

Is religion the last refuge of Barbarism?

By GREGORY BETTS

A.N. Whitehead's statement that religion is "the last refuge of barbarism" (the last? surely the bitch-god nationalism deserves a place there as well) challenges an institution that has survived a countless spread of years to, on the whole, good reviews. Why then his ferocious wording? -"barbarism" indeed. One imagines the neighbourhood priest as a spiritual patrolman; preachers as gestapo-squads of the soul.

But examine religion more closely and one begins to see his point, namely that for too long (one day is too long) man has performed a circus-full of tricks under the Stern whip-hand of some deity, and to what avail? In the murky days of yore, before all became numbers in a national machine, perhaps religions could be regarded as serving some pragmatic benefit - by inculcating a measure of order where only chaos had reigned, by keeping the good good and a few of the bad nervous, or just restraining the poor from slitting the throats of the rich. For these affects we can only nod dutiful if unenthusiastic

gratitude while mumbling, "a necessary evil," under our breath. Since, however, the long arm of the law has grown considerably longer, such that those regulating tasks are now exercised ably by secular codes and state agencies. Society has outgrown its anticipated order-stick but still men cling - why? In answering it is well to realize man's infinite capacity for self delusion. Homo sapiens is an inventor; faced with the limitations of his knowledge, with mysteries and grim uncertainties, he constructs certain myths to make of life a coherent, complete tableau. In this manner, religion fills a vacuum, becoming an opiate/panacea.

This, then, is the "barbarism" - that while God is dead, man does not yet live. Modern man is in this respect, still huddled with his forebearers in a cave, casting prayer into shadows, fearful of the unknown dark - here is the affliction, the sad tale of a species' immaturity.

The theist (or deist) and atheist, though moored at opposite spiritual poles are actually, in intellectual terms, close and equally culpable,

brethern - both authors of the same illusion, namely that finite man can mingle his understanding with an infinite God. We are all presented with, at base, two choices; either (1) we regard our existence as the designed product of an all-knowing God-figure, or (2) to use B. Russel's phrasing, we see ourselves as merely "the chance colloccations of atoms." In the first, life becomes very simple and defined, like pieces on a chessboard; with the second option, we are reduced to nature's self-deprecating punch line, a cosmic fluke. The mistake of the theist and atheist is to regard these two possibilities as representing the only viable alternatives, while in truth there is a third life-choice - that of the agnostic. Therein lies the sole intellectually tenable position. The agnostic, faced with the initial quandry, "to deity or not to deity," stops short of easy solution, eschews virulent "no" and fervored "yes" alike, and puts his trust on the only solid ground - the firmament of reason.

That reason cannot probe our ultimate *raison d'être* I do not contend, but there I am

content to remain ignorant. Hope flies unbidden where it will, to eternal gardens or cities without wrong or pain, but reason, being master, must tame the imagination and direct our thoughts and energies toward man as he is, mortal and confined to earth (moon-age travel excepted). Accepting this belief, religion itself becomes blasphemy because it prevents man from realizing the key to his own

becoming. The free man exalts his own life because he can know of nothing else, and this being so, each moment is sacred, whether there be divinity behind our being or not. Living as we do, on the knife-edge of the atomic age, is this not perhaps our last chance to declare, I am my own Saviour, and make of this life a gift and blessing? - It is the delay that is the barbarism.

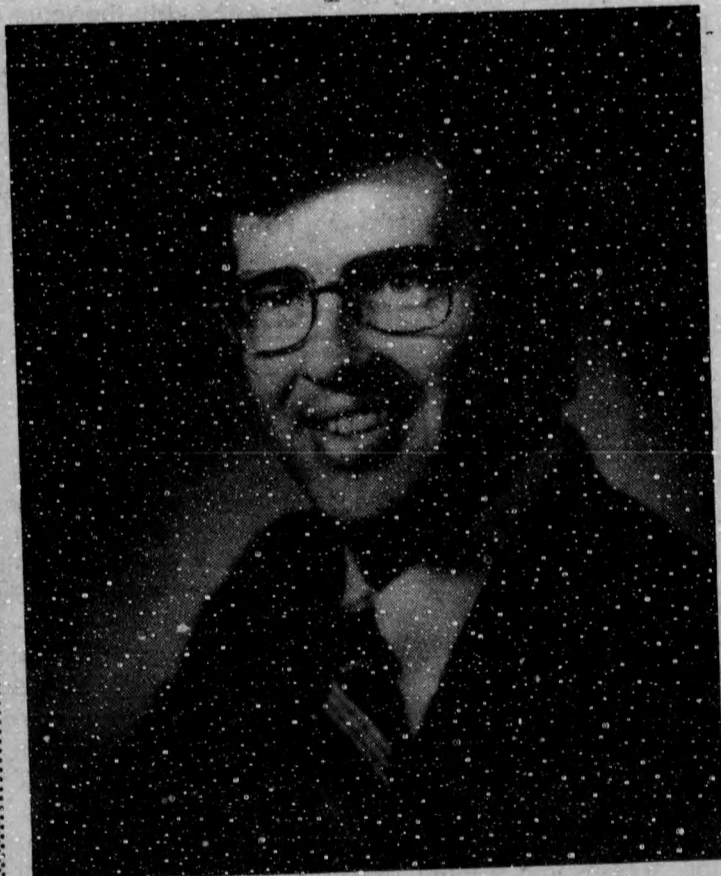
Home Economics program planned

A programme highlighting a variety of career opportunities available to university students majoring in Home Economics is planned for Thursday, Oct 14 at 7:30 pm in D'Avray Hall, Rm 261.

Speakers will outline their work in Nutrition Education, extension, community service, teaching, directing a pre-

school, energy conservation, marketing, and international development. Everyone is welcome. It is sponsored by the Home Economics section of the Faculty of Education, UNB and the Student Home Economics Club. Contact Eleanor Wein, Home Economics, co-ordinator 453-3508 for more information.

A Message From



DAVE CLARK

"I am very grateful for the support and encouragement university students have given me during this campaign.

I am now more determined than ever to establish a working relationship with constituents whose problems are unique and not always widely understood.

That is why I have refrained from competing with the election goody promises of my Liberal opponents. I don't want to destroy your trust in me before we even begin."

ON OCTOBER 12, MAKE DAVE CLARK YOUR M.L.A.

Authorized by David R. Clark, Progressive Conservative, Fredericton South