



Justifying Man's Ways to Man

You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition, by Erich Fromm (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 240 pp. \$4.95), and ***After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism***, by Richard L. Rubenstein (Bobbs-Merrill, 287 pp. \$5.95), consider various aspects of Jewish identity vis-à-vis tradition. Bernard Mandelbaum is president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

By BERNARD MANDELBAUM

GOD IS ALIVE! What is more, after reading what some of His children say about Him these days. He is a patient, loving Father.

Criticism of the volumes under consideration derives from more than a difference of opinion with the authors about the meaning of God. It is difficult to comprehend how two obviously creative and learned people like the psychoanalyst and philosopher Erich Fromm and Richard Rubenstein, a rabbi with a master's degree in Hebrew literature, fail to recognize a basic inconsistency in their position. It has been said: "The sign that tells you which road to take does not necessarily have to walk down the road." However, by the very nature of their enterprise, philosophers and theologians who reason about the relationship between man's thought and behavior have some obligation to relate their own principles to their practices.

It is perplexing, therefore, to find Mr. Fromm beginning his presentation with a plea for a dispassionate, unprejudiced, almost *tabula rasa* examination of what Judaism has to say to contemporary man — "... to avoid the danger of picking out some data to support a preconceived thesis"—and then posit the following preconceived assumption: "I wish to make my position clear at the outset . . . God is one of the many different poetic expressions of the highest value in humanism, not a reality in itself." In other words, Fromm starts with his belief that God is dead (or never lived). He then proceeds to portray a Judaism that speaks with great relevance to twentieth-century man who seeks self-understanding and the improvement of society. Fromm's amazing range of authorities for this picture is

drawn from Biblical, rabbinic, and other classical Jewish sources—all of which make the very opposite assumption. Human equality, freedom, life's uncertainties and complexities, the values and goals of existence that Fromm describes so meaningfully derive from views of rabbis, scholars, and philosophers whose wisdom is based on their belief in the reality of a God who is alive.

Actually, Mr. Fromm and the radical thinkers of our day (he uses the term "radical humanism," rather than the "radical theology" label of Mr. Rubenstein) are battling windmills. Their difficulty is the literalness of interpretation of a statement—for example, the sentence with which this review begins. Teachers of the earliest Rabbinic period (through the year 500), Maimonides and other medieval commentators are as critical of a literal, anthropomorphic reading of Scripture as the most sophisticated twentieth-century student of thought. "The Torah (*i.e.*, Bible)," they tell us, "speaks in a language that is understandable to man."

ALL the doubts, questions, uncertainties, changes in the concept of a living God which Fromm and Rubenstein invoke were part of the concern of the most pious. "Seek the Lord when He is to be found."—Isaiah. ". . . indeed there are times when it is difficult to find Him."—Zohar. "Why does the Bible state God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, repeating His name three times? Because each generation finds new meaning in God's reality" — from an eighteenth-century commentary. This is the inevitable lot of finite man seeking to understand an infinite Reality. Nothing has yet been written to compare to Scripture's Job in his blunt questioning of God's justice in a world where good people suffer and the wicked appear to prosper. The dilemma of justifying "God's ways to man," which Rubenstein raises poignantly in *After Auschwitz*, aroused a Milton of the seventeenth century, just as it perplexed wise men of the Roman period who witnessed the animality of men in a coliseum whose "thumbs down" and cheers signaled a gladiator to massacre helpless victims before their very eyes. However, when in doubt, the believer in God makes the assumption of faith in God's reality.

Mr. Rubenstein frequently quotes the

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words of Ivan Karamazov: "If there is no God, all things are permissible." Yet the substitute for a faith in God is not, as Fromm and Rubenstein imply, a demonstrable, scientific, experientially verifiable set of principles. What we find is the substitution of another "faith," with less proof, less authority, and less historicity.

This is particularly evident in *After Auschwitz*, by Richard Rubenstein. In a high point of this volume of essays, the chapter on "The Meaning of Torah in Contemporary Jewish Theology," he writes: "The limitation of Jewish atheism is that it offers no way of actively sharing or participating with other Jews in the wisdom, the aspirations, the remembrances and the insights of earlier generations." Yet Rubenstein fails to follow through with any significant use of these authorities for his own radical theology. His new prophets (he even uses the word "prophet" in reference to them) are Freud, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Melville. To put it mildly, the following statements of Rubenstein, which would require a volume to refute in detail, are radical, *reductio*, and a sorry substitute for Moses, Isaiah, Rabbi Akiba, and Maimonides: ". . . human freedom is limited the moment the nursing infant is compelled to refrain from utilizing its milk teeth to bite the breast of its mother. . . . For Freud [and, therefore, beyond question] God is the projected superego of the community. . . . Norman Cohn [a minor prophet] has stressed the role of the Jew as the castrating father in the paranoid fantasies of the anti-Semite. . . . Earth is a Mother, but Earth is a cannibal Mother. Sooner or later it consumes what it gives birth to."

Nevertheless, the reader should not be discouraged from reflecting on the significant, and often exciting, contents of these two volumes. Fromm, despite his foundationless structure, gives a vivid description of a living tradition which speaks with great meaning to man in his struggle to feel at home in the world; "to bring man to life again." His extensive footnotes, in particular, contain most erudite and creative interpretations of Jewish thought.

Rubenstein's discussions are superb concerning the differences between Judaism and Christianity in the interpretation of the Messiah; the concept of law; belief versus behavior in contemporary radical theology; the depths of Nazi bestiality and its continuing threat to society; the undeniable reality that two thousand years and more of a living tradition become a part of each of us at birth.



The Mark Fein Case. By William A. Reuben. Dial. \$5. On February 20, 1964, a millionaire Manhattan industrialist was charged with the murder of a bookmaker to whom he allegedly owed \$7,200; he was convicted and sentenced to from thirty years to life, and is now serving his time in Sing Sing Prison. Trial and subsequent proceedings are here examined in close detail. (Did justice miscarry?)

The Verdicts Were Just. Edited by Albert Averbach and Charles Price. Lawyers Coöperative Publishing Company. