

## Negotiating the Marketplace of Comfort: Secularists Confront New Paradigms of Death and Dying in Twentieth-Century Britain

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## Résumé

Négocier le ' marché du confort' : les libres penseurs face à de nouveaux paradigmes concernant la mort en Angleterre au XXe siècle.

La mort laïque en Angleterre s'est fait une place viable dans la société de la fin du XIXe siècle. Les libres penseurs avaient la possibilité d'échapper aux services funéraires théistes, mais il n'existait aucune ' terre promise' pour les approches non religieuses envers la mort au cours du XXe siècle. Le christianisme ainsi que les approches non-rationnelles à l'égard de la mort adaptèrent rapidement leur message sur la mort et l'au-delà et créèrent un ' marché du confort' où ils espéraient attirer des adhérents grâce à de nouvelles offres théologiques et philosophiques. Les libres penseurs anglais ont dû s'adapter à ce nouveau monde. À la fin du XXe siècle ils ont saisi eux mêmes l'essence de ce que le ' marché du confort' pouvait apporter. Ainsi faisant, le message purement rationnel dans l'organisation des funérailles laïques devient moins important que la satisfaction et le confort qui peuvent être offerts aux individus.

Onderhandelen in een ' markt van troost' : vrijdenkers confronteren nieuwe paradigma's rond sterven en dood in Engeland tijdens de 20e eeuw.

De vrijzinnige doodsbeleving had een duidelijke plaats verworven in de Engelse samenleving op het einde van de 19e eeuw. Vrijdenkers waren in staat om hun eigen uitvaartceremonies vorm te geven, maar van een seculier ' beloofd land' met wijdverspreide niet-religieuze ideeën en praktijken rond de dood was tijdens de 20e eeuw geen sprake. Christelijke en nietrationele manieren van omgang met de dood en het hiernamaals werden met aangepaste boodschappen actief in een ' markt van troost', waarbij werd gehoopt op een zo groot mogelijk publiek. Engelse vrijdenkers dienden zich aan deze nieuwe context aan te passen en tegen het einde van de 20e eeuw hadden ook zij de voordelen van deze ' marktplaats' ondervonden. De rationalistische boodschappen in burgerlijke begrafenissen werden teruggeschroefd in functie van een flexibel aanbod van troost en voldoening voor de nabestaanden.

# Negotiating the Marketplace of Comfort: Secularists Confront New Paradigms of Death and Dying in Twentieth-Century Britain

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Despite early struggles in the first two thirds of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, secularists in Victorian Britain could argue that they had achieved many of the important rights of citizenship associated with death and dying by the very end of that same century. This apparent triumph during this era has similarities with the chronology of struggle for cultural and legal recognition of secularist death in countries like France and Belgium. The final third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the religious stranglehold on the control of death and burial broken so that atheists, agnostics and deists could reasonably contemplate the ability to plan their own interment, devoid of clerical interference. Nonetheless, there remained important differences. On the continent of Europe freethought organisations readily meshed with socialist groupings and often had overlapping membership. In Europe this also seemed more obviously rooted in articulate and strong local cultures, especially in towns and regions that had undergone rapid industrialisation. In Belgium and France in many municipalities both working class socialists and urban bourgeoisie successfully created effective anticlerical cultures. These resisted the cultural and religious claims of the Catholic Church in particular. Resistance to such challenges was also equally organised in localities. The Catholic Church in Belgium, for example, could draw on its local community and lay support for its uncompromising stance on secular burial, actively denying access to its funeral services to those exhibiting opposition to its religious hegemony<sup>(1)</sup>.

These local networks on both sides were not a noticeable feature of the landscape of death and burial in Britain. Perhaps of still greater overriding importance in explaining the absence of such pressures in Britain has to be the comparative absence of anticlericalism and anticlerical cultures<sup>(2)</sup>. Religious attitudes (rather than religion and its institutions) were nonetheless a barrier to be overcome in Britain, but this was not to prove insurmountable. By the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a more tolerant attitude in Britain to secularists (those wanting the removal of religion from the centre of power), atheists

(1) See the contributions of Christoph De Spiegeleer and Jeffrey Tyssens on secular funerals in Belgium in this themed issue.

(2) Apart from early 19<sup>th</sup>-century antagonism over tithes there was very little anticlericalism linked with political radicalism in Britain. Even the message of Thomas Paine in his *Rights of Man* predominantly focused its attack on 'kingcraft' and 'lordcraft' rather than 'priestcraft'. For an analysis of what anticlericalism did exist in Britain see Nigel ASTON & Matthew CRAGOE, *Anticlericalism in Britain, c. 1500-1914*, Stroud, Sutton, 2000.

(those with an avowed philosophical unbelief in the existence of God) and humanists (those with a belief in the sole power of human agency)<sup>(3)</sup> could be said to exist in embryo<sup>(4)</sup>.

Thus, this article has a somewhat different purpose to others within this themed issue. Rather than outline in depth the struggles for public recognition of secularist death rights at both national and local level this particular article looks beyond this stage. It looks at the advantages, but more importantly the dangers and perils, of achieving an apparently much sought after and desired goal coveted by secular cultures and sub-cultures throughout Western Europe. In short, this article asks the intriguing historical question of what happens when the secular community in a western country achieves its goals of full funerary, burial and interment rights within a culture of non-interference from the religious establishment? In an obviously adjacent question the article offers pertinent observations about the much craved secularisation of death, dying and disposal and the effect of this upon secular and religious outlooks in an age of apparent equal rights and privileges.

### Victorian Legacies

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century history of secularist death in Britain has been briefly surveyed but arguably still awaits thoroughly detailed examination<sup>(5)</sup>. The first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an idealised version of secularist death trailblazed by infidel ideologues. Richard Carlile (1790-1843) and Henry Hetherington (1792-1849) stage managed their deaths to emphasise their contempt for Christianity<sup>(6)</sup>. Carlile's dissection was conducted as a piece of radical theatre which aided medical discoveries and ridiculed the concept of the resurrection of the body<sup>(7)</sup>. The rank and file of the secular movement had previously endured the relentless assault upon their view of the universe and their deathbed through a prolific and caustic didactic literature detailing the last agonies of those unwise enough to reject Christianity. The last days and hours of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) were a particular favourite of this

(3) For the purposes of this article all three groups will be referred to as 'secularist' since all three could be described as having this common position. Only where distinctions are important for analysis will the specific distinguishing terms be used.

(4) By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century new legislation offered the opportunity to provide for the disposal of the dead as an entirely secular affair. For the Burial Act of 1900, which placed cemeteries within a firm secularising context by following the presumption that all new cemeteries would remain unconsecrated unless a case was made for their consecration, and the Cremation Act of 1902, which looked set to undermine the centrality of the Church of England to funerary matters by legalising cremation, see Julie RUGG, *Churchyard and Cemetery. Tradition and Modernity in Rural North Yorkshire*, Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 232-243.

(5) The starting point remains David NASH, "'Look in her face and lose thy dread of dying': The Ideological Importance of Death to the Secularist Community in Nineteenth Century Britain", in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 19, 1995, 2, p. 158-180.

(6) For Hetherington's last will in which he outlined his atheist views, see *The Reasoner*, vol. VII, n<sup>os</sup> 171 and 172, 1850.

(7) For Carlile's associations with 'radical surgeons', see Charles Wortham BROOK, *Carlile and the Surgeons*, Glasgow, Stickland Press, 1943.

literature and indicated a desire to undermine the reputation and emphasise the perils faced by the most prominent of secularists<sup>(8)</sup>.

However, as the century progressed it is possible to see a viable secularist deathbed developing in Britain. Unlike many episodes in the history of such struggles in Europe secularists in Britain were considerably less effectively in orchestrating systematic civic and cultural opposition to religious colonisation of death and interment. Moreover, unlike catholic Belgium, religious practitioners tried to overwrite secularist claims that sought a secular burial. This presumptive inclusion created a culture of individuals seeking to opt out, rather than finding themselves excluded by the actions of the church which created anticlerical sub-cultures reactions and solutions. Secular death rituals and secular burial tended to emerge in Britain as a piece of individualism on the part of the dying. The absence of anticlericalism in Britain meant that secularist yearning for secularist death and burial was more obviously the result of individual conviction rather than immersion in the practices of a deliberately ostracised outsider subculture.

The evidence for this is quite widely distributed throughout the secularist press of the period, in the form of stylised obituaries. Indeed the absence of central organisational structure to manage and co-ordinate such efforts (as well as archives such an organisation might leave behind) means that the secularist press remains the best source for studying such attitudes to death and the practices of British secularists around such events. The secularist community was held together by a well-organised and distributed secularist press<sup>(9)</sup>. This press reached beyond provincial urban centres to be the only contact that rural secularists had with those who shared their opinions. The press regularly contained reported accounts of far-flung individuals who believed themselves to be the only isolated freethinker within such distant locales. In such circumstances the deliberately staged civic secular funeral was not an available option. Instead such individuals emphasised their constancy upon their deathbeds and their continual assertion of secularist principles. These were communicated to the press and published to establish a definitive record of individuals expressions of unbelief before death. These provided individuals with a degree of comfort as well as the optimistic belief that such testimonials spread through a national secular press would have the latent power to inspire others<sup>(10)</sup>.

The constancy of unbelief amongst the dying was upheld by a refusal to interact with religious ministers, as well as the systematic production of affirming and defiant secularist deathbed statements which would then be reliably reported nationwide in the secularist press. Methods to gainsay

(8) See, for example, *Recantation of the Last Moments of Thomas Paine and M. De Voltaire*, London, 1863.

(9) This press embraced titles such as *The Reasoner*, *The Freethinker*, *The National Reformer*, *The Secular Review* and *The Truthseeker*. For the history of secularism during this period the standard work remains Edward ROYLE, *Victorian Infidels: The Origins of the British Secularist Movement*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1974.

(10) For example, the beliefs of Mortimer Guy (of St Leonards in Sussex) were attested by two letters to the secularist press. One of these contained the request of the deceased to 'come and see a secularist die'. See *The Reasoner*, vol. XVI, n° 412, 16 April 1854.

recantation stories were also gradually developed and these also proved especially effective in preserving the reputation of the late century secular movement's leaders<sup>(11)</sup>. In some respect the blueprint for such actions echoed knowledge of the culture's earliest and most famous proponents. Constancy of unbelief was asserted through the appearance of crucial texts embraced by the dying at deathbeds. Thomas Paine<sup>(12)</sup>, Constantin-François Volney (1757-1820)<sup>(13)</sup> and George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906)<sup>(14)</sup> all feature in this alongside dying words echoing a variety of secularist aphorisms and mottos<sup>(15)</sup>.

From the 1860s until the very end of the century and beyond it is possible to see a number of practices gradually put in place. Burial rituals for unbelievers over the century moved from having to grudgingly accept Christian burial to a gradual extension of rights. The evolution of secular intervention in the funeral rites of the Established Anglican Church was augmented by the introduction of urban municipal graveyards, which undermined the Church of England's secure monopoly over burial provision<sup>(16)</sup>. Eventually, the legalisation of cremation symbolically severed

(11) See David NASH, "'The Credulity of the Public Seems Infinite': Charles Bradlaugh, Public Biography and the Battle for Narrative Supremacy in Fin-de-siècle England", in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 7, 2002, 2, p. 239-262. This article outlines, as one example of this, the strategy adopted by Charles Bradlaugh's brother William who was an evangelical Christian. William Bradlaugh worked hard to argue that his atheist brother had recanted on his deathbed. Charles Bradlaugh's daughter worked strenuously through the following two decades to retain and promote the 'orthodox' secularist account of his last days.

(12) Thomas Paine is credited with creating the foundation text of western secularism *The Age of Reason*. This was polemical and forthright in its condemnation of Christianity and it is scarcely surprising to see this appearing as a comforting text for dying secularists.

(13) Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, comte de Volney was a scholar and philologist who managed a career in French government under the Estates General, Napoleon and later the restored Bourbon monarchy. His central work which turned up at secularist deathbeds in Britain was *Ruins of Empire* which argued that enlightenment thinking would eventually persuade the religious to see the kernel of truth that underlay all religions. Such a message was ambiguous and strangely portable and it is no surprise to see this text popular in America where it was translated by Thomas Jefferson.

(14) George Jacob Holyoake, the effective creator of the secular movement in Britain in the 1850s had also created a reassuring secular catechism for the dying with his frequently reprinted pamphlet *The Logic of Death, or Why should the atheist fear to die?* This was circulating amongst secularists and influenced their last hours and deathbeds from the early 1850s onwards.

(15) D. NASH, "'Look in her face and lose thy dread of dying'", *op. cit.*, p. 170.

(16) A series of Burial Acts in the 1850s built on the success of private cemetery companies, which proliferated between 1820 and 1853, by allowing the establishment of Burial Boards to form new cemeteries. These boards signalled a stride towards the enhancement of secular authority and a diminution of the powers of the Established Church. See James Stevens CURL, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, Thrupp, Sutton Publishing Limited, 2001, p. 141-142. Secularists had commenced circumventing the conventional burial service by holding their own devotional rites before reaching the graveyard or obtaining the co-operation of the minister. Whilst many wanted to grant reforms allowing secular services, secularist liberties were sacrificed in the compromise that became the 1880 Burial Act in which they were permitted only silent burial. This allowed them to process to the graveside without comment or declaration. Any attempts at these had earlier been considered and described as breaches of orderliness by high

the link between the Victorian population in Britain and the Christian doctrine of the literal resurrection of the body. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century secularists were able to die unmolested by Christianity, or by the state which supported its establishment. They may even, by this stage, have been capable of celebrating the small role they might have played in establishing what they would have seen as a certain secularisation of the phenomena of death and dying. Secularists had carved a place for themselves in funerary culture.

### Secularist Death in the Twentieth Century – Plans and Prospects

By carrying this account onwards into the 20<sup>th</sup> century this article continues this history and uncovers some surprising reactions and responses. On the face of it the progress described in the foregoing paragraph paints the expectation of a continuing Whig history of progressive extension of rights and achievement of full citizenship for secularists in death, as in life. This would involve the assault upon and erosion of Christian power over the hearts and minds of the populace at large. Holistic secularist critiques of Christianity as an establishment noted its power over all things from cradle to grave, and the secular movement in seeking to combat this exhibited an explicitly dual purpose<sup>(17)</sup>. This had to establish and provide secularists with the same rights as other citizens.

However, many had further and deeper aspirations to rid the world, and the wider community of Christianity and its influence. Provision for unbelievers was tinged with the hope that such provision would one day overtake and supersede the paltry and illusory Christian alternatives. Indeed this desired for ‘dream’ conceivably fortified those secularists who struggled to assert their identity in death. Some aspired to produce prescribed alternative death rituals with the production of secular burial services in the hope of establishing an alternative paradigm of death. However, it is debateable how far such a paradigm would appeal far enough beyond the secular community and colonise the wider population. Yet it remains certain that by the end of the century secularist funerals and non-religious paradigms of death and burial had become available to an increasing number of people, and seemed on the march into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into an ever brightening future<sup>(18)</sup>.

Anglican opponents. See D. NASH, “‘Look in her face and lose thy dread of dying’”, *op. cit.*, p. 173-175.

(17) It is interesting to note that this conception of Christianity controlling ‘from the cradle to the grave’ was an intrinsic part of initial secularisation narratives in the model of Peter Berger’s *The Sacred Canopy*. See Peter BERGER, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York, Anchor Books, 1967.

(18) By the First World War we see the emergence of obituaries which were longer and more personal containing anecdotes and reminiscences of the deceased and considerably less ideological content. For examples see obituaries of: William Platt Ball, *The Freethinker*, 14 January 1917; Jack Hecht, *The Freethinker*, 10 February 1918; Charles Jortan, *The Freethinker*, 17 March 1918; Robert Taylor, *The Freethinker*, 23 June 1918; John Thomas Horsman, *The Freethinker*, 14 July 1918; Richard Hollins, *The Freethinker*, 13 October 1918; William Mumby and Henry Cowell, *The Freethinker*, 27 October 1918; Frances Moss, *The Freethinker*, 5 January 1919; Robert Clough, *The Freethinker*, 19 January 1919; Charles McDermid, *The Freethinker*, 16 March 1919; Rose Thurlow, *The*

What secularists had provided for themselves were rituals and burial methods of their own choosing and it was a salutary experience to discover, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, that this would not necessarily be to the taste of all. Indeed it would come, at times, to actively conflict with the desire for this to become universal. Far from seeking to eliminate the secularist alternative, which had been religion's stance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian denominations and spiritually aware death rituals began to shape, cultivate and market their own paradigms of death which were becoming more flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals. These sought not to remove or bring secularist death rituals under their control, but instead to compete with them for acceptability amongst their own believers. Ironically in doing so they came to share the secularist vision of reaching wider acceptability. Rather than consolidating the victories won in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the secularist cause initially found itself defining and sharpening its practices of death, dying and the afterlife as a defence against the rejuvenated narratives offered by both orthodox and unorthodox spirituality. Secularists came to realise their place in competing narratives of death, and the appeal these may have had to the British population at large. The secularist paradigm of death, and the battles around it, seems to have shifted to perhaps not be about burial – the rights to equality here seems to have long ago been conceded. Instead they turned around evolving definitions of the nature of death<sup>(19)</sup>. A changed version of Christianity had moved beyond assuming outright and unquestioned authority to actually offering a different and worryingly compelling competing paradigm and philosophy of death.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century provided a range of challenges and wakeup calls to those who assumed for themselves the task of comforting the dying and consoling their loved ones who remained. Ironically, for the secularists it was many of the unforeseen manifestations and functions of modernity that brought competing narratives of death back to their doorstep. These older forms of competition did not wither and perish as hoped, but instead reinvented themselves and adapted their message to place all, both secular and religious, in this area in a 'marketplace of comfort'<sup>(20)</sup>. Such a marketplace involved a battle not for outright supremacy as though engaged in a war. Instead actions resembled attempts to define niche markets and gradually to expand subscription to the 'product', hopefully at the expense of rival

*Freethinker*, 30 March 1919; John Proctor *The Freethinker*, 13 April 1919 and Miss A.E. Hickling, *The Freethinker*, 4 May 1919. This last occasion was the first time the secular service was read at a crematorium by a woman.

(19) See 'The Fear of Death', in *The Freethinker*, 13 May 1917 for a piece which indicates the inheritance from the 19<sup>th</sup> century which accused Christianity of making death a site of fear rather than the serenity which atheists and secularists offered.

(20) For the use of the concept of a 'marketplace of comfort' to analyse competing narratives of illness and dying arrived at by both religious/secular institutions and private individuals during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see David NASH, *Christian Ideals in British Culture: Stories of Belief in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2013, Chapter 6 ("Our Way to Eternal Joy is to Suffer Here with Christ' – Sickness, Pain and Dying"). This article seeks to analyse the role of this 'marketplace of comfort' in providing satisfactory narratives in the context of funerals, funerary rites and the narratives created about what happens beyond death.



suppliers. Thus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century models of 'victory' became transmuted into models of gradually outsmarting and outbidding the 'competition'.

### **World War One and Challenges to the Rational**

It was primarily the First World War that proved the great watershed that dramatically altered 20<sup>th</sup>-century British culture's attitude to death<sup>(21)</sup>. Alongside the war creating the first mass movement of the century in the shape of men volunteering for the ranks, it also unwittingly introduced the phenomenon of mass death on a previously unforeseen scale. Hostilities dramatically increased the likelihood of sudden death, and moreover sudden death that occurred away from family and loved ones in an alien environment. It was also routinely violent and even sometimes apparently devoid of meaning, often the eventual fate of individuals could not be determined at all<sup>(22)</sup>. After death a link with previous burial practices and cultures of memory associated with the dead were broken, since quite early on a decision was made not to repatriate the bodies of the fallen. This series of unsatisfactory resolutions to the death of loved ones was lacking an acceptable and meaningful conclusion for those suddenly and unexpectedly bereaved.

This series of changes, and the attendant evolving attitudes they brought, perhaps became the greatest of shocks to the Anglican Church in England. This was still the established church in England and this particular status bequeathed opportunities and ambiguous responsibilities. The opportunities took the form of being able to set standards for liturgy that would be adopted or followed by the bulk of the population. It also had antiquity on its side with this liturgy conveying the sentiments of previous generations stretching back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, such expectations carried hopes amongst the Anglican hierarchy and its own history and antiquity could work against it, since this encouraged cultures of stasis and intransigence. Such attitudes almost pulled Anglicanism, and its provision for the dead, apart during the war years.

Anglicanism entered the First World War in a quite parlous state and was utterly ill prepared for the challenges the conflict would bring to it. At the outbreak of war the Anglican Church was poorly staffed lacking both numbers and quality amongst the few it did have. There had in fact been a considerable and lamentable failure to invest in the training of ordinands which was disorganised and relied upon local initiatives with no sense of national co-ordination<sup>(23)</sup>. In 1914 this state of affairs was reaping the whirlwind for the Anglican Church. Stories from the front emerged which

(21) See Patricia JALLAND, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

(22) For a Christian statement of this obvious creation of unsatisfactory circumstances surrounding the new paradigms of death conjured up by war, see Rev. William J.L. SHEPPARD, *Messages from the Dead*, London-Stirling, Drummond's Tract Depot, 1923, p. 3-4.

(23) Alan WILKINSON, *The Church of England and the First World War*, London, Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1978, p. 238-239.

indicated the low esteem in which Anglican chaplains and Anglicanism itself were held. Disquiet was evident at Lambeth Palace when it also emerged that a number of serving officers at the front were converting to Catholicism. This was largely because the Catholic Church was able to offer the last rites, whereas the Anglican Church chaplains described themselves as irretrievably tied to the inadequate and lengthy service for the Communion of the sick<sup>(24)</sup>.

Some though had learned to improvise and the introduction of less formal services by some chaplains encouraged a more ecumenical attendance. This reticence amongst Anglican clergy to provide adequately for servicemen could be traced back to beliefs inherited from the Reformation, that consideration of the dead and speaking of them was intrinsically Catholic and superstitiously popish. This meant that Anglicans had to wait until 1909 before a proper consideration of the matter became the preoccupation of the Church hierarchy. Only then was it decided that the wording was sufficiently ambiguous to provide for a quasi-Catholic or evangelical Low Church reformed interpretation. Thus, it was concluded matters should be left alone to provide an ecumenical bridge in a church maintaining its broad, inclusive character<sup>(25)</sup>.

Such evidence points firmly to the fact that attitudes to death had not been the victims of a species of secularisation. Despite waning confidence in established forms of Christianity, the response we see here indicates an enduring need for forms of comfort amongst a population encountering new and peculiarly difficult circumstances. Recognising this need was central to the Anglican Church's recovery towards the end of the war and immediately after. It gradually introduced prayers for the dead as well as a range of prayer cards and pamphlets inviting prayer for those serving and fallen<sup>(26)</sup>. All Souls' Day grew in importance throughout the war and, by the end of 1917, the Anglican Church promoted the construction of cheap shrines established at street corners commemorating the serving and the fallen<sup>(27)</sup>. It became so well attuned to this new marketplace, and especially its own potential place within this, that it used its privileged position to obtain centrality in the hearts and minds of post-war British society. Anglicanism's role in creating the phenomenon of war remembrance effectively eclipsed the contribution of other religious denominations. Its control of institutions, local religiously significant buildings, physical memorials and ceremonies all produced a virtual monopoly position for Anglicanism. In particular it also presided over the transmutation of temporary structures (such as the Cenotaph) and temporary ceremonies, such as remembrance days at local and national level, into fully fledged and enduring national forms of identity and nationhood linked to death and personal sacrifice. This was perhaps also embodied in the creation of the 'unknown soldier', a ceremony performed in darkness

(24) London, Lambeth Palace Library, Davidson Papers, Volume 377, item 7, Chaplain General to Archbishop Davidson, May 1915.

(25) Thomas Wortley DRURY, *Prayers for the Dead: an Historical Review of Church of England Formularies from A.D. 1536 to A.D. 1662*, London, Elliot Stock, 1909.

(26) William GRIFFITHS, *A Prayer for a Friend Out of Sight*, Biggleswade, Phillips, 1914; *Suggested Subjects for Intercession During the War*, London, SPCK, 1915.

(27) Alex KING, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance*, Oxford, Berg, 1998, p. 47-50.

with considerable religious solemnity – rituals almost unrecognisable to lower church Anglicans of the previous generation<sup>(28)</sup>.

In many respects this whole unforeseen turn in the history of death wrong footed secularist aspirations for a secular century and a removal of Christianity's hold over people at large. Not only had religion survived a crisis but it had discovered new ways to rejuvenate itself and adapt to changing needs. It had learned the hard way that the population at large could now call the tune. This was now the real discovery about modernity rather than accepting and promoting a simple 'Dover Beach' style receding of the 'Sea of Faith' narrative<sup>(29)</sup>.

### Spiritualism's Bid for the 'Marketplace of Comfort'

Anglicanism and Secularism encountered another interloper seeking to corner an ambitiously large sector of the 'marketplace of comfort'. Spiritualism was almost tailor made to take advantage of this unusual and fraught situation<sup>(30)</sup>. Indeed the lengths to which it would go to effectively create a new, and importantly bespoke, grieving experience were closely allied to what became its strangely unique selling point – it was acutely conscious that it was supremely and irrefutably demand led<sup>(31)</sup>.

Spiritualism grew rapidly after the publication of Oliver Lodge's book *Raymond*, which outlined instances and responses to spirit communication with Lodge's dead son who had fallen at the front in 1915<sup>(32)</sup>. It became especially popular after the emergence of a high profile advocate in the shape

(28) For more detail on this phenomenon and the argument surrounding Anglicanism's colonisation of remembrance and its implications, see D. NASH, *Christian Ideals in British Culture, op.cit.*, Chapter 5 ("At the Going Down of the Sun' – Collective Loss and Collective Remembrance").

(29) Referring to Matthew Arnold's lyrical poem 'Dover Beach', published in 1867, in which the poet laments the loss of faith envisaged by the retreat of the 'sea of faith'. Such a narrative shaped the British attitude to secularisation imbuing it with a gentle but insistent inevitability. For the power and impact of secularisation when expressed as a series of narratives with specific intentions and purposes, see David NASH, "Believing in Secularisation – Stories of Decline, Potential and Resurgence", in *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 41, 2017, 4, p. 505-531.

(30) The leading account of Spiritualism in its own right (albeit with its own emphasis on portrayal and reception) is Jenny HAZELGROVE, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000. Hazelgrove only notes religious opposition to Spiritualism emanating from the Christian churches and seems to date this from the subsequent decade. See J. HAZELGROVE, *Spiritualism and British Society, op.cit.*, p. 18-19.

(31) See Edmund MCCLURE, *Spiritualism: a Historical and Critical Sketch*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916, p IV. McClure, the Canon of Bristol, notes that twice daily services which offer to "bring their audiences in touch with the unseen" were suddenly occurring and drawing large numbers.

(32) Oliver Lodge (1851-1940) was arguably a prize asset to the spiritualist movement. He had acquired a distinguished reputation in Britain as a physicist. Upon his conversion to Spiritualism he sought to reconcile the spiritualist and material worlds in a single system. Although he observed and commented on the phenomenon of spiritualism and mediumship the First World War brought him to mainstream prominence – significantly as a bereaved father who benefitted from spiritual revelations from beyond.

of Arthur Conan-Doyle (1859-1930)<sup>(33)</sup>. In the final years of the war, and just after, Conan-Doyle energetically lectured on the truth of Spiritualism in Britain, America and Australasia. He also wrote extensively on the subject, most notably in his quasi-spiritualist manifestoes *The New Revelation* (1918) and *The Vital Message* (1919). In these he outlined the evaporation of his scepticism and his embrace of this new view of the universe<sup>(34)</sup>. In these works he skilfully spelled out everything that Spiritualism could provide as an especially appealing offering within the wider ‘marketplace of comfort’.

Unlike Anglicanism, Spiritualism very quickly learned how to address the individual mourner, rapidly moving beyond the anachronistically vapid generic comfort offered by the former. Spiritualism was initially undemanding and, from a marketing point of view, offered an unrivalled range of loss leaders at little or minimal cost. The fallen could be addressed individually and in turn reply in the same manner to their loved ones. It was also, conveniently, a thoroughly ecumenical world in the life beyond, encouraging the submerging of worldly differences in favour of a homogenised product based solely around sudden and utterly acute need<sup>(35)</sup>. It also regularly invoked familiar Christian motifs which reassured those who had come to its doors so recently from Christianity<sup>(36)</sup>. Describing its wartime development the theologian, philosopher and translator Rev. George William Butterworth was uncomfortable noting that Christ was mentioned because “(...)many people are not happy about a system which leaves Him out.” However for Butterworth he unsatisfactorily registered that Christ was portrayed as “(...) an ‘advanced spirit,’ a ‘prophet,’ a ‘gifted sensitive,’ and so forth”<sup>(37)</sup>.

Spiritualism also offered glimpses of the life beyond and contact with the deceased which secular approaches to death, of course, actively shunned. It moved further away from both Anglicanism and Secularism by suggesting the spirit world could intervene and influence the course of world events – neatly unravelling the feelings of futile loss that had accompanied the deaths of many. Sacrifice was now assuredly not in vain and meaning had been restored to death through this ‘kindly’ intervention on the part of Spiritualism. Indeed, it even assured attendees that their own conduct would

(33) Arthur Conan-Doyle is obviously known as the creator of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes but remained in public life as a defender of Spiritualism. He had moved in such circles as early as the 1880s and eventually joined the British Society for Psychical Research in 1893. However, it was only at the end of the First World War that he commenced to lecture on the subject, something which itself suggests to us, as it did to contemporary opponents, that there was an element of opportunism in this particular choice.

(34) Arthur CONAN-DOYLE, *The New Revelation*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1918 and IDEM, *The Vital Message*, New York, George Doran & C<sup>o</sup>, 1919.

(35) Some were prepared to argue that Spiritualism and its concept of the ether argued that all humankind had a shared subconscious. See J. HAZELGROVE, *Spiritualism and British Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 200-201.

(36) See chapters two and three (‘Catholic Connections’ and ‘Virgin mothers and warrior maids’) of Hazelgrove’s *Spiritualism and British Society* for an examination of how Spiritualism easily mapped itself onto the ideas, doctrines and culture of Roman Catholicism.

(37) George William BUTTERWORTH, *The Church and Spiritualism*, London, The Press and Publications Board, 1937, p. 6.

be transfigured for the better, through knowing the certainty of survival after death. For these people the Book of Common Prayer's exhortation 'death where is thy sting' suddenly had its meaning transformed<sup>(38)</sup>. Oliver Lodge had also been convinced that the spirit world also contained beings more developed than mankind. He concluded *Raymond* with a coda that reaffirmed Christian morality reconciling this with Spiritualism: "I believe that the call of Christ himself will be heard and attended to, by a large part of humanity in the near future, as never yet it has been heard or attended to on earth."<sup>(39)</sup> To a competitor like Anglicanism this seemed all so neat and tidy. Butterworth criticised Spiritualism for borrowing "(...) its ethics from Christianity and presents them in a feeble and sentimental form. There is no call to heroism or self-sacrifice. All is platitudinous, the dream-aspiration of men who will not face the harsh realities of life"<sup>(40)</sup>.

Butterworth's criticisms portrayed a real religion seeking to challenge an ersatz and flimsily constructed one which presented a sanitised and infantilised comfort filled death. But such criticisms were already more than a shade anachronistic. Whilst Anglicanism, as we have heard, replied by reinventing its own ways of communing with the dead, Spiritualism offered a considerable range of intellectual and cultural threats to secular views of death, dying and disposal. Part of this was because Spiritualism had altered the type of target that Secularism faced in its competitive struggles. Anglicanism had been the establishment which controlled the infrastructure of religious thought and culture. In Victorian England it regulated, for the most part, how the nation conceived of its relationship with God, the universe and death. Secularists in this period, especially under Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891), established themselves with the intent (like other liberal causes) of breaking this monopoly and its denial of freedom<sup>(41)</sup>. In undertaking this task they had, spectacularly successfully, portrayed Anglicanism and its hold upon the establishment as intransigent, tyrannical and anachronistically adrift from the spirit of the age.

Spiritualism was altogether a peculiarly different and modern threat. Although the literature of the period states it had been of various vintages, its appeal after World War One was fundamentally new. As we have heard it was malleable, undogmatic, calculated to produce contentment and shrewdly

(38) G.W. BUTTERWORTH, *The Church and Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 7.

(39) Oliver LODGE, *Raymond, or Life and Death*, London, Methuen and Co, sixth edition, 1916, p. 376.

(40) G.W. BUTTERWORTH, *The Church and Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 9-10.

(41) Charles Bradlaugh was the single most dominant presence in the world of Victorian British Secularism. From the 1860s he brought a more confrontational style and philosophy that contrasted with his predecessor as *de facto* leader of the Secular movement. Bradlaugh became President of the National Secular Society in 1866 and held this post until his death in 1891. During his lifetime he involved himself in confrontations and causes which often made him and the movement subjects of national discussion. These included the right to birth control information, the right to affirm in court and the right for atheists to enter parliament. For a full account see Edward ROYLE, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1980.

asked for an extension (rather than a negation) of rationality<sup>(42)</sup>. It also claimed to take materialism at its word, uniting the mechanical motions of a Newtonian universe with a static ‘permanency of Being’ which it hastily described as God<sup>(43)</sup>. Above all it emerged, as already discussed, as utterly demand led. This last aspect meant it already had grasped the essence of the ‘marketplace of comfort’ – that addressing demands and needs and even cultivating them was the way forward for belief systems<sup>(44)</sup>. As one Spiritualist commentator put it:

“In answer to a nation’s prayer for pity, but one movement remained that could demonstrate the return of the dead to their homes. O, critic, blush for very shame, its name was Spiritualism”<sup>(45)</sup>.

Perhaps the best exemplar of all these tendencies is evident in a 1922 pamphlet entitled *Life in the Summerland* by Mabel Corelli Green. These revelations came to Corelli Green through automatic writing which enabled her to contact her ‘three spirit boys’ on Peace Day 1919, to be followed by her own daughter ‘May’ in 1921. When May contacted her all was healed and family bonds were seamlessly restored, moreover the guardian angel principle could also be asserted to assuage fears and reassert that the Great War had been truly ‘the war to end all wars’:

“I was not quite eighteen years on the earth plane, but those years were full of happiness, even though two dear brothers passed over here in the war. Their passing brought us into such close touch with the Spirit World, and I was greatly blessed with help from God to use my spiritual gifts to help others just a little bit sometimes. I am now with my two dear brothers and a third one whom I never knew on earth, because he came over as a baby many years before I was born. They all three watch over Mother and the others at home. Now I can help too, much better than I did on earth.”

But the ambition of the message was spread wider and further with the prospect of offerings of comfort for all:

(42) See AMICUS, *Silhouettes of Spirit Life*, London, Hutchinson & C°, 1924, p. VI; O. LODGE, *Raymond*, *op. cit.*, p. 390-391.

(43) See W.H. EVANS, *Spiritualism a Philosophy of Life*, Manchester, The Two Worlds Publishing Company, 1925 for a statement clearly intended to indicate that ideas associated with materialism are a transitory stage to a still higher enlightenment. But see also the criticisms of Butterworth which described Spiritualism as the very antithesis of materialism: G.W. BUTTERWORTH, *The Church and Spiritualism*, *op. cit.*, p. 7. See also J. HAZELGROVE, *Spiritualism and British Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 21-22 for deliberate attempts to equate the machinery of Spiritualism and Spiritualist contact with the language and media of modernity, later even mimicking and reworking conventions from radio programme genres.

(44) For suggestions that the Christian opposition to Spiritualism was intent on eliminating a clear and obvious rival, see ‘Christianity and Spiritualism’, in *The Freethinker*, 25 January 1920.

(45) Harvey METCALFE, *The Evolution of Spiritualism*, London, Hutchinson and C°, 1925, p. 215.

“(...) I am anxious for the Mothers who need the messages I can give, to have a description of our life and work; the lessons we are taught, and the beautiful land we live in(...). We are more alive here, and although just ourselves, still we really enjoy life in a way you cannot understand”<sup>(46)</sup>.

### Secularism’s Fightback against Spiritualism

Challenging this shameless level of apparent ‘debasement’ of the currency of belief and unbelief was to prove a significant task for secularist and atheist worldviews in the 1920s and 1930s. Understandably secularists, for some very obvious reasons, became quite vitriolic about Spiritualism and its damage to the religious landscape of post-First World War Britain. As early as 1909 Charles Albert Watts (1858-1946), the editor of *Watts Literary Guide* and founder of the Rationalist Press Association, dismissed it as ‘unscientific’ and riddled with telling disagreement about what transpired in the spirit world. In the end he concluded that the spiritualist creation of an afterlife had tried to rejuvenate the morality of reward and punishment in a life beyond this one. This contrasted with Secularism’s achievement of persuading society to accept the hereditary aspects of evolution and the laws of cause and effect<sup>(47)</sup>. The nationally distributed secularist *Freethinker* could be forthright and caustic about Spiritualism and saw this as the latest manifestation of religion’s encouragement to commune with the dead: “If men were certain that death ended existence they would not care a toss whether there was a God or not”. The paper also described spirits as “spooks” and requoted popular journalism which described the doctrine as “spook rubbish”<sup>(48)</sup>. A later correspondent called it “(...) unbelievable as to doctrine in beginning, middle and end; chaos, perplexity, bad logic, delusions, deceit, all beyond the test of truth”<sup>(49)</sup>.

(46) Mabel Corelli GREEN, *Life in the Summerland: Given from the Spirit World through Inspirational Writing to her Mother Corelli Green*, London, Stead’s Publishing House, 1922, p. 5. For another account of spirit communication suddenly occurring in the summer of 1919, see McLaren Post MACFIE, *From Heaven to Earth: Messages Automatically Written by McLaren Post Macfie*, London, The County Printers, 1919.

(47) Charles WATTS, *Spiritualism a Delusion: Its Fallacies Exposed*, London, Freethought Publishing Company, 1909, p. 8, 9, 22.

(48) ‘Science and Spiritualism’ and ‘Archer on Spooks’, in *The Freethinker*, 11 March 1917. It later concentrated on instances of fraud. See ‘Science and Spiritualism II’, *The Freethinker*, 18 March 1917. This series continued in the paper, unmasking fraud until the summer of 1917. See ‘Science and Spiritualism XVI’, in *The Freethinker*, 1 July 1917. See also W. Mann’s ‘Science, Telepathy and Communion with the Dead’, in *The Freethinker*, 22 July 1917 where the author celebrates the unmasking of the medium Eusapia. This series of articles ran until 23 September 1917. For the rest of this year there was also a series ‘The Enigma of Death: a Solution’ written under the pseudonym ‘Abracadabra’. The series ‘Spiritualism’ took off in the early 1920s. See ‘Spiritualism’, in *The Freethinker*, 1 February 1920. Numerous other articles also contain related matter. Notably a series called ‘Science and the Occult’ which ran until the middle of October 1920.

(49) ‘The Spiritist Absurdity’, in *The Freethinker*, 8 June 1919. A later article in *The Freethinker* likened its appeal to primitive feeling above rationality as re-enacting the age

One of the very best windows onto this is to view the debates and disputes that settled around two of Spiritualism and Secularism's greatest advocates at this time. Spiritualism arguably grew to a new level of prominence after Arthur Conan Doyle's conversion to its principles. Conan Doyle had begun to lecture prominently in the last years of the First World War and had conducted significant lecture tours covering much of the country by the end of the conflict. His work was also aided greatly by the decision of the Northcliffe Press to bankroll Spiritualism to the tune of some £20,000<sup>(50)</sup>. One of Conan Doyle's advantages he offered to the Spiritualist cause was that he slotted it into an otherwise uncontroversial lifestyle and outlook. This was inflected with a genuine concern for the feelings and sufferings of others. Ernest Clephan-Palmer (1883-1954) noted that he played a good game of lawn tennis and mixed a tolerably good whisky and soda. Yet when showing visitors around his 'Psychic Museum' he regretted his inability to help Oscar Wilde "from this side", since the automatic writings emanating from his spirit indicated he was in difficulties "on the other side"<sup>(51)</sup>. Conan Doyle engaged in a series of disputes in person and print with Joseph McCabe (1867-1955), the leading secularist writer and speaker of this period. McCabe had been a Catholic priest and had already written a series of books and shorter works outlining, with the apostate's zeal, the travesties and calumnies maintained by the Church and its forms of authority. In contrast McCabe resolutely asserted his advocacy of materialism and this was, at least partly, an explanation why he rounded so defiantly upon Spiritualism<sup>(52)</sup>. He was to go on and become one of the most high profile writers and popularisers of secular ideas in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Both men wrote extensively on the subject, sometimes in answer to each other critiquing each's ideological position, and they also staged a public disputation in November 1919 which was attended by a considerable crowd. At this meeting Conan Doyle outlined Spiritualism's "consolation that it has brought to thousands and thousands of people". Conan Doyle also readily offered an apology for the apparent individual cases of fraud amongst mediums, concerned and deeply well intentioned individuals who otherwise had previously maintained good records as spiritual contacts with the afterlife<sup>(53)</sup>.

In reply Joseph McCabe had written a history of Spiritualism in which he commenced his criticism of Conan Doyle. In this he argued that Spiritualism was an unfortunate outgrowth of the age of Christianity's retreat. It was also

old characteristics of religion. See 'The Spiritualistic Boom', in *The Freethinker*, 20 July 1919.

(50) Joseph McCABE, "Evolution Denies Morality", in Huntly CARTER, *Spiritualism its Present Day Meaning*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1920, p. 232.

(51) Ernest CLEPHAN-PALMER, *The Riddle of Spiritualism*, London, Rider and C°, 1928, p. XIII and 3.

(52) Spiritualism could also make converts of rationalists. For an example of such a 'recantation', curiously published by a secularist publishing house, see Charles A. MERCIER, *Spirit Experiences*, London, Watts and C°, 1919.

(53) *Verbatim report of a public debate on "The truth of Spiritualism" between Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, M.D., LL.D. (representing Spiritualism) and Joseph McCabe (representing the Rationalist Press Association) held at the Queen's hall, London, on March 11, 1920*, London, Watts and Company, 1920.



common in frontier societies where hysterical reactions to phenomenon could be expected to produce irrational and hysterical responses of this kind<sup>(54)</sup>. From here he offered a novel argument about how the enlightenment and materialism had perhaps provoked an unforeseen backlash. As he put it, the spread of education restored spiritual features to the idea of heaven; this had made it progressively less appealing because it now had become merely disembodied spirits meeting in the afterlife<sup>(55)</sup>. Instead Spiritualism, under the early American spiritualist writer and advocate Andrew Jackson Davis, had created (opportunistically) the ‘Summerland’. This functioned as “earth without pain, disease or death” restoring the dead to corporeal form: “Universalists found it just what they desired. Men and women who were on the point of quitting Christianity because of the more painful features of its medieval theology discovered a religion to which they could subscribe”<sup>(56)</sup>. This was also convenient for these seekers who were people that McCabe saw as anxious to combat the amorality of materialist explanations of the universe.

Proving survival beyond death conveniently restored incentives and justifications for versions of higher morality – a conclusion McCabe treated with disdain<sup>(57)</sup>. McCabe saw Spiritualism’s adoption of the concept of the ether (a substance that allegedly connected the whole universe together) as also a piece of calculated opportunism. This even made him hint at a realisation that 20<sup>th</sup>-century British death experiences indeed constituted ‘a marketplace of comfort’: “They desired to outbid Christian Theology by promising that the mother would again see the pretty form of her child. (...) They went onto reconcile science and religion by arguing matter and spirit were formed out of this common ether”<sup>(58)</sup>. McCabe blamed Spiritualism’s prominence upon the recent publicity surrounding Conan Doyle’s particular interest which had made the press jump upon the bandwagon<sup>(59)</sup>.

McCabe was certain that all were engaged in a battle to win the respect of a society still drawn to religious impulses, much to the chagrin of most secularists. He was likewise appalled in the years after the First World War to discover a woman prepared to wilfully disregard reason in favour of other thoughts and feelings. He vainly attempted to confront her with his “unpleasant facts” about Spiritualism but received the heartfelt reply “Don’t tell me”. Reeling from this McCabe expressed himself outraged by the fact this woman “preferred an illusion”<sup>(60)</sup>. However, in this McCabe, either wilfully or otherwise, had ignored the zeitgeist.

As for Spiritualism’s claim to supernatural guidance and knowledge from beyond, McCabe gave this very short shrift. Conan Doyle had claimed

(54) Joseph MCCABE, *Spiritualism: a Popular History from 1847*, London, T.F. Unwin Ltd., 1920, p. 18-20.

(55) J. MCCABE, *Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

(56) J. MCCABE, *Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 25.

(57) J. MCCABE, *The Religion of Oliver Lodge*, London, Watts and C°, 1914, p. 174-176.

(58) J. MCCABE, *Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 237. See also J. MCCABE, *Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud? The Evidence of Sir A. Conan Doyle and Others Drastically Examined*, London, Watts & C°, 1920, p. 147-149.

(59) J. MCCABE, *Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 236.

(60) J. MCCABE, *Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 235.

to have awoken from a dream with a conviction that the Piave River would eventually prove crucial to the outcome of the war. This did prove vital to the Italian defensive lines in the period during and after the battle of Caporetto. Another medium had also predicted that the sinking of the *Lusitania* would similarly have a distinctive impact upon the war and its outcome. McCabe nonchalantly pointed out that such guesses were scarcely difficult to make and could have easily been arrived at rationally<sup>(61)</sup>. In moments like this McCabe must have felt that whole basis of society which had, in his mind, been moving towards rational explanations of the universe was in danger of jeopardising this through a 'return' to enchantment and its irrational explanations.

Summing up his objections to Spiritualism Joseph McCabe laid his cards upon the table:

"I represent Rationalism. That is to say, I want the whole world to use its reason, every man and woman in the world. I will respect any man or any woman, no matter what their conclusions may be, if they have used their own personality, their own mind, and their own judgement, rigorously and conscientiously. I do not care what conclusions they come to"<sup>(62)</sup>.

Again taking the opportunity to be conciliatory McCabe went further to reassert the primacy of materialism and the outlooks it foregrounded for 20<sup>th</sup>-century cultures:

"I prefer to cling to this life, to this human nature that we do know so well. I stand here respecting to the uttermost the sincerity of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but I stand here with the same sincerity to say that this movement is one vast, mischievous distraction of human energies from the human task that lies before us today. (Prolonged cheers.) I say that within the four corners of this world in which you live you will find inspiration for all the human conduct you can conceive"<sup>(63)</sup>.

In such pronouncements secularists like Joseph McCabe were expressing a fear that destabilising Christianity had not led to a secular future, but instead had created a vacuum or a space for esoteric world views. This may have been particularly evident in the discredit of the biblical creation story in favour of reworking versions of the idea of evolution – this last idea had constructed a fertile cornerstone of much esoteric theory including Spiritualism. Alongside this Spiritualism, whilst claiming modernist credentials, equally used the war to discredit scientific rationalism which had ensured "science was prostituted to the wrong ends"<sup>(64)</sup>.

(61) *Verbatim report of a public debate, op. cit.*, p. 15-17.

(62) *Verbatim report of a public debate, op. cit.*, p. 47-48.

(63) *Verbatim report of a public debate, op. cit.*, p. 50.

(64) H. METCALFE, *The Evolution of Spiritualism, op. cit.*, p. 214.

What perhaps provides the greatest insight into how religious doctrine and institutions had been replaced by a much more amorphous world of inchoate feelings is the discussion of fraudulent activity masquerading as genuine spirit contact. McCabe's lecture repeatedly offered hard evidence that individual mediums, and some well publicised incidents, were tantamount to fraud on a significantly large scale. Yet, Conan Doyle's reply to McCabe must have seemed astonishing and may have wrong footed him. Conan Doyle offered an apology for apparent individual cases of fraud amongst mediums, individuals he stressed who otherwise had very good records as spiritual contacts with the afterlife. This admission of unreliability represents a climb down from a narrative of religion's infallibility, which for secularists of the previous generation would have appeared not unlike Christianity giving way to biblical criticism. McCabe stated the bare bones of his reaction thus:

“Does it matter? Yes it matters exceedingly. It matters more than it did before. The world is at a pass where it needs the clearest-headed attention and warmest interest of every man and woman in every civilisation. Fine sentiments, too, we want; but not a sentimentality that palsies the judgment. Men never faced graver problems or had a greater opportunity. Instead of dreaminess we want a closer appreciation of realities. There lies before our generation a period either of greater general prosperity than was ever known before, or a period of prolonged and devastating struggle. Which it shall be depends upon our wisdom”<sup>(65)</sup>.

Conan Doyle had ditched issues of proof and consistency in favour of something else. Conan Doyle's admission that some mediums occasionally were reduced to faking it was effectively saying that individuals were to regard complete consistency and spiritual truth, all of the time, as actually unimportant. Moreover, Conan Doyle wanted to deflect attention away from this unfortunate situation. Instead he wanted attention to focus on the desire of these mediums to go to great lengths to satisfy individuals and their search for relief and meaningful communication. Effectively the world at large should not scrutinise whether spiritualist mediums were truthful or fraudulent. Instead it should note the great comfort the 'faith' offered to people, especially when it was needed. In this equation need trumped truth, especially if that truth was incomplete, unsatisfactory or uncomfortable. Spiritualism again asserted that it did not instil obligations and duties upon people, unlike Christianity, and could further point to how simply it was demand led – a factor even readily, if uncomfortably, conceded by Joseph McCabe.

### **Secularists Engage with the 'Marketplace of Comfort'**

Considered overall this version of religion was anathema to all serious versions of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Secularism. Such considerations rather rudely announced to secular world views that their attitude to death now existed

(65) J. MCCABE, *Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud?*, *op. cit.*, p. 158-159.

in this ‘marketplace of comfort’. Even McCabe turned this around to offer a competitor to Spiritualism:

“The finest sentiment you can bestow on the memory of the dead is to make the world better for the living. Has your child been torn from you? In its memory try to make the world safer and happier for the myriads of children who remain”<sup>(66)</sup>.

In the face of this dilution and adaptation it may have been tempting for secularists in the age of McCabe to see their fate plainly before them. Had they become the sole defenders of rationalist mindsets and outlooks? Given the accommodations made by existing religions, and the approaches of new interlopers it must have been tempting to assume with foreboding that the secular rationalist worldview was the last universalist creed in the West.

Jenny Hazelgrove’s analysis saw Spiritualism as a victim of some twists and turns in the development of modernity, as well as growing secularisation. Mediumship was supplemented by other choices open to women seeking to command respect, power, and independence. Likewise, she argues there was a certain post-1945 secularisation of death that demanded simpler services and displays of emotion. This considered Spiritualism to be a cultural construct akin to Victorian melodrama, potentially carrying the same unwanted cultural baggage<sup>(67)</sup>. Some of these changes had their counterparts in the experience of other religions and their responses to secularisation. Very rapidly thoughts turned to addressing needs and demands rather than seeking to relaunch or reinforce older beliefs. A clear example of this in operation was the gradual waning of Catholic belief in the doctrine of purgatory. Whether this remained the official doctrine of the Catholic Church into the new Millennium became markedly less important than how many people within Catholicism’s constituency, or market, believed in it or found it palatable enough to accept as a central part of funeral services for their loved ones.

We can also trace the impact of the ‘marketplace of comfort’ on secular views of death when we encounter the wording and provision contained in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Humanist and Ethicist funeral services. Over the course of the century these showed evidence that the bold statement of rationalism had waned in favour of a greater inclusiveness. In these elements of flexibility and inclusivity suggest a desire to address the needs of those attending such funerals, rather than to assert ideological purity or, in some contrast to the previous century, make any particular stand about secularist death and burial. The Ethical Funeral Service of 1938 noted that it was chiefly intended to instruct and inform those called upon to conduct an ethical funeral service at short notice<sup>(68)</sup>. This implies that many such services were expected to be private affairs potentially hastily organised after the reading of a will or letter left by the deceased. Such a situation is perhaps further confirmed with the suggestion that mourners may render some assistance to the family

(66) J. MCCABE, *Is Spiritualism Based on Fraud?*, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

(67) J. HAZELGROVE, *Spiritualism and British Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 270-274.

(68) *Ethical Funeral Service*, London, Rationalist Press Association, 1938, *passim*.

in their grief and that the officiant is instructed to get biographical details from the family, if necessary by letter.

This was somewhat different to the battles and funerary demonstrations of power, will and intent of the previous century. The service was also described as ‘illustrative’ and capable of modification or incorporating sentimental material. Within this text death is considered a friend that evokes the sacredness of life in blank verse with a deliberately cultivated antiquity:

“(...) that veiled figure which snatches now the tender bud and now the withering blossom, which comes, now in the first flush of dawn, now in the high noon of full vigour, and now in the rich sunset of the rounded life”<sup>(69)</sup>.

This lyrical language may have been deliberately evocative of the Book of Common Prayer and was perhaps another technique intended to aid inclusivity, and defuse potential hostility from Christians present at such occasions. In this it echoed George William Foote’s own desire in the 1880s to undermine the Bible through lampoon and blasphemy. G.W. Foote (1850-1915), a secularist free speech campaigner and would be literary critic, believed the Bible was a brilliantly written and lucid work, offering a euphony that had seduced the emotions of several generations<sup>(70)</sup>. As such Foote believed those scholars who had “diligently compared texts” for the King James Bible had been especially fortunate in writing their prose in the age of Shakespeare<sup>(71)</sup>.

Perhaps the full flowering and culmination of secular death’s place in the ‘marketplace of comfort’ can be seen in end of century and contemporary humanist services. The 2006 British Humanist Association guide *Funerals Without God* was substantially a republication of the guide produced a decade earlier<sup>(72)</sup>. It now included extra examples and the removal of a suggestion about proselytising the secular message, if the deceased had been an activist. This further served to widen the appeal of, and constituency for, secular humanist funeral services in Britain. The 2006 version contained advice about giving practical help for the relatives of the deceased, on the role of the officiant, how to obtain grief counselling, and advice about individuals left with the task of undertaking the funeral themselves. Religious hymns were allowed if they evoked secular memories, but were not permitted if they were to make religious statements. Acute observers and consumers of this phenomenon may have wondered what precisely the difference in emphasis meant in practice.

(69) *Ibid.*

(70) George William Foote had earned notoriety as the leading character in *The Freethinker* blasphemy case of 1882-84. His carefully choreographed martyrdom gave him sufficient standing with the movement to be the natural successor to Charles Bradlaugh as President of the National Secular Society.

(71) See Joss Lutz MARSH, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, London, University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 251.

(72) Jane Wynne WILSON, *Funerals Without God*, London, British Humanist Association. Editions were published in 1989, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2006 & 2014.

Throughout the 2006 version there was a strong emphasis upon choices. The multiplicity of methods of disposal (versions of cremation versus burial) were mentioned, methods of composing the ceremony, as well as suggestions for texts, poetry and music. Illustrations of how services might be tailored for a range of needs meant a number of sample ceremonies were included (with one added since the mid 1990s). These comprised those covering the aged, the suicide of a young man, a two year old child, and a disabled individual<sup>(73)</sup>. This would later be augmented by a subsequent work which offered advice on unusual situations such as the deaths from AIDS, murder, double suicide, anorexia nervosa, alcoholism and accidental death. Innovatively this work also offered a service which could be used at the death of a beloved pet<sup>(74)</sup>. Further choice was also evident in the ability to conduct ceremonies in a variety of specific places such as woodlands, consecrated ground and at memorial meetings. By the 2014 edition, *Funerals Without God* recognised that some might, by now, “(...) feel confident that they can celebrate the lives of their relations and friends without asking for any help from an outside agency”<sup>(75)</sup>. This perhaps even suggested that the wheel had indeed turned full circle to again reflect the individual statements and independence of mind that had been the currency of mid-Victorian secularists.

From here we should take note of how far humanists and secularists had created a wider offer of death experience. Acknowledging the needs of their audience meant that, like the religious, they found themselves squarely within the ‘marketplace of comfort’<sup>(76)</sup>. Atheists and secularists had to compete with Christianity and spirituality reinventing acceptable forms of death. It is especially telling that the 2014 edition noted the increasing popularity of humanist funerals “as alternative ceremonies become more widely known”. Such funerals still contained “(...) no religious belief” but the phrase “alternative” placed them within the realm of choice and sought to appeal to lifestyle and personality based attitudes as much as religious ones<sup>(77)</sup>.

(73) These were variations on a pattern set by Frederick James Gould in his own volume that was initially published in 1906 and was used during the First World War. This had a range of graveside addresses tailored to the age of the deceased, alongside guidance on the appropriate expression of sentiment. These different addresses encompassed ‘Infancy’, ‘Childhood’, ‘Youth’, ‘Middle Age’ and ‘Old Age’ and appear to be modelled on individual examples Gould had presided over. See Frederick James GOULD, *Funeral Services Without Theology: a Series of Addresses Adapted to Various Occasions*, London, Watts and Co, 1923 edition. This was superseded by a later edition in 1939 which by now had recognised the growing appeal of cremation and told individuals on how to leave instructions if they favoured this method of disposal which remained a legal necessity.

(74) Carole MOUNTAIN, *Out of the Ordinary: Ceremonies Where the Circumstances are Unusual or Tragic*, London, British Humanist Association, 2000, p. 59-147.

(75) Jane Wynne WILSON, *Funerals Without God*, London, British Humanist Association, 2014 edition, p. 8.

(76) For the same processes of personalisation in Belgium, where secular funerals offer flexible forms of comfort instead of ideological purity, see C. De Spiegeleer’s contribution in this issue.

(77) Jane Wynne WILSON, *Funerals Without God*, London, British Humanist Association, 2014, p. 1.

## Challenges to Late Twentieth-Century Secularist Death

Arguably the greatest proof of secular death's embrace of the 'marketplace of comfort' comes from noting late 20<sup>th</sup>-century attempts to poach their market and damage the coherence and credibility of the secularist offer of the death experience. Although occurring in many forms, these had in common the renewed attempt to portray secular death as unsatisfactory failure when set aside more comprehensive and spiritual conceptions of death and the wider universe. The growth of the Hospice movement was an exemplar of this. This was deliberately conceived as an antidote to the perceived ideological and psychological pressures around euthanasia and assisted dying<sup>(78)</sup>. Once again it addressed some of the unforeseen consequences of modernity, in this case the greater likelihood of succumbing to incurable and progressive diseases. These were ailments in which life might genuinely be prolonged by the intervention of medical science. The medicalised death that seemed to be the epitome of rationalisation was now, within the ideology of the Hospice movement, rendered unsatisfactory in favour of a greater spirituality and patient centred approach to death. This contrasted with the book that had been the Victorian period's primer on death for the secularist, Holyoake's *Logic of Death*<sup>(79)</sup>. This had offered a philosophically rational and naturalist approach to death as well as comfort which encouraged fortitude in the face of potential suffering. In contrast the Hospice movement sought to prolong life through pain management with a focus upon the individual and their needs. This was an approach which was considered by many secularists to become a widely open door for the discussion of the spiritual. In some respects secular and humanist world views fought back against this with rejuvenated vigour with the onset of debates about assisted dying. This again, like the Hospice movement, offered an approach to the intolerable situations that medical science still created – but this time in a wholly rational guise. In this they were helped by allies such as the Natural Death Centre who produced pamphlets that emphasised independent death and gave instructions on how to refuse artificial feeding, non-resuscitation and the creation of pro-choice 'death plans'<sup>(80)</sup>.

Cremation, something which strangely had not grabbed the secularist mind in the manner we might expect, also became an area of fightback against Spiritualism. A 1944 pamphlet from the Rationalist Press Association noted that the First World War had not simply inspired Spiritualism but equally a sharper sense of materialism. This had meant that cremation during

(78) For a discussion of this, see D. NASH, *Christian Ideals in British Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 128-135. See also Shirley du BOULAY, *Cicely Saunders: The Founder of the Modern Hospice Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1984.

(79) D. NASH, "Look in her face and lose thy dread of dying", *op. cit.*, p. 169.

(80) See Nicholas ALBERY, Matthew MEZEY, Mary MCHUGH & Marie PAPWORTH, eds., *Before and After: The Best New Ideas for Improving the Quality of Dying and for Inexpensive, Green, Family Organised Funerals*, London, The Natural Death Centre, 1995, *passim*. This organisation also published pamphlets advocating woodland and farmland burial, as well as one offering a miscellany of thoughts around death that derived from and updated the range of ideas offered by Gould at the start of the century. See also Nicholas ALBERY & Stephanie WIENRICH, eds., *The New Natural Death Handbook*, (Third Edition), London, The Natural Death Centre, 2000.

this period “(...) was appealing in increasing measure to the intellectual classes”<sup>(81)</sup>. This observation allowed secularists to maintain a belief that Spiritualism preyed upon the less educated and that intellect and reason was a bulwark that protected rational intelligent thought. This conveniently neglected the intellectual pulling power of some of Spiritualism’s advocates both before and after the First World War.

Some late 20<sup>th</sup>-century models also went in a different direction that revisited post First World War challenges to rational secular paradigms of death and dying. Gerry Connelly’s book *The Afterlife for the Atheist* (1995) offered itself as an explanation and exposition of thanatology. It sought to make friends with its supposed atheist audience by promising that “no religion will be offered inside the book” nor would examples be drawn from fiction. The book then offered evidence from psychiatrists drawing upon near death experiences as well as Tibetan and Egyptian books of the dead. It then ‘modernised’ the spiritualist offering by describing the ‘Electronic Voice Phenomenon’ in which the voices of the dead could supposedly be heard when playing back recordings of silence<sup>(82)</sup>. The book was ostensibly a whole manual on how to contact the dead with your tape recorder and how to experiment rationally whilst doing so. This idea updated the post World War One Spiritualist phenomena, yet equal returned to asking many of the same questions about God, hell and war. Again such ideas painted themselves as drawing from modernity, whilst equally recasting older ideas<sup>(83)</sup>. References to Anti-matter and parallel worlds were methods of reconstructing the ether that held the universe together, for those schooled in a new scientific lingua Franca. The book even returned full circle trying to reconcile atheists back to religion, God and heaven:

“Although the saying is hackneyed, all you need is love. It is not easy to learn to love; you will spend much time and effort in your next life learning precisely this. In this life, most of us will fail. But don’t give up for fear of failure. Only love for others will make us want to do things for others benefit. Only then will we move on to our next lives leaving this world in a better state than we found it”<sup>(84)</sup>.

A similar development occurred in the context of seeking to widen choice amongst individuals wanting innovative and memorable ways of individual commemoration. Books encouraging diversity and commemorative services held elsewhere and separate from a traditional funeral service for the family have also become significant. It is interesting to see subscription to this idea

(81) *Rationalists and Cremation*, London, Rationalist Press Association, 1944, p. 4.

