

# Freethinker

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## 'PUNDITS', MINI-SKIRTS AND THE VATICAN

AS MANY of those journalists and television personalities, nowadays liable to be referred to collectively as 'pundits', are over-prone to pointing out, we are living in a permissive society. The young have more money than ever before. They have more freedom than ever before. They shout louder than ever before. And so on. Most 'pundits' have written or said something along these lines in recent months. The more liberal of them, a preponderance of whom is found on television and in the serious dailies, give the appearance of approval, but they tend to have minor reservations and one ends up with the impression that despite their sideburns their enthusiasm is only skin deep, restricted by a deep-seated jealousy and consciousness of their years.

The reactionary 'pundits', who are generally found in the gutter press though they creep into a sizeable segment of the quality daily press as well, express the disapproval, which generally belies galloping bewilderment. Some of these men are not as journalistically nonplussed as others. They do make valid points and serve to show up the inevitable but understandable weaknesses of "modern youth". Others—and despite an effort I cannot erase the names of two Sunday papers from my mind—are men, whom one imagines nervously rub a shiny terylene knee with one hand, pat the flap of greying hair which is doing double duty with the other and gasp for water each time drugs, students, long hair, premarital intercourse or any of the other things which they associate with the offspring of their contemporaries, are brought to their attention.

One thing is certain, and becomes more and more certain as each yawn is provoked by another pundit either spluttering over, or attempting to explain, youth, namely that not only are the young big business, as the gravity with which businessmen refer to the "teenage market" bears out, but they are also influential. Why else should so much middle-aged verbiage be devoted to them? It is the verbiage of the men who are often described as "the opinion-formers". Rapidly however, their sphere of influence is being reduced because the young no longer pay heed to them, nor afford them the respect that in the past would have been their due. They fear the increased influence of the young. Paris, General de Gaulle and the devaluation of the franc are just across the channel. And this fear manifests itself in reams of either "Stick them in the army" hysteria, or "The Beatles—Four boys who changed a generation" attempts to answer the question "Why?".

What the establishment pundits fail to realise is that any attempt to regress youthful trends will either have no effect or push the trend a stage further, unless it comes from someone, whose concern for the improvement of the world is genuine and revolutionary—though not necessarily militant. Hence the legend of Che Guevara, the idolisation of Herbert Marcuse, and the canonisation of Tariq Ali, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and Rudi Dutschke. No person, who is not of the frame of mind of these men can hope to effect anything but a further drift away from the establishment. And perhaps the most powerless people of all are churchmen.

One wonders therefore whether the Vatican's recently announced ban on mini-skirts, or more correctly female



knees, can be in any way an attempt to arrest permissiveness. Mini-skirts perhaps more than anything symbolise modern youth. Long hair is normally worn only by students or the middle classes. Mini-skirts are worn by virtually all females under thirty, regardless, even it seems, of the circumference of their thighs. The Vatican's motive could be put down to a divine revelation that God does not want to rest his eyes on female thighs, or, ironically, one suspects Freud would assert that a priest seeing a girl in a mini-skirt would feel his potency threatened. Whatever the motive, it would appear at first glance to reveal a quite unbelievable lack of know-how in the field of public relations. At a time when the Roman church's power is rapidly ebbing, can they really hope to gain by, suddenly, on a Sunday afternoon, causing a number of young ladies to either borrow their male companion's trousers, or else unpick their hems.

Or could it be that the Vatican has developed a greater insight than the average British 'pundit' and simply given up trying to influence a generation with which it is only too evident it has nothing in common?



# Freethinker

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The views expressed by the contributors to FREETHINKER are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

## AGITATORS

THE ULSTER PROBLEM has reached a point, at which though violence and insurrection could begin again at any moment, there is little to be done but await developments. The question has been given so much attention in the press and on television that it has become both boring and hard to say anything original.

The British government have done what was expected of them, save for their inadequate treatment of the 'B' Specials. This force, which on account of its now well-known sectarian bias and predilection for violence is a major cause of unrest, has it seems through the Orange Lodges such a hold on the Unionist government at Stormont that the British are rendered relatively powerless to restrain it. For if the British government were to do what justice demands, namely to disband the 'B' Specials, the Unionist government would likely fall and this would present Whitehall with the constitutional problem which hitherto they have skilfully avoided.

On August 27, Mr Enoch Powell made a speech in which he condemned both foreigners and professional agitators for the trouble in Northern Ireland. He went on to outline what he considers to be a new technique employed by agitators to disrupt the establishment in many parts of the world. Briefly Powell thinks the following strategy is used. A small group of people initiate violence for no reason. Public attention is drawn to the venue they have chosen, and asks what is the cause of the trouble. Grievances are found to exist and the blame for the violence is aimed at the establishment. That this represents no argument is seen

## COMING EVENTS

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. Cronan and McRae.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.: Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.: Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. Mosley.

### INDOOR

London Young Humanists: 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8: Sunday, September 7, 7 p.m.: "Censorship or Editorial Responsibility?", Roger Derry.

Chelmsford Humanist Group: Public Library, Chelmsford: Tuesday, September 9, 7.30 p.m.: "Our Sun God—A discussion of Christian Origins", Dick Condon.

by anyone who notes Powell's admission that grievances are found to exist. Can Powell or anyone else contend that the position of the Roman Catholics in Ulster, and particularly in Londonderry, is not insufferable. The blame lies indeed with the establishment, both at Stormont and at Westminster, and with us all for not recognising the problem before. We have created the tragic situation where blood has to be shed before our government will redress a grievance, which they readily admit is genuine. If, as Powell maintains with his characteristic lack of evidence, it requires political agitators to bring this about, then one can only thank them and wish them well, and if they happen to be foreign, then we can only press for a more liberal Home Office attitude towards visiting political activists.

## SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE IN FREETHOUGHT

GREGORY S. SMELTERS

SINCE THE FREETHINKER claims to be 'The Humanist World Weekly', and humanism with freethought is the scientific alternative to religion, then one would presume that publishing scientific definitions of Christian mythology is one THE FREETHINKER'S basic editorial aims. However, it is annoying that many contributors do not use a scientific approach, but stubbornly cling to medieval theological jargon about 'God' in Christianity.

Let us clear up the semantics of the term 'god'. It is a generic term, never a proper name. Its definition is, "a member of the highest rank of mythical beings". Ghosts and fairies may be classed as the lowest rank. Thus, atheism as a denial of the existence of all gods is as much a truism as *a-fairyism* (a denial of all fairies) would be. Writing a mythical generic term with a *capital* initial does not make any difference—a referent to the term will still be missing. This is scientific common sense.

Now, the proper semantic usage of 'god' is, as with all other generic names, either with the indefinite article, "a god" ("a God" is an eminently muddle-headed Anglo-Saxon usage), or with the definite article "the god", as in the Hebrew and Greek Bible, for a well-known West Semitic god in question, whose proper name was "Yahweh" (Jehovah), but which name has since been under a superstitious taboo and everywhere (except in "Hallelu-Yah!") is substituted by "the Lord". This, however, did not stop people in the first centuries widely using it in magical incantations such as "Yaho".

A scientific definition of Christianity is, then, as follows: Christianity is the worship of a West Semitic god, Yahweh, of his breath-soul (Hebrew "ruah"; Holy Ghost), and of his incarnation/son/word/ anointed prophet, Yehoshuah, which means "Yahweh saves". The composite, *contradictory* qualifications of the name "Yehoshuah" (Jesus) logically exclude any possibility that a human referent to the name "Jesus" could have lived in reality. This is logical common sense. It would be absurd to look for any historical evidence about such a mythical monster. This "Jesus myth" theory is really a truism, and "the historical Jesus" is rightly denounced as a "creation of phantasy, the arbitrary invention of the unbeliever" by the Rev. N. Micklem, D.D. (*The Christian Faith*, p.180).

But what about the tri-unity dogma? This was mainly based on a sure forgery (Matthew 28:19) where a ghost

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# 'IS GOD OUT THERE?'

F. H. SNOW

THIS TITLE, in huge letters, stared at me when I opened my Sunday newspaper on the morning when spaceship Apollo 11 was preparing for its touchdown on the Moon. The writer of the article under that heading, the Rev Denis Duncan, editor of the *British Weekly*, told his readers that millions of people would be asking the question framed in its title, over the weekend. Not that they thought it at all feasible that the astronauts would find God in the Moon's vicinity, or anywhere within vision, but considered that, as man went from one planetary expedition to another, as an inevitable process, a confrontation between God and humans was certain.

The reverend author went on to say that belief in a literal God is still widely held, despite the fact that many theologians have abandoned that belief. I have hammered at this in numerous articles, alive to the realisation that, if the voice of scepticism is virtually muted through a complacently unatheistic outlook by organised secularism, this fundamental tenet is assured greater longevity.

The clerical writer of "Is God out there?" was at pains to state that God is not out there. He asserted that the sovereign creator of man and the universe is not to be discovered in space, because he is not a person. We could have told him that he is undiscoverable because he is nothing, but our cleric's view was that he is something—a something in our very midst, inhabiting happy humans; a Mind, working everywhere amongst us, and through all manner of mediums. He is known by those ultra-modern Christians who have got rid of a personal God but cannot relinquish belief in a god of some sort, as Ultimate Reality. I confess that I am unable to comprehend how a sheer intangibility—a less than shadow of a shadow—can be a reality, however ultimate. If, in the logic of Mr Duncan and his life, God's impersonality renders him undetectable in space, how can it afford any ground for detectability elsewhere? The pulpiter responsible for the literary peurility that prompted this article, concluded it by triumphantly stating: "You don't have to leave Earth to find God. *He's right here.*"

Was his assumption of God's terrestrial presence intended to convey that he is identifiable on this globe? Was it meant to imply that our five senses can affirm that he is amongst us? They aren't expected to, it appears. We have simply to accept Mr Duncan's assurance that if we love our fellowmen, we love God, and see him in them. He is visible as love and through love throughout the world. We see him in a kindly smile; others see him in ours. If our fellow men love us, God is visible in us to them. Every one of us is God, when we reflect his goodness, his love, his benevolence. Everything that's observable as love and goodness, is God, and evidence of him.

There we have it. We don't have to go speeding among the planets, looking for a Father Christmassy chap. God's right on our doorstep, without beard, body or semblance of his traditional self—as completely invident a deity as the old gentleman, but still God, in spite of those damned atheists. The snag is that, having done away with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and who knows else, Mr Duncan and those who think like him have no heaven to go to when life's labours are over. What will they do for a blissful hereafter? According to Dr John Robinson, the ex-Bishop of Woolwich, who was the first eminent ecclesiast to convert God into an abstraction, Heaven is the heavenly feel-

ing ecstatic believers experience, continued eternally. The Ultimate Realists will unfortunately have no fixed abode in the life to come, but at least will be exempt from *post mortem* oblivion.

I find it hard to credit ecstatic feelings to believers in a formless, homeless insensibility. Fundamentalists have far stronger ground for experiencing spiritual transports. In their blind belief, they have a real being to worship, a real Almighty to pray to, a certified heaven to dwell in for eternity. They can't afford to lose their literal God. The faith of millions upon millions of Roman Catholics, Jews, Moslems and Free Church Protestants, in the reality of an omnipotent Lord, is tremendously tenacious, and, along with Mr Duncan's love-deists, presents a pretty kettle of fish for secularism's culinary expertise.

What right, I ask, has Mr Duncan to the adjective 'reverend', as he no longer preaches what he was ordained to preach? He presumably wears the dog-collar and other insignia of a priest of the Divine One who, on the testimony of Holy Writ, walked in Eden's garden, and demonstrated his reality to Adam, Cain, Enoch, Moses and other scriptural characters. In honesty, he should unfrock himself, and cease to prefix to his name a word apt only for genuine Christian ministers.

"Is God out there?" Man may set foot on Mars, Venus or even more distant stars, without fear of confronting him, but belief in his celestial reality will hag-ride humanity far into the future, and deified abstractions will befog the mentalities of self-styled intellectuals, if secularism's concern with social reforms involves the virtual abandonment of its time-honoured atheism. We live in changing times, but let us beware of changing so radically as to make our movement a toothless caricature of its former self, unable to effectively combat superstition, and realise, in the foreseeable future, its ideal of a rational and humanitarian society.

## A DAY IN SUSSEX

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21st, 1969

### LEWES

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## HUMANISM: WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT

G. L. SIMONS

THE POSITIVE STRENGTHS in a philosophy such as humanism scarcely need to be spelt out in an organ such as the FREETHINKER. The basic terms of reference of humanism are sound and little needs to be said about them. For me, the best humanism embodies a profound concern for people and it operates in a purely secular framework. The *secular orientation* and the *concern* seem to me to be all that are necessary, as premises, for an adequate social philosophy. But it seems to me also that there are serious defects in humanism as it is usually represented and that these defects make it a shadow of what it *could* be, if rightly viewed. I offer the following criticisms as one who would wish to see humanism develop and not disappear. I hope that the points I raise may encourage discussion in the FREETHINKER columns and possibly elsewhere.

In the first place the humanist outlook seems incredibly narrow. The concern of the humanist is focused on particular topics such as religious instruction and divorce law reform; other social aspects, which affect people's lives just as much, are scarcely mentioned in humanist literature. I refer to economic exploitation, unemployment, racialism, etc. I am not claiming that these aspects are *never* discussed by humanists, only that they do not receive a coverage proportionate to their importance.

It may be that many of the things I would wish to see occupying the attention of humanists are strictly *political* and perhaps this is outside the scope of humanism. But a humanism so conceived can scarcely pose as a *comprehensive* social philosophy. If humanism is obliged to ignore the profoundly *political* issues of modern society (or at least to play down these issues) then what is its role to be? Is humanism to be no more than a secular charity with only half-a-dozen interests? Is it to say nothing about the role of the police, the financing of National Health Service, the approach to egalitarianism, the relationship of university and state, the nature of democracy, the place of authority, etc., etc.?

What I am suggesting is that humanism develop a political depth—not in the petty party political sense (which is only a bit of politics), but in a profounder sense that has relevance to questions of political philosophy. What form of social organisation best suits human requirements? What types of social institutions should we try to erect? How should they be governed? To whom should they be answerable? When wealth is generated in society how should it be used? Who should decide? Should we encourage individual financial incentive or a more social co-operative motivation? How should we educate our children? For citizenship or individuality? Where is the line to be drawn? And so on and so forth . . . I suggest that all these questions are important, that they come within the terms of reference of a secular philosophy which purports to be relevant to man in society, but that they are not being studied in depth by humanists.

Look for example at Kit Mouat's delightful little book *What Humanism is About*. About nine of the chapters deal with aspects of social morality; of these, *six* deal with what may be termed 'sexual morality'; one is on 'national ethics', one on 'international ethics'. In the whole book—which seems to me to give a fair picture of modern secular humanism—there is little or nothing about racialism, unemployment, social services, war, exploitation, democracy, distribution of wealth, etc. The humanism that emerges is one

based largely on concern over chastity, marriage, abortion, homosexuality, and the status of women. These are all vital topics, but they are no more vital than many that do not even get a mention. Again the question must be asked—what is humanism supposed to be? If it is supposed to be a secular philosophy designed to give man guidance in the problems he faces in society then it is totally inadequate: on some problems it has much to say, on others nothing. If, on the other hand, humanism is supposed to be nothing more than an enlightened pressure group directed at particular social aspects such as RI and abortion law reform then it is much more impressive. Who can deny that it has already had a significant effect in legislation on homosexuality, abortion, divorce? Who can deny its growing impact on the whole question of religious instruction?

The reasons for humanism's relative narrowness can easily be found in history. It was born in an anti-clerical intellectualism which focused on such questions as family planning, the need for MPs to take a religious oath, and the general persecution of the unbeliever. But today many of the old battles have been won; some have not and are still being fought. And with others—of great importance—humanists have not yet entered the fray.

The 'political' narrowness of humanism can be seen in its attitude to charity. In any civilised society there should be a movement *away from* charity. Charity is only an admission that the social provisions for a society's needy are lacking. In a civilised society resources would be allocated to eliminate the need for charity; the provision of *charitable* institutions is a measure of society's social failure. And yet the humanist is as keen as the Christian to support charities which in the past have arisen to aid the victims of economic exploitation. If, as is true in modern Britain, a man may be worth ten million pounds and old age pensioners die of cold because they cannot afford fuel, the answer to me does not lie in newspaper advertisements appealing to well-wishers to give the old people a charitable handout. The answer, to me is a form of social organisation which does not so disproportionately distribute its resources. Charities in fact—which are almost always totally inadequate—sometimes even serve to disguise the fact that drastic social reform is needed. Doubtless this is why a number of wealthy individuals thriving on the *status quo* rush to give their crumbs to the crippled and the destitute.

Another sign of the narrowness of humanism is its largely middle class orientation. The sheer intellectualism of much humanist writing necessarily debars it from the interest of poorly educated members of society. And in any case the problems of the lowly paid tend to focus on such questions as how to acquire housing, how to gain secure employment, and even—in some cases—how to afford food for their children. The middle classes are removed from these difficulties by income and tradition, and a philosophy that is solely based on such writers as Flew, Huxley, Russell, Hawton, Baroness Wootton, Blackham, etc., generally with a university background and no industrial experience, is unlikely to achieve a mass impact on society in a whole range of important fields.

Humanism has great potential but it will not realise it unless it becomes deeper politically and wider socially. Perhaps humanism needs a Marx, a Darwin, or a Freud.



Perhaps, alternatively, this is the wrong approach. Perhaps humanism should draw on the great innovators in different fields and provide a fine and durable amalgam. Compared with various religious and political traditions humanism is culturally and socially impoverished. To a degree this is because it is youthful: time may generate the richness that

should accompany a worthwhile philosophy. But I see few signs that this is being done today in a *uniquely humanist* way. But again—perhaps all non-religious art and non-religious sociology and political philosophy are part of humanism. What is humanism? What is its scope? Where is it going?

## THE MEANING OF MEANING

PETER CROMMELIN

THE COMPILERS of dictionaries have set themselves a hard task, however much it may be a labour of love. They set themselves the impossible task of defining the indefinable. The dictionary definition of the meaning of meaning as "what is meant" is only useful as an example of tautology. However most dictionaries seem to agree that meaning is concerned with the significance of signs, especially the verbal signs that make words. Words both spoken and written provide the dialectical materials of common human intercourse.

Until man learned to talk, it must have been impossible even to begin the long voyage of exploration into the meaning of the world that has occupied the mind of man ever since the first words were uttered. There must have been human speech long before there was any writing. The written word comes as a much later extension of the spoken word and involves the addition of much more complicated visible signs to the audible sounds of speech as a means of intercourse. The infinite variety of literature is derived from the infinite number of ways in which written words can be combined to give information, to tell a story or simply to evoke sentiments that would not otherwise be felt.

A word to be a word must have a meaning. The word and its meaning are totally indivisible. A word may have several meanings but must have at least one to be included in a dictionary. When a word has many meanings, the one intended by the writer can normally be derived from the context in which it is used. A particular combination of words may result in a statement that seems to falsify the known facts and for this reason appears to be a false or misleading statement. Some statements seem to contradict themselves, and must for this reason be condemned as logically meaningless. The statement that God is good but permits evil is one that seems to render itself meaningless through self-contradiction. Logic demands that if God exists there is no evil, and if there is evil there is no God.

A theological book that is very much concerned with the meaning of meaning is a recently published Pelican paper-back edition of *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* by Paul van Buren. The author is Professor of Religious Thought at Temple University, Philadelphia. A professional theologian, he is also a professional minister of religion as a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church. As a man who by his professional ability is able to support a wife and four children, Dr van Buren has every right to claim as he does on the cover of his book, that he is a "secular man". For so long as religions and "churches" are kept going by professional ministries, they must be accepted as a secular factor in the making of the ordinary familiar world of human experience. They must also be judged by the purely secular consideration whether they really earn their living in this world without any reference to that so dubious "other world".

Most certainly a real thorough-going secular humanist would be happy to foresee the total extinction of all the

religions of mankind. We would not want this extinction to be brought about by any violent persecution of religion, but only through the gradual loss of faith in the minds and hearts of the faithful, followed by the replacement of theological belief by a more rational and more humane secular humanism. Communism is not a religion, but anti-communism infects all forms of "Christianity" and thereby helps to create that militant opposition to "communism" that does so much to prevent communism from emerging as universal humanism. Certainly in the "Free World", religion and politics have sunk to a very low level as an expression of human conscience. The religious "I believe" is no more trustworthy than the political "I believe". The Anglican bishop Robinson's book, *Honest to God*, does not seem to have made the Church of England visibly more honest than it was before.

According to the meaning of meaning, a book is a book, and regarded simply as a book, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* is not a bad book. It is hard reading but not entirely unrewarding to the intellect. It has been called a theological thriller, and it is no doubt more worthy of serious study than the average "thriller". The linguistic analysis of theological and gospel concepts can provide the same kind of intellectual entertainment as that provided by some of the academic studies of Professor A. J. Ayer. It is a kind of game with words. If the author can remain entirely incomprehensible he may claim to have won the game, while if the reader is able to understand all or most of what he reads, he can claim to be on terms of equality with the author. He might even feel able to go one better and make confusion even more confounded.

Yet the game of linguistic analysis will never enable an observer to detect the difference between the fact and fiction. The more plausible the tale, the more it will stand up to any amount of linguistic analysis, but it will not become any more true in the process. It is impossible merely by reading the gospels to tell whether we are reading history or mythology. History and mythology have this in common that they both refer to an unobservable past. The past is dead and gone and can never be restored to life. The only point of reading either history or mythology is that it may bring information, interest, or inspiration to those who are now living. That is the point of the book which the author has called *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*. Reading the gospel in the second half of the twentieth century, is not the same human experience that it would have been if we had been able to read it when it was first written. And we have every reason to believe that even before the gospels were written, the stories and the folk-lore that are the foundation of religious belief for Christian people were being carried about by word of mouth. Even one who has totally rejected all the dogmas of Christianity, both catholic and protestant may feel disposed to agree that the New Testament is a good book to

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read but not a good foundation for the entire moral conduct of life. Yet I must confess that there are times when I feel that it would be best for mankind if the Holy Bible could be sunk into oblivion for at least a thousand years. If I were a cast-away on that desert island where there is a gramophone with records plus a Bible and Shakespeare, I would without any hesitation cast the Bible into the sea. The desert island would be for me a symbol of complete emancipation from all cant, hypocrisy and humbug for which the Bible has become the main foundation.

By reading *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* as a duty to the secular cause, I was induced to re-open the pages of a much greater book, first published more than a century ago. The faith that inspired Ernest Renan to write his celebrated *Life of Jesus*, was the kind of faith that inspires a poet to write and an artist to paint. Renan was indeed a very great artist in the French language, out of which language he did paint an unforgettable portrait of the man Jesus. The work of Renan is no more historical than the gospels from which much of its information is derived. But Renan paints the portrait of a living man without that mask of divinity imposed by ecclesiastical Christianity upon its legendary founder. Renan's portrait is that of a great teacher who arouses a boundless enthusiasm in his disciples, while it is only after they have lost their master for ever through death that they come to realise the eternal significance of his mind and teaching. Renan's *Life of Jesus* remains a unique and incomparable work of art. The best thing I can say about the work of Paul van Buren is that it does not contradict Renan or make the latter seem any less important in the Thinker's Library.

Yet it must be acknowledged that the times are not congenial to a rational pursuit of Biblical studies. Human civilisation has got itself into what might well be called "the hell of a muddle". The danger of world conflict threatens humanity with complete extinction, total annihilation. At such a time it seems a waste of time to devote the mind or the will to the study of ancient history or mythology. It is often too difficult to decide which is which, but anyhow they seem very remote from present day needs or anxieties.

No rationalist feels compelled to accept the gospel narrative as a kind of "historical" proof that God lives or that miracles happen. No secular interpretation of the Christian gospel can achieve *The Rights of Man*. No secular interpretation of the Christian Gospel will achieve those human qualities that are necessary to the completion of the Humanist Revolution. If we want to be kind to the Christians the most that we can say is that some of the moral sentiments they attribute to their Lord do find an echo even in the heart of an atheist.

#### FREETHINKER FUND

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## BOOK REVIEW

OSWELL BLAKESTON

KUT: THE DEATH OF AN ARMY, Ronald Millar (Secker and Warburg, 63s).

ONE OF THE revelations of our time is the disclosure of the State as major criminal, the unrepentant merchant of death in the armaments racket, the enemy of personal liberties as in Greece or Hitler's Germany. Yet we still cling to the illusion that many servants of the State are respectable, and we afford a special deference to "dear old colonels with twinkling eyes". Read then Ronald Millar's *Kut: The Death of An Army*, for not only is a soldier a mass murderer by profession but he is often a criminally irreligious bungler at his trade.

Mr Millar tells us how the top brass plunged into the Mesopotamia business without any planning and threw away the lives of 30,000 men between December 1915 and April 1916. The original idea was mainly a pretty sordid concern to protect oil interests; and an expedition was sent to Basra in the hope that a victory there would encourage the Arabs to rise and throw off the oppression of their Turkish masters. There were, in fact, early successes; but the troops were in no condition for a prolonged overseas campaign. All military equipment was in short supply, the climate was extremely unhealthy, and there was not one hospital ship available for "a minor theatre of war". Oh well, there was nothing to be lost but lives, so why not tell the gallant chaps to march on and have a crack at capturing Bagdad?

Again and again tired men were ordered to move forward without cover in broad daylight to deliver a frontal attack against a strongly entrenched foe. The commanding officers would be surprised to see the men meet "a solid sheet of lead" and hear enemy rifles crackling like a thousand whips lashing soldiers down. Of course the generals and colonels never forgot their respectable manners, and they were always sending one another telegrams of congratulations about such "heroic stands". Then the men might be lice-ridden, dying of starvation and plague, screaming in pain; but the gentlemanly thing was to say in despatches that the general condition was "satisfactory".

After all, ships were coming up behind the lines with wooden packing cases of all shapes and sizes to be used as fuel to give the troops a hot meal. Sure, it's in the records, even if one can scarcely believe that even the military with their supreme powers of non-planning could have firewood sent all the way from India without first chopping up the empty cases to save cargo space. Carry on, gentlemen, and sit back and wait for applause from His Majesty in Buckingham Palace. Here it comes: "May God bless you and all your undertakings". A pity that an orderly who transcribed the message on a rusty typewriter wrote "undertakers".

Inevitably some of the younger officers had still to learn all the rules. One actually fired a shell at the enemy commander. Gad, sir, a gentleman doesn't shoot at Fieldmarshal von der Goltz, "one of the world's foremost military strategists", a fully paid-up member of the murderers' club. The young officer was instantly "severely reprimanded" by his superiors and was lucky to escape court martial.

But you must read Mr Millar to find out how Sir Charles Townshend became besieged in Kut. It is Mr Millar's story and he tells it brilliantly so that the non-expert can follow each move as clearly as if he were watching a news-reel of disaster. The author introduces touches of appallingly vivid description (the flies covering corpses so that they seemed to be wearing chain mail), and moments of near comedy (the officer who felt naked without a dog when his wise pup ran from shell fire), but in all the extraordinary pages, assembled with an incredible labour of research, Mr Millar keeps a cool appraisal which gives full point to every detail of the bloody homicidal muddle.

Townshend certainly had to suffer himself—anything dished up in the mess from dogs to grass—during the ghastly siege. That was some excuse; and perhaps Townshend could justify his motto that "hostile bullets make better supervisors than sergeants"; but how, in the name of his god, could he justify to himself the fact that, at the drop of a medal, he was prepared to propose the eviction of the civil population from Kut, a death and torture sentence, or to suggest a plan for fighting his way out and leaving his wounded to the mayhem of the Turks? And yet Townshend was a man who had reached the top of his "respectable profession". In comparison with his ruthlessness it seems a minor matter that he simply forgot that the Indian soldiers under his command would not eat horse-flesh and would rather perish of scurvy. If the mirages of Mesopotamia bedevilled marksmanship, what of the



mirage of the officer as an honourable and knowledgeable leader of men?

Finally, although attacks which failed could be readily enhanced with palliatives such as "heroic", Whitehall panicked when Townshend had to surrender. Kitchener suggested that an attempt be made to buy off the enemy with a disgraceful bribe of pieces of silver. The bribe was accepted but it didn't save the garrison from further mutilation and annihilation. Rebel members of Parliament actually demanded a report, one which has been described as "the most distressing document ever submitted to Parliament". Yet the document did not stop Townshend being awarded the KCB in 1917, or from becoming an MP himself in 1920.

So freethinkers must pluck up courage. We must not be afraid to say that the "beloved old colonels" are really something else, mass murderers. Mr Millar has found the courage to write his objective book, and like every truthful history of war it is an accusation; and we also must accuse, however cosy it is to condone.

(Continued from page 282)

speaks in Greek of a "trinitarian" baptismal formula. There is no triunity in the Gospels, only an ordinary triad of mythical Jewish *elohim* ("mighty ones", not "gods"). The father Yahweh, his own travelling breath-soul (the Holy Ghost) and his son, "Jesus", came down to save Jews. We must, of course, dismiss "the systematical insanity" (J. M. Robertson's apt term in his *Short History of Christianity*) which developed around these *elohim* in Christian theology<sup>2</sup>.

It is also downright stupid and self-stultifying for freethought writers to stick to medieval jargon about "God" or "the Lord God" (in Hebrew "the mighty Yahweh"). Nowadays, we must exclusively adopt the scientific language of biblical anthropologists and orientologists: "the West Semitic god Yahweh"<sup>3</sup>, "Yahweh's breath-soul", "Yahweh's incarnation, etc., Yehoshuah". This will greatly facilitate humanist spade-work in burying the discredited Christianity.

This scientific language of applied semantics is no yet learnt or assimilated by present-day philosophers treating of atheism. They are still hopelessly muddled-up with the medieval jargon about "God", and therefore they can't refute "theism" conclusively. A good example of this muddled state is Prof. P. Edwards' article on "Atheism" in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. He writes: "A philosophical sophisticated atheist would begin by distinguishing three types of belief in God) what we have called the metaphysical God, the infinite anthropomorphic God, and the finite anthropomorphic God. He will then claim that he can give grounds for rejecting all three, although he does not claim that he can prove all of them to be false."

For a semantically informed freethinker it is most easy to prove all these three types of 'god' as false, that is, as mere names without referents. In semantics, any name or phrase whose sense is self-contradictory does not have a referent in the world, and using such a name as if it had one, produces a logically false argument, such as that of theologians. Such a self-contradictory phrase is "infinite anthropomorphic god". Also a self-contradictory phrase is "metaphysical ('not in space time', that is 'existing nowhere never') god". The "finite anthropomorphic god" is, of course, any of the gods in national mythologies, such as the West Semitic god Yahweh of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim mythology.

