Curious

When Pastor Runyon did not return to the New York Conference at the end of his Sabbatical (leave) he automatically sacrificed his ministerial standing for it was

imperative that he return to his duty. According to conference rules that body was obliged to reclassify him. He did not report his heretical beliefs because they were not then fully matured. Good thing because this saved his church a lot of embarrassment for certainly the New York papers would have played up the story. His exit was thus graceful . He has never applied for reinstatement because his conscience would not allow him to preach untruth. After twenty-four years he is more sure than ever that he made the right decision.

Mr. Runyon's immediate family, his wife, brothers, sisters and a married daughter are all Methodists. One married daughter is a Catholic.

Mr. Runyon believes that everyone should have the freedom to worship or not worship as he chooses. Therefore he does not advocate outlawing churches. However on constitutional grounds he is against all forms of government subsidy such as making churches tax free.

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