(82) Gerry CONNELLY, *The Afterlife for the Atheist*, Corby, Domra Publications, 1995, p. 23-59.

(83) Jay Winter argues in an influential chapter of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* that Spiritualism was part of an “avalanche of the unmodern”. This fails to see Spiritualism in the wider context of various beliefs seeking to offer consolation and creating particularly palatable doctrines to do so. See Jay WINTER, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, Chapter 3 (“Spiritualism and the ‘Lost Generation’”).

(84) G. CONNELLY, *The Afterlife*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.



and its logic also embraces the input of Christian practitioners, alongside content which offered forms of Christian burial service as a legitimate option amongst many<sup>(85)</sup>. It is also salutary that the urge for increasingly person centred funerals inspired practicing Christians to ditch traditional services in favour of this new agenda or indeed to provide these to non-believers when requested<sup>(86)</sup>.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after earlier triumphs, secularists and humanists had jettisoned aspirations for a universally practiced wholly rational death. Instead they competed for their place in a 'marketplace of comfort'. This did not however mean that their ideological message was neglected entirely. Offering comfort had always been central to Humanism and it could realise these ideals arguably more readily and comfortably than many religious denominations. Likewise, for secularists such changes became a warning to never underestimate the fear amongst a wide number of people of what it would be like to live in a disenchanted world. Such sentiments today loudly echo in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, amid its attempts to argue the virtues of possible re-enchantment<sup>(87)</sup>.

Ideologically it was also possible to voice concerns that allowing and permitting the indulgence of quasi-religious sentiment, loss, longing and emotion was actually the commencement of eclectic 'pick and mix' religion. This was constantly constructing (and reconstructing) God in the image of man, in which mankind's needs are the paramount and driving force. This arguably functioned like Spiritualism which placed man's spiritual nature back at the centre of the universe – for secularists precisely where it was no longer wanted. This also offers an explanation for the existence of movements for the scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena and those to counter non rational explanations of physical phenomena. In preserving an established secular paradigm of death the sceptic movement has to provide rational explanations of esoterically explained phenomena and to combat attempts to reintroduce transcendence and forms of intelligence guiding and shaping the universe.

Bertrand Russell's *Why I am not a Christian* (1927) explained this quite fully in its chapter 'Death the Final Event of the Self'. Russell argued against the Bishop of Birmingham that the apparent immortality of humankind must stem from it being the creation of a universe with an intelligence, since it would be unintelligent to make such a creation perish:

“(...) human sacrifices, persecution of heretics, witch-hunts, pogroms leading up to wholesale extermination by poison gases.(...) Are these abominations, and the ethical doctrines by which they are prompted, really evidence of an intelligent creator? And can we really wish that

(85) See, for example, the acknowledgements in Sue GILL & John FOX, *The Dead Good Funerals Book*, Ulverston, Engineers of the Imagination, 1996, p. 3, 120-136.

(86) For an account of the development of life centred funerals in Australia which involved the crucial intervention of practicing Christians, see Tony WALTER, *Funerals and How to Improve Them*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, p. 217-221 See also p. 231 for an account of a Christian Funeral Director, familiar with the life centred funeral agenda, conducting a wholly secular funeral.

(87) Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*, London, Belknap Press, 2007.

the men who practiced them should live forever? The world in which we live can be understood as a result of muddle and accident; but if it is the outcome of deliberate purpose, the purpose must have been that of a fiend. For my part, I find accident a less painful and more plausible hypothesis”<sup>(88)</sup>.

Russell saw an immoral form of universal salvation peddled in conventional Christian narratives of an endlessly forgiving God, one who could paradoxically also be excused his own indiscrete uses of providence. Instead this version of Christianity, and its attitude to death and the hereafter, felt like a comfort blanket rather than a robust belief capable of withstanding intellectual and philosophical challenges. Thus from arguing against Christianity’s hard uncompromising nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century secularist and atheist paradigms of death in the 20<sup>th</sup> century found themselves arguing against how soft, soggy and yielding Christianity had become. It was using death as a cosy and comforting loss leader within the ‘marketplace of comfort’, thereby creating a much more passive and compliant constituency, potentially drawing in those less obviously tied to religion. Christianity had produced a sort of inclusive associational heaven for all – one method of colonising the way back to belief was to make all such beliefs more palatable and less hard to question or reject. Given this, secularism and atheism’s message would always seek to unravel the steps to unreason and cosiness even if its message should remain stark, perhaps in its own way reenchanting the secular.

## Conclusion

Earlier work on secularist death in Victorian Britain emphasised the achievement of a series of gradual gains and recognition of the rights of unbelievers to aspire to a manner of death and burial of their own choosing. By the end of the century humanist funerals and non-religious paradigms of death and burial had become available to an increasing number of people, and seemed on the march into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and an ever brightening future.

But this achievement may not have been as extensive as perhaps it could have been. This article has unraveled an otherwise optimistic Whig and secularising account. Secularists had to address the conflicting issue about whether they were championing minority rights or what they hoped would eventually become norms for all. Ultimately the quest for rationalist approaches to death, dying and disposal were confronted during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by a number of unexpected phenomena and changes. Religious and non-religious outlooks competed to provide convincing and satisfying paradigms of death amidst the rise of a ‘marketplace of comfort’. The First World War placed an increased cultural premium upon the dead which saw Britain’s established church recognise the spiritual need of

(88) Bertrand RUSSELL, *Why I am Not a Christian. And Other Essays on Related Subjects*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1957, p. 93.

those in mourning (through the phenomenon of remembrance), whilst its monopoly over such comfort was challenged by the arrival of Spiritualism. This latter belief threatened to overwhelm both orthodox Christianity and likewise undermine the rational view of death proposed by secularists. By the late century rational death and burial paradigms had to do battle with the rejuvenation of quasi-religious support for Spiritualism and later softened Christianity. In the midst of such arguments secularists came to see their 'human centred' approach could be in danger of being elbowed aside and the area colonised by the softer humanising attitudes of later century Christianity.

## ABSTRACT

**David NASH, *Negotiating the Marketplace of Comfort: Secularists Confront New Paradigms of Death and Dying in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain***

Secularist death in Britain had carved itself a viable place in society by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Whilst it had made escaping theistic services and burial possible for its own adherents it did not move forward into a 20<sup>th</sup>-century 'promised land' of widely practiced secular and secularist approaches to death. Christianity and non-rational approaches to death rapidly remade their messages about death and the hereafter and created a 'marketplace of comfort' where they hoped to attract adherents with new types of theological and philosophical offering. British secularists had to adapt to this new world and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had themselves grasped the essence of what the 'marketplace of comfort' could provide. In doing so the rationalist message in secular funeral provision began to be less important than the satisfactory and flexible forms of comfort it could offer to individuals.

Secularism – Britain – 20<sup>th</sup> century – paradigms of death – Church of England – Spiritualism

## RÉSUMÉ

**David NASH, *Négocier le 'marché du confort' : les libres penseurs face à de nouveaux paradigmes concernant la mort en Angleterre au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle***

La mort laïque en Angleterre s'est fait une place viable dans la société de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les libres penseurs avaient la possibilité d'échapper aux services funéraires théistes, mais il n'existait aucune 'terre promise' pour les approches non religieuses envers la mort au cours du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le christianisme ainsi que les approches non-rationnelles à l'égard de la mort adaptèrent rapidement leur message sur la mort et l'au-delà et créèrent un 'marché du confort' où ils espéraient attirer des adhérents grâce à de nouvelles offres théologiques et philosophiques. Les libres penseurs anglais ont dû s'adapter à ce nouveau monde. À la fin du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle ils ont saisi eux-

mêmes l'essence de ce que le 'marché du confort' pouvait apporter. Ainsi faisant, le message purement rationnel dans l'organisation des funérailles laïques devient moins important que la satisfaction et le confort qui peuvent être offerts aux individus.

Libre pensée – Angleterre – XX<sup>e</sup> siècle – paradigmes concernant la mort – Église d'Angleterre – spiritualisme

## SAMENVATTING

**David NASH, *Onderhandelen in een 'markt van troost': vrijdenkers confronteren nieuwe paradigma's rond sterven en dood in Engeland tijdens de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw***

De vrijzinnige doodsbeleving had een duidelijke plaats verworven in de Engelse samenleving op het einde van de 19<sup>e</sup> eeuw. Vrijdenkers waren in staat om hun eigen uitvaartceremonies vorm te geven, maar van een seculier 'beloofd land' met wijdverspreide niet-religieuze ideeën en praktijken rond de dood was tijdens de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw geen sprake. Christelijke en niet-rationele manieren van omgang met de dood en het hiernamaals werden met aangepaste boodschappen actief in een 'markt van troost', waarbij werd gehoopt op een zo groot mogelijk publiek. Engelse vrijdenkers dienden zich aan deze nieuwe context aan te passen en tegen het einde van de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw hadden ook zij de voordelen van deze 'marktplaats' ondervonden. De rationalistische boodschappen in burgerlijke begrafenissen werden teruggeschroefd in functie van een flexibel aanbod van troost en voldoening voor de nabestaanden.

Vrijzinnigheid – Engeland – 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw – paradigma's rond de dood – Kerk van Engeland – spiritualisme