Since this scientific language approach is the only one that definitely disposes of all religious names, which lack referents, as delusions, theologians avoid discussing semantics and its implications. (An exception is *God Talk* by Professor J. Macquarrie.) This is also a decisive reason for all freethinkers to press on with the semantical debunking

of Christian mythology as well as with the logical refutation of Christian dogmas, for example, exposing omniscience as cancelling omnipotence and all-goodness of Yahweh, since he (if he existed) could not make his *true* foreknowledge *false* afterwards by intervening in the inflexible order of the universe of which he is said to have true foreknowledge from all eternity. This argument alone makes all churches and priests superfluous and therefore must be emphasized.

In a desperate attempt to get out of mythology, Professor Macquarrie defines "God"—"in the sense of that wider Being *within* which *all* particular beings have their being" (p.99). But this "Being" is obviously the universe of matter, space, time, and nothing else: here theology ends in atheism.

To my surprise, I have noticed that the stupid and stubborn sticking to the medieval theological jargon about "God" is not yet abandoned even in the Soviet atheist literature (*Humanism, Atheism*, edited by I. Kichanova: Moscow 1968. See the Freethinker, February 2, 1968, p.39). So far, I have been the only freethought protagonist of an exact semantic language about classical atheism<sup>4</sup> versus the yahwistic mythology of Jews, Christians, and Moslems<sup>5</sup>—by exposing age old obscurantists mistranslations<sup>6</sup>.

Why are there no up to date users of scientific language among the contributors to THE FREETHINKER—in these very days of semantics,<sup>6</sup> logical analysis, and cybernetics on the one hand, and of thousands of Christians seminarists, priests and parsons all over the world already realising the falsehood of yahwism (monoyahwism, not monotheism) and abandoning "the great scandalous body, that infamous corporation they call the Church" (*Three cheers for the Paraclete*, p.213 by J. Kencaley—an Australian best-selling anti-clerical novel of 1968) on the other hand?

1. "It is the custom to use a capital 'G' for the God of the Jewish-Christian tradition, and a small letter for the others - *Yahweh* is usually translated into English as 'the Lord'. This is a personal proper name, a fact rather obscured by the usual translation." ("God" in J. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1963 edition).

"The God of Jesus and of his followers is indeed Yahweh of Mosses and of Israel." (*Hebrew Religion*, p.417, by Oesterley, D.D. and Robinson, D.D.)

2. For some contemporary exponents of the 'systematic insanity', see V. Mehta, *The New Theologian* (Pelican Books)

3. For the latest research on Yahweh and his background, see W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*.

4. "No Gods whatsoever exist" (Diagoras the Atheist). This correct definition is missing in the article on atheism in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, edited by P. Edwards, who also ignores the semantic facts that both "God" in Christianity is the God Yahweh and "one God beyond all gods" is a semantic fallacy in the new theology. Professor Edwards' contribution is thus worthless for freethinkers.

5. In Islam, "Allah" which is short '*al ilah*' and means 'the god' always refers to the god of Hebrew prophets and of Jesus, to the maker of Adam and Eve, that is, to the God Yahweh. The Syrian Christians, too, use 'allaha' - 'the god' - to refer to Yahweh, the common god of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This fact greatly facilitates and simplifies the conclusive debunking of these monoyahwistic religions.

6. Exposing the traditional English 'God' as a mistranslation of the Hebrew and Greek 'the God', I wrote in THE FREETHINKER of November 10, 1935 (*On using 'God'*): ". . . 'the God' implies that the term is used as a substitute for a particular god alluded to in a context. Applying this to the Christian Bible, 'the god' or 'God' simply stands for Yahweh." And in a letter of May 26, 1935, I introduced the new purely semantic attack on the traditional term 'immaterial' as being synonymous with 'existing nowhere-never at all', i.e. 'nothing at all', which term being thus a fallacy implied the destruction of the whole theology of 'immaterial nothings', and not only of the mythical Yahweh, his ghost, and his incarnation etc., but also Jesus.



## LETTERS

### Czechoslovakia

IN HIS article 'The Statue of Liberty' (August 9), F. H. Snow's comments on Czechoslovakia are fatuous to say the least. He states, "there was no invasion, as the Czechs understood it". When they awoke to find the tanks and troops from five other countries rolling through their streets, what does Mr Snow imagine they thought was going on? That the Warsaw Pact had come to tea?

"Had Russia followed up her troop movements with violence against peaceful citizens, she would have deserved international obloquy", Mr Snow pronounces. I seem to remember hearing something like this before; since there was no widespread fighting, and very few deaths, the invasion wasn't a *real* invasion, was it? Eh? Of course the whole thing was comparatively bloodless—because the Czechs did not resist. Does Mr Snow think that if they had, the Russians would politely enquire the time of the next train back to Moscow? Just as they did in Hungary perhaps?

Mr Snow tells us that he had "the impression that the great majority of Czechs viewed the display of Russian might . . . very differently from alien liberty lovers". Exactly *how* did they regard it Mr Snow? What were the stones, the swastikas drawn on tanks, and the arguments with the troops about? An esoteric East European welcoming ceremony maybe?

One does not have to be a fascist hyena or a crypto-capitalist-imperialist-lacky-stooge to have noticed that the occupation—sorry about the blunt word, Mr Snow—was carried out against the manifest wishes of the Czech population. Mr Snow can, of course, argue the invasion was justified in spite of this, but I don't really see how he can make out a case that it met with no opposition.

We are always hearing about America's dupes; if Mr Snow's comments on Czechoslovakia are anything to go by, the Soviet Union has its too.

MICHAEL CREGAN.

