

Book Reviews

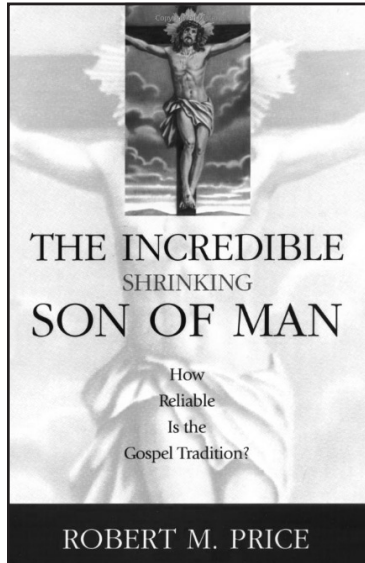
BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW

Readers' contributions help make Humanist Perspectives a vibrant, dynamic magazine.

We encourage readers to request a book or books for a short review of up to 500 words. Let the Humanist community know about new books they would find interesting. We are open to suggestions of other recently published books as well. Contact the Book Review Editor at BookReviews@HumanistPerspectives.org.

THE BLACK BOOK OF CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY, Yves Engler, Fernwood Publishing 2009. *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* is the first critical overview of Canada's role on the world stage. While most Canadians believe their country's primary role has been as peacekeeper or honest broker in difficult-to-solve disputes, the book cites hundreds of examples of colonialism, racism, naked self-interest and willing participation as a policeman for the British and then American empires.

ODYSSEY OF A PRACTICAL VISIONARY, Belden Paulson, Thistlefield Books 2009. A memoir that provides reflections on many of today's most difficult problems and issues, including refugee resettlement, ineffective U.S. educational systems, natural resource depletion, racial unrest and poverty. The book also relates the author's experiences with voodoo in South America, being labeled a CIA spy, living in a communist village during the Cold War, dealing with racial issues in the 1960s, helping to create an ecology-minded community in East Central Wisconsin, and his involvement with the founding of the Peace Corps. The author describes his dedication and perseverance in overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges to help pave the way to a better world.



William Harwood reviews:

The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable is the Gospel Tradition?
Robert M. Price
Prometheus Books, 2003,
ISBN 978-1591021216 ,
389 pages

In *Deconstructing Jesus*, Robert Price concluded, on the basis of what might be termed a preponderance of the evidence, that Jesus of Galilee was not a real person from history. In *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, he does not withdraw that conclusion, but I get the impression that he now sees it as “too close to call.” The point on which both proponents and opponents of a historical Jesus converge is that the virgin-born savior-god Jesus, whose repeated violations of the laws of reality

culminated in his rising from the dead, assuredly did not exist.

Price's treatment of miracle tales is likewise more consistent with Jesus being a real person than a purely mythical entity. He writes that, (p. 151), “The strongest argument in favor of Jesus actually being a faith healer is that virtually all the ailments he is said to have cured have a place on the list of psychogenic maladies or somatization disorders in today's diagnostic manuals.” And (p. 155), “earlier New Testament statements that Jesus did no miracles,” imply the existence of a real Jesus, no more capable of impossibilities than Oral Roberts.

In explaining the gospel descriptions of Jesus as “the Nazarene” (Mark 1:24 and elsewhere) and “*the Nazorean*” (Mat 26:71 and elsewhere), Price sees Nazorean (Ναζωραίος) as meaning a member of the Nazorean sect. He acknowledges that, in calling Jesus *The Nazarene*, “Mark no doubt took this as a geographical reference” (p. 51). But he explains that Jesus was originally known only as “The Nazorean.” One of the competing schools of Christianity later changed his designation to The Nazarene (Ναζαρήνε) for the purpose of suppressing his status as a member of a preexisting sect rather than an innovator. Mark wrote at a time when the changed title had become common, and used it

exclusively. The other gospels, in addition to using Mark, also utilized older documents containing Jesus' original title.

