

2-1-1931

Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country

John Theodore Mueller
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mueller, John Theodore (1931) "Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 2 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol2/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Mueller: Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country

Wort er so meisterlich gelehrt und so siegreich verteidigt hat. Und sein sterblicher Leib wird ruhen, daß er auferstehe am Ende der Tage mit allen seligen Kindern Gottes in Kraft und Herrlichkeit.

Wir aber beklagen in seinem Hingang den Verlust eines großen Lehrers, eines herrlichen Werkzeuges Gottes, eines bewährten Rufers im Streit und eines zuverlässigen Unterweisers unserer theologischen Jugend und bitten an seinem Sarge unsern lieben Gott, daß er fortfahren wolle, uns Professoren zu geben, die mit Treue und Fleiß unsere theologische Jugend unterrichten, damit auch bei unsern Nachkommen die reine Lehre und Bekenntnis des Glaubens bis auf die herrliche Zukunft unsern einigen Erlösers und Seligmachers Jesu Christi durch Hilfe und Beistand des Heiligen Geistes erhalten und fortgepflanzt werden möge. Amen.

Die theologische Arbeit des Entschlafenen ist von solcher Bedeutung für unsere Synode, für die ganze lutherische Kirche, ja für die ganze christliche Kirche, daß es am Platze ist, darauf noch weiterhin zurückzukommen.

F. Pieper.

Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country.

Dreary though it may be, the subject of atheistic propaganda in our country nevertheless demands conscientious study, especially by our pastors and all who are directly interested in the young people of our Church in order that ways and means may be found to safeguard their spiritual welfare, in particular while they are attending colleges and universities.

Only a short time ago we were horrified by the blasphemies of agnostic Modernists. To-day, however, we are facing a foe that is even more treacherous and pernicious. Modernism, with all its vagaries, at least endeavored to preserve some kind of religion and respect for God. But to-day an extreme type of atheism is attempting to destroy altogether even the semblance of religion which Modernism has left. Its slogan is: No God and no religion whatever.

This type of atheism is aggressively militant and employs the most effective weapons that can be found. To prove this statement, we shall publish *in toto* an article from the *Sunday-school Times* (October 18, 1930), which, under the heading "Atheism, Indecency, and the Magazines," offers the following startling news:—

"The American colleges and universities were founded and endowed chiefly by Christian men as a basis for a Christian civilization. They have become nurseries of unbelief. The great publishing houses were of similar origin. Macmillan's was established by the Scotch Baptists, Harper's by Irish Methodists, Scribner's by Presbyterians,

the Century Company by New England Congregationalists, Houghton, Mifflin by Methodists, and Funk and Wagnalls by Lutheran clergymen. How far at least some of them have slipped from the Christian point of view and Christian ideals can be quickly determined by a glance at their price lists or a cursory study of their magazine publications.

"In the *Forum* of March, Harper and Brothers, under the caption of 'Man's Unending Battle against God,' advertised a coming article in *Harper's Magazine*. This is what the advertisement says of it: 'Many honest, thoughtful people are wandering — lost — in the debatable ground where the frontiers of science, religion, and morals meet. To all readers blessed with inquiring minds, Elmer Davis's *God without Religion* will come as a revelation of integrity of thought, combined with lofty spiritual force. Mr. Davis's bold plea to discard the religion that deceives us for our own comfort is an inspiration to the reader. It represents, moreover, the kind of reading that *Harper's Magazine* gives you each month.'

"Too true! What would Mr. Davis do? In his article in *Harper's* for March, 1930, he writes that 'the bulk of the old-time religion is incredible.' 'The Fall-and-Atonement drama, which is the core of traditional Christianity, has had to go overboard,' he tells us. 'The code of conduct that had been unwisely tied to an obsolescent theology fell with it; unless men lose heart and surrender themselves to the bishops, that particular Humpty-Dumpty [*i. e.*, Christian ethics] can never be put together again.' 'There is no evidence of a God who pitieth His children. There may be forces in the universe friendly to man, but the evidence is as yet unconvincing. The whole seems at best indifferent, sometimes actively hostile; we shall get only what we fight for, and not all of that. The business of man is one long endeavor to thwart the will of God, that is, to correct the abuses and evils in God's world.'