### Smoking and Alcohol

J. W. NIXON implies that other people are affected more by drinkers than by smokers, but I'm not so sure. I may move in sheltered circles, but when I have visitors, they have drinks, which affect me not one iota, but those who smoke make the house stink for two or three days. When I return home after attending a meeting of local professional people I have to change clothes and wash my hair because of the lingering stench of cigarette, cigar and pipe smoke.

The humanist ideal of maximum freedom for the individual is always tempered by the qualification that an individual's freedom should not hurt others. Smokers would do well to remember this.

I would guess there are more excessive smokers than excessive drinkers. And do not the widows and children of men who've died from lung cancer or bronchitis need as much sympathy as widows of alcoholics?

DEREK MARCUS.

### Free will

MR SIMONS writes (August 2) that if an act is motivated, it cannot be regarded as free. But every proposed act evokes pro and con motives, and the actor may be free to choose between them. We all act as though we are free to choose between various motives.

Mr Simons' definitions of general freedom are equally temperamental. He writes that the Communist Chinaman enjoys freedom to eat, whilst the capitalist worker may starve. Freedom, however, refers to and involves only choice. The Communist must look to one body only, the state, for permission to work and eat; whereas under capitalism the worker can generally choose between several employers or, alternatively, start his own business. Marks, of Marks Spencer, started with a street barrow. Our aim should be to increase the area of choice, not reduce it.

HENRY MEULEN.

### Blood transfusions for Jehovah's Witnesses

I AM RATHER PERTURBED at the virtual silence by the FREETHINKER and NSS about the indefensible practice of refusing blood transfusions to relatives on religious grounds, by Jehovah's Witnesses.

In my view this should be second only to Religious Instruction in the reforms that the NSS and BHA are campaigning for.

True, some of the more enlightened doctors would override the views of parents wishing to deny children transfusions, but it is still a matter of chance. I suggest that:

(1) No person under the age of 18 should be refused blood transfusions on religious grounds, under any circumstances.

(2) Those over 18 who wish to refuse blood transfusions should have an identification disc or a written form of refusal, to be carried at all times.

(3) No person, of whatever age, should be refused a transfusion at the whim of a second party, without the disc or written refusal.

Such a campaign and maybe a bill in parliament would, I feel, meet less opposition than our other reforms such as Sunday Entertainments, Euthanasia, since the Jehovah's Witnesses are a relatively small group.

MICHAEL HUGHES.

PLEASE THINK AGAIN, Mr Nixon. Your letter criticising the FREETHINKER for an article on smoking is very poorly argued.

Contrary to your statement, smoking is by no means irritant only to the smoker. Have you never travelled on the upper deck of a bus or shared a railway compartment with a pipe-smoker? Yes, you can use the lower deck, or a no-smoking compartment—when you can find room. Most people, it seems, have the same idea.

Smoke and drink cannot be compared when talking about them as "evils" as you do. There is no evidence that smoking is beneficial in any way, apart from a doubtful argument that it helps the nerves, disorders of which it probably causes anyway. But most alcoholic drinks, especially in the beer category, are not only pleasant, but also nutritious and beneficial to the health, especially the digestion. In order to function properly the human body requires a substantial liquid intake every day, and why should this be restricted by prohibitive attitudes like those of Mr Nixon, to water, "soft drinks" and tea. And have you examined the interior of your teapot lately, Mr Nixon?

Guinness is frequently included in a remedial diet in hospitals. Even spirits have, in moderation, some small beneficial properties, but it is true that on the whole, these concentrated doses can have damaging effects on the stomach, bladder and liver.

Without going into fire damage, and I have in my possession an official statistic which cites smoking as the fourth major cause of fire in Britain last year, the habit causes just as many accidents as drink. Drivers who light cigarettes while approaching road junctions, on motorways, and so on, drivers who breath smoke too deeply and develop an uncontrollable cough in traffic, or get smoke in the eyes, all cause road accidents. Not to mention the driver who drops his lighted cigarette in the car while driving, or who throws his smouldering butt through the window into a pram, shopping bag, or oil patch and so on. And it is quite possible to be "under the influence" of excessive smoking.

Where drink is concerned, it is outdated and irrational licensing laws which cause the greater part of alcoholic trouble. Conscious of "closing time" a person is liable to drink more in the time available than if he could walk in any time of the day for one or two drinks as he feels need for, as one does abroad.

Attitudes of prohibition and the "evils" of drinking, smoking and drug-taking will not help at all, they will merely make matters worse.

ERIC WILLOUGHBY.

### Sir Joseph Hooker

IN YOUR RECENT and very excellent leading article on cremation you stated "As early as 1910 the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey ruled that the remains of Sir Joseph Hooker should be cremated before interment in the Abbey".

If this is correct, the clergy in question were being rather tactless as the great botanist did not die until December 10, 1911. In accordance with his express wishes Sir Joseph was buried on December 17 in his family's grave in the churchyard of St Anne's, Kew Green. The Dean of Westminster did in fact offer interment in the Abbey, but this was declined as being against the deceased's wishes, and Hooker is commemorated at Westminster only by a profile medallion in marble by Frank Bouchier, situated in the north aisle of the nave near the Darwin memorial. Sir Joseph was a close friend of Darwin's and gave him a great deal of help with his botanical work and the publication of *The Origin of Species*.

NIGEL H. SINNOTT.

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