Price ignores those early Christian apologists who accepted that Jesus was basically a hunchbacked dwarf. And because he rejects the "ugly man" hypothesis, he interprets the line in Luke, "Physician, heal yourself," as "Heal your own," meaning "Repeat in your hometown the miracles you allegedly performed elsewhere." He agrees with the Jesus Seminar

that the story of Judas's betrayal is unmitigated fiction, and points out the absurdity of an insider needing to identify Jesus to the temple police: "Which one of you guys is Elvis?" (p. 185)

There is no significant conclusion in Price's book with which any competent scholar disagrees. *Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, along with Price's other books, should be mandatory reading for all scholars concerned with Christian origins, whether behind or in front of

the professorial lectern. The only writer of comparable importance for at least a decade is Bart Ehrman.

Dr William Harwood is the author of forty books and over 500 articles for freethought journals in nine countries, and a contributing editor of American Rationalist. His most recent books are American Hitler: George W. Bush and the Republicanazi Gestapo; the two-volume The Fully Translated Bible (editor/translator), and What to Believe: Books For And Against the God Hypothesis Reviewed.

On the International Scene

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Sixteen Days of Activism Global Campaign.

In December 1999, at their 54th Session, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring November 25th the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This was in recognition of the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for serious commitment by the world community to make finding solutions a key priority.

The origins of November 25th go back to 1960, when the Mi-

rabal sisters, activists from the Dominican Republic, were violently assassinated for their political activism. The sisters, known as the 'Unforgettable Butterflies,' became a symbol of the crisis of violence against women in Latin America. November 25th was the date chosen to commemorate their lives and promote global recognition of gender-based violence, and has been observed in Latin America since the 1980s.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an annual global campaign started in 1991 by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University in the United States. The campaign begins on November 25th, runs through World

AIDS Day on December 1st and ends on Human Rights Day on December 10th.

Since it was started, more than 1,700 organizations in 130 countries have participated, using the annual campaign as an organizing strategy to call attention to gender-based violence and better resources to combat it.

UN: IHEU calls the Vatican to account over child abuse

The Vatican (known in diplomatic circles at the "Holy See") was accused by IHEU at the UN Human Rights Council today (22 September 2009) of both covering up child abuse and allowing it to continue. The speech by IHEU

On the International Scene (continued)

representative Keith Porteous Wood also drew attention to the failure of the Holy See to comply with its obligations under International Law.

Mr. Wood's speech:

UN HUMAN RIGHTS

COUNCIL: 12th Session (14 Sept – 2 October 2009)

Speaker: IHEU Representative, Keith Porteous-Wood:

Tuesday 22 September 2009

Agenda Item 4: Matters requiring the attention of the Council

Child Abuse and the Holy See

Mr President,

In 1990 the Holy See acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It submitted its first and only report in 1994—about which CRC expressed several areas of concern. But since then—nothing. The extent of child abuse within the Catholic Church is well known. What we are addressing here, however, is the reaction of the Church authorities over which the Holy See exerts control.

- Victims have been accused of lying, even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary.

- The Church has covered up allegations, and generally failed to inform the civil authorities, even when obliged to do so. Moreover, dioceses have frequently moved alleged abusers

from one location to another, resulting in repetition of the abuse.

- Clerics implicated in concealment have been permitted

Clerics implicated in concealment have been permitted to remain in office, such as Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston who still enjoys papal support as archpriest of a papal basilica in Rome

to remain in office, such as Bernard Law, Archbishop of Boston who still enjoys papal support as archpriest of a papal basilica in Rome, and is still a cardinal.

- The Church has argued that the problem was minor, [that it did not know the true extent of the problem, or was ignorant of the nature of child abusers or of their recidivist tendencies] yet the scale of the problem has been known to the Church since at least the 1980s.

- Every possible step has been taken by the Church to minimise both criminal sanctions and the amount of compensation it paid.

- “Gagging” clauses are routinely imposed as part of the settlement of cases.

Mr President, the Holy See has been complicit in widespread attempts to cover up cases of alleged child abuse perpetrated by members of its clergy and religious orders, apologies are rare, and a general admission of the Church's culpability has yet to be seen.

We urge the Holy See to recognise its responsibilities to children and the CRC, to bring its reporting up to date, and to instruct its dioceses and religious orders to report all cases of alleged child abuse to the civil authorities. We suggest that as an institution that claims to have “the highest moral authority”, it can do no less.