"And what about the individual? 'He is not worth troubling about,' says Shapley [the Harvard astronomer], 'except as he contributes by deed, thought, or progeny to the survival of the species. . . . Salvation, if any, is for the race. The individual who has so much ego in his cosmos that he demands it for himself had better sell his mind to the bishops, who will give him a gilt-edged assurance of eternal life.' And so on for eight or ten pages! The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism could ask for nothing more satisfactory.

"*Scribner's Magazine*, not to be outdone, publishes an article in the June [1930] issue by Henshaw Ward entitled 'The Disappearance of God.' This writer points out without apparent regret that 'it is the friends of God who have made God incredible.' By the 'friends of God' he means professors in various theological seminaries whom he

Mueller: Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country
 quotes, such as Prof. G. B. Smith of the University of Chicago, Prof. E. S. Ames, Prof. Douglas C. Mackintosh of Yale, the former Baptist minister Dr. J. H. Randall. Mr. Ward calls attention to a 'collection of testimonies gathered by a man who was once a Baptist minister in Texas and is now an editor of the *Christian Century*. After I have read it, I can think of nothing but the massacre of God that is being made by the best religious thought of the day.' This includes 'the God of fifteen well-known thinkers.' He later speaks of these men as an 'eminent band of specialists,' whose majority vote is that the God to whom I once said 'Now I lay me' has disappeared.

"Turning to the *Forum*, one finds a continuous flow of anti-christian essays. Some of these are printed under the title of 'What I Believe,' the belief being in most instances a repudiation of Christian theism and the Christian revelation. H. G. Wells, in the August [1930] issue, concludes his paper with an appropriate 'Vanity of Vanities.' He says that we are 'face to face with the ultimate frustration of every individual desire in age, enfeeblement, and death.' His only comfort is that, when we die, 'we shall never know that we are dead.'

"Sir Arthur Keith wrote in the April *Forum* that he had come of a Christian home in Aberdeenshire. Darwinism landed him in atheistic materialism. 'By the absorption of this new knowledge my youthful creed was smashed to atoms. My personal God, the Creator of heaven and earth, melted away. The desire to pray—not the need—was lost, for one cannot pray to an abstraction.' For the peace of God Sir Arthur Keith thinks he has found a Stoic substitute. He tells us that he has 'an urgent craving for immortality. That longing, which lies at the root of the Christian religion, I look upon as a sin of the flesh—one to be conquered and suppressed.' Such a suppression, instead of bringing consternation or despondency, gives 'a peace which only those who have felt it can realize.' The apostle insisted that for those who had lost the resurrection hope naught remained but to eat, drink, and wait for death. Keith differs. 'If men believe, as I do, that this present earth is the only heaven, they will strive all the more to make heaven of it.' Certainly they ought to for logic's sake, but do they?

"Then comes Prof. John Dewey, who has scrapped the idea of God. This with the related ideas of the soul and its destiny, of fixed revelation, and the like, has 'made it impossible for the cultivated mind of the Western world.' Dewey seems to regret this in a way, for with these spiritual losses has gone, too, the older 'philosophy of hope, of progress,' and no 'new, coherent view of nature and man' has yet been discovered.

"Mr. Mencken's reasoned 'belief' is given in the September *Forum*. He holds that the discoveries of Copernicus proved that 'the

so-called revelation of God as contained in the Old Testament was rubbish'; that the authors of the New Testament were ignorant and credulous men, who 'put together a narrative that is as discordant and preposterous . . . as the testimonies of six darkies in a police court.' So low has the *Forum* sunk! A future life is to Mr. Mencken an absurd concept, for which there is as little evidence as for witches. He believes that religion is done for in America. 'Alone among the great nations of history we have got rid of religion as a serious scourge—and by the simple process of reducing it to a petty nuisance.'

"James Truslow Adams, writer of history, tells us in the *Forum* for May and June that he is not a member of any Church and that he intensely dislikes Paul. But he feels the need of some protection against the breaking dikes. He thinks therefore we should hold to Christ and Marcus Aurelius until a greater teacher shall arise, not because of any confidence in the Bible, but because these two 'synthetized the moral experience of the race up to their own times.' . . . This at least is faulty history. So also is an excursus Mr. Adams makes into present-day church history. 'The moral and social degradation of the Pacific races is,' he solemnly tells us, 'due largely to the insistence of the white man and his missionaries upon a too sudden change in the moral beliefs and codes of the natives.' Obviously he has never heard of Hall Young and Sheldon Jackson.