And we urge the international community to hold the Holy See to account.

Thank you sir.

[The complete statement is available on the IHEU web site.]

UN publishes IHEU statement on religious registration in OIC member states

The UN Human Rights Council has published IHEU's written statement on religious registration in OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) member states. The statement documents the failure of OIC member states to uphold their citizens' right to freedom of religion, with specific examples in Egypt and Malaysia. IHEU calls for all states to eliminate laws which require citizens to specify their religion on official documents and to permit all citizens to freely change their religion or belief without discrimination. IHEU also calls on OIC member states in particular to end discrimination against non-Muslims.

The statement, as published by the UN, is available on the IHEU web site.

Discrimination based on religion or belief

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: 12th Session (14 Sept – 2 October 2009)

Speaker: IHEU Representative, Roy W Brown: Tuesday 15 September 2009

Agenda Item 2: Report of the High Commissioner

Mr President,

We welcome the report by the High Commissioner and in particular her emphasis on discrimination against minori-

ties. We regret however that she made no specific mention of discrimination based on religion or belief.

We therefore welcome the statement made on behalf of the OIC in this regard, particularly in view of reports we have seen in recent months of Muslims burning churches and of Christians being burned to death in their homes in Pakistan, with the authorities doing little or nothing to prevent it. From Somalia we hear reports of four Christians being beheaded simply for converting to Christianity; from Nigeria of a priest being beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam. From Iran we hear continu-

ing reports of discrimination against Bahais and from Egypt against Coptic Christians.

In many OIC States non-believers and apostates face discrimination, imprisonment and even death.

But it is not only in the Islamic States that religious minorities face discrimination and violence. In India the issue of the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat remains unresolved, and we have more recent reports of churches being burned in Orissa, while in China earlier this year we saw wanton violence directed against the Muslim Uighurs.

We also see non-violent discrimination suffered by religious minorities in many Western countries through the privileges accorded to state churches, and through concordats with the Holy See which privilege the Catholic Church, leading to discrimination against non-Catholics.

Mr President, is it not time that the Council took far more seriously the issue of discrimination based on religion or belief? And is it really necessary, yet again, to remind States that it is individuals—believers and non-believers—that have human rights, not their religions or beliefs.

Thank you sir.

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On the International Scene (continued)

IHEU attacks plans for a “Sharia-based” human rights organization

In a speech to the Human Rights Council today (22 September 2009) IHEU main representative Roy Brown attacked plans announced earlier this year by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to create an “independent, permanent body” to promote human rights in its member states based on the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam. IHEU urged the Human Rights Council and the international community to withhold recognition from “any human rights organisation that fails to recognise either the Universal Declaration or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

UN HUMAN RIGHTS

COUNCIL: 12th Session (14 Sept – 2 October 2009)

Speaker: IHEU Representative, Roy W Brown: 22 September 2009

Agenda Item 3: Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights

Threats to Universal Human Rights

Mr President,

We wish to raise again the issue of threats to the universality of Human Rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration, the ICCPR and the ICESCR.

Regional variants to the uni-

versal instruments do exist and many have been accepted by the UN and published by the High Commission, in 1997 and again in 2002, in Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments. Such regional instruments include

... no human rights organization that fails to recognize the Universal Declaration should be accorded recognition by this Council, or the international community

the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights.

A problem arises however when so-called regional instruments are not variants of, or supplementary to, the universal instruments but bear no relationship to them. One such is the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, adopted by the foreign ministers of the

OIC in 1990, and published by the UN as one of the regional instrument in 1997. This declaration was given a new lease on life by the announcement by the OIC Summit in Mecca in December 2005 of plans to create “an independent permanent body to promote human rights in the member states, in accordance with the provisions of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam.” This decision was confirmed by the OIC Conference of Foreign Ministers in May this year.

But the Cairo Declaration makes no reference to the Universal Declaration or the IC-CPR, and declares that “The Islamic Shari’ah is the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification to any of the articles of this Declaration”. The proposed organisation therefore undermines the very concept of the universality of human rights.

Surely Mr President no human rights organization that fails to recognize either the Universal Declaration or the ICCPR should be accorded recognition by this Council, or the international community.

Thank you sir.

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