"The latest novelty in the *Forum* is a series of estimates by various writers in the public eye of the twelve greatest dates in human history. Hendrik Willem Van Loon leads off in the September issue. Van Loon's first date is 2200 B. C., when Hammurabi formulated his Code of Law. Why? Because 'without him Moses, ten centuries later, would never have been able to present his followers with those Ten Commandments which became the ultimate standard of conduct for the Western World.' The fifth date is the birth of Christ. Mr. Van Loon believes He was the son of Joseph and Mary. 'I need waste no words,' he writes, 'upon the importance of this occurrence. Were it not for the strictly formulated ethical code of the young Syrian prophet, . . . the Roman Empire would probably have survived much longer, for it was the deterioration from within which followed upon the pacifist teachings of Jesus that, quite as much as anything else, allowed the barbarians to destroy this immensely strong bulwark of civilization.' And Mr. Van Loon professes to teach history in an American college!

"These extracts are perhaps sufficient to classify certain magazines as purveyors of atheism, magazines that go into college reading-rooms, Y. M. C. A.'s, public libraries, and American homes. But there is another phase equally dark. There are certain things which the apostle insisted should not be once named among you as saints. The

magazines, and following the pagan mode of shouting them out from roof-tops. There is an old Jewish professor dying of cancer of the tongue in Vienna. It is he who has set the cancerous tongues a-wagging in the psychology courses of our colleges during the past decade, the graduates of which are now displaying their psycho-analytical wisdom in the magazines. It is not desirable to quote from the numerous notes taken. The *Forum* for May had an article, 'Polygamous Women,' which ought to drive the *Forum* from the tables of all Christian homes. *Scribner's* gives entry in its pages to a woman whom it describes as a 'daring writer.' Certainly the adjective is quite as applicable to the editor and circulating manager; for such articles, not many years ago, would have cost the magazine thousands of subscribers; perhaps they do even to-day. A publication that discusses without circumlocution perversities of the 'Cities of the Plain type' should be subjected to a rain of fire by indignant readers.

"Naturally those who write, and those who publish, articles embroidered with Freudian allusions resent restriction, and one is not surprised to find in *Scribner's* a scurrilous account of the life-work of Anthony Comstock. Mr. Comstock, no doubt, made mistakes and had his limitations, but he was a man of courage, who faced death in behalf of public decency. To hold up such a man to public ridicule but disgraces both writer and publisher. Those who believe in clean living will not soon forget the unchivalrous article 'Comstock Stalks' in *Scribner's* for April."

We have reprinted the article in full because it affords the reader an excellent insight into the kind of pabulum which our "best" high-brow magazines are offering their subscribers. As the *Sunday-school Times* observes, they have become purveyors of atheism and of the perversities of Sodom. The harm they do is all the greater since they, because of their former reputation as superior periodicals, enter our homes, public libraries, church libraries, colleges, universities, etc. Many readers who harbor an incomparable dislike for the pulp magazines with their blood-and-thunder-stories, their lewd and perverse sex emphasis, and their other glaring faults and vices will not hesitate to study and place into the hands of their friends and families these so-called "better journals." Aggressive atheism certainly made a wise move when it engaged in its vicious service the magazines which hitherto have enjoyed so enviable a reputation. It is high time for our pastors, teachers, and guardians of the young people to acquaint themselves with what these magazines offer their constituents and to find out how many of their young people are reading them. Unless we know what our young people read, we shall never understand their temptations and doubts, nor shall we be able properly to warn and enlighten them with regard to the difficulties arising from their

destructive reading-matter. In order to discover this, it is not necessary for the pastor to subscribe for the various magazines in question since excellent "digests" of their contents may be obtained in the periodical markets.

However, the matter is much worse than the foregoing article suggests. In a previous number the *Sunday-school Times* had published a news item under the heading "The American Anti-Bible Society." The item reads:—

"The American Bible Society is in the old Bible House on Fourth Avenue. Not far away, on East Fourteenth Street, is the American Anti-Bible Society. 'If it's against the Bible, we have it,' is the announcement of this 'Headquarters for Anti-Biblical Literature.' 'Catalog Free on Request.'—The legal representative of the Soviet government in the United States sought incorporation for this society. The spirit of Moscow is seen in the announced purposes of the society: to bar the Bible from the public school; to dislodge it from the guest-rooms in hotels; to discourage its use at gubernatorial and Presidential inaugurations; to remove it from the witness stand; to check and ultimately stop its unsolicited distribution among soldiers, seamen, patients, and prisoners; and to counteract the work of societies circulating it as the Word of God.

"'The American Anti-Bible Society,' we are told, 'offers a broad platform, upon which Modernists, higher critics, Unitarians, evolutionists, rationalists, freethinkers, agnostics, and atheists may unite to discredit the Bible as an infallible book. . . . Liberals of every shade are eligible for membership.' These people desire 'the names and addresses of students preparing for the ministry. Copies of current catalogs of preacher factories will be gladly received.' This is obviously a move to break down or remove the future leadership of the Church. They continue: 'Most denominational schools are hotbeds of heresy, as it is impossible for an educational institution to maintain any degree of dignity without teaching evolution. Higher criticism produces skeptics. Whoever accepts evolution should stop preaching Christianity. The descendants of apes don't need a Savior. Christmas is more and more being celebrated without reference to Jesus.' The call is sounded to establish forums wherever possible (that is, wherever atheism can be popularized). It is noticeable that among the vice-presidents of the Freethinkers of America are Prof. Ellen Hayes of Wellesley and Prof. H. E. Barnes of Smith. Both colleges were founded by Christians with specifically Christian purposes."

So far the quotation. Let the reader subject the contents to a close scrutiny in order that he may fully understand the far-reaching influence which this ungodly society hopes to attain. For here is the center of the aggressive atheistic movement which now confronts

Christianity in our country and which evidently has its origin in Moscow. Mueller: *Atheistic Propaganda in Our Country*

The fertile field which the atheistic blasphemies find at our public institutions of learning is well shown by the following news item clipped from the *Sunday-school Times* (September 13, 1930). We read: "I recently talked with a judge of the United States Circuit Court who had just gone back to his alma mater for a visit, the first since his graduation. He was received as an honored guest, a famous 'old grad,' and was made to feel at home. He spoke a few words in the assembly, words of faith and trust. After the assembly he dropped into a science class and was in time to hear the professor make some facetious remarks about 'the old fossil who had talked in chapel.' The professor's remarks were so well received by the class that he felt encouraged to go on, and he sneered at the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, called Him a martyr who died for a foolish ideal, scoffed at His resurrection, and rudely jested about His return. The old judge rose in indignation to defend the Lord Jesus, and the class jeered him to silence. He said he was so amazed that he went on a tour of investigation and found that the 'faith, manners, and morals' of the student-body were gone." Similar reports of the spread of atheism in our colleges and universities appear quite frequently in the religious press and prove the perils to which all are subject who attend the schools of our country.

The consideration of this dreary topic, of course, raises the question, What can the individual pastor do to safeguard the youth of his church? In answering this query, we do not intend to attempt an extensive reply. Conditions differ so much in the various parts of our country that much will depend on the pastor's own initiative. But in general, we believe, the following points deserve attention.

First of all, the ministry to-day calls for greater watchfulness on the part of the pastor. If ever, the minister of to-day must be a shepherd of his flock, a true *Seelsorger*, who endeavors to find out what his young people are doing, and especially, what they are reading. The ministry of the Gospel has always been difficult, but it is more difficult to-day because the attacks of Satan are so multiform and insidious. For this reason the pastor must first of all watch over the souls entrusted to his spiritual care.

In the second place, the pastor must have personal contact with his young people, especially with those who are attending schools where atheistic influence may be suspected. For such contact our Walther League has paved the way and affords excellent opportunities, which no conscientious pastor dare neglect. No matter how busy he may be, he ought never to leave the direction and supervision of the societies of his parish to others. This is especially true of the instruction in doctrine which they receive. Wherever Bible classes

exist, these deserve the pastor's own attention, and it ought not to be delegated to any one else, since in the final analysis the pastor is responsible for the welfare of his young people.

Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 2 U, Art. 11

Again, there must be adequate indoctrination, especially in such congregations as are exposed to atheistic propaganda. Sometimes those very things which we presuppose most are least understood by our people. If Luther had to continue the study of the Catechism during his whole life, how much more ought our people to do so, as they are surrounded by so many foes of the Christian faith! Such fundamental doctrines as the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, His vicarious atonement, the Biblical plan of salvation, the doctrine of justification by faith, the Christian Church, heaven and hell, the means of grace, the Christian life, etc., must never be neglected, but treated again and again from different points of view, so that the young people become thoroughly familiar with them. In addition to this the pastor may also, as time permits, treat such special topics of Christian apologetics as the present-day propaganda of atheism makes necessary, showing how the enemies of divine truth pervert history, misrepresent facts, and blaspheme the Christian faith because in the end their animosity against the Word of God flows from their hatred of God Himself. Russia to-day supplies us with a startling illustration of what atheism is and what it accomplishes where it is free to do as it pleases. From conditions prevailing there the pastor may draw a graphic picture of what our own country will be if the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism succeeds in its nefarious objective. Let our young people learn also that atheism has always attacked the Church and boasted of ridding the world of God, but that Christianity continued by the power of God, while unbelief destroyed itself by its own folly and fury.

Atheism is willing to devote time and money to the destruction of the faith of our youth. Should we pastors, to whom God has entrusted those whom His Son has purchased with His blood, not consecrate our time and strength to the preservation of their faith? What we need to-day is more time for private study, for our sermons, for the indoctrination of our people, and for that personal contact with the doubting and the tempted and the weak in faith which our own beloved Savior employed so advantageously. When the wolves are endangering the flock, the shepherd dare not sleep. Just how he must meet the wolves depends largely on his own ingenuity and the circumstances under which he labors. Only let him watch and pray and testify! The rest God will provide as the conscientious minister applies himself faithfully and diligently to his holy task.

In conclusion we may call attention to four "do's" which Dr. L. S. Keyser in his helpful little work *A System of Christian Evidence* suggests with regard to the right treatment of doubters. His direc-

tions are as follows: "1. Treat them kindly. If you would win some to the Christian faith, you must be winsome. 2. If you can, convince them by sound reason. Perhaps you can thus remove some of their intellectual difficulties. . . . Only we must be careful not to usurp the office of the Holy Spirit, who alone can regenerate the soul and give assurance of truth. 3. Let your dominant motive be to win them to the truth. 4. Pray earnestly for doubters."

It is well for us to observe these points, for sometimes we easily become impatient, as the fruit is slow in ripening. From our Savior's method of spiritual warfare we may learn also the strategy which the present new foe of aggressive atheism makes imperative.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER.

Das Schicksal der letzten Könige Judas.

Es ist ein bemerkenswerter und bezeichnender Unterschied zwischen biblischer Geschichte und Profangeschichte. Die in der Heiligen Schrift enthaltenen Historien sind eo ipso absolute Wahrheit, während alle Geschichtschreibung außerhalb der Schrift relative Wahrheit ist. Und wenn in weltlichen Schriftstellern sich Erzählungen von Begegnissen finden, die auch in der Schrift enthalten sind, so sind diese nur in dem Grade als unbedingte Wahrheit anzunehmen, in welchem sie mit dem Schrifttext stimmen. Andererseits haben alle geschichtlichen Tatsachen, die ursprünglich in einem menschlichen Geschichtswerk zu finden waren und dann von den Verfassern der historischen Bücher der Schrift mitaufgenommen wurden als ein Teil des inspirierten Textes, eben durch diese Aufnahme den Stempel der vollen Wahrheit erhalten. Dies gilt z. B. von den betreffenden Episoden im „Buch von den Streiten des Herrn“, 4 Mos. 21, 14, im „Buch des Frommen“, Jos. 10, 12—14, im „Buch des Sehers Gad“, 1 Chron. 29, 29, und von vielen andern Stellen, sonderlich im Alten Testament. Sodann sind aber auch mit den in der Heiligen Schrift aufgezeichneten geschichtlichen Ereignissen besondere, von Gott intendierte Lehren verbunden. Während es wahr ist, daß die Wege und Gerichte Gottes im allgemeinen auch aus der Profangeschichte erkannt werden können, so haben wir doch in bezug auf die Schrift die ausdrückliche Erklärung Gottes, daß das, „was zuvor geschrieben ist, uns zur Lehre geschrieben ist“, Röm. 15, 4, wo das Wort *doxa* eben allgemein genug ist, sämtliche Teile des Alten Testaments miteinzuschließen, sowie das „alle Schrift, von Gott eingegeben“, 2 Tim. 3, 16, woran der Unglaube vergeblich gerüttelt hat, denn seine Beweiskraft läßt sich eben nicht abschwächen; der Ausdruck *πάσα γραφή θεόπνευστος* steht zu gewaltig da.

Diese Tatsachen treten dem Bibelforscher mit besonderer Stärke entgegen in den verhältnismäßig kurzen Berichten über die letzten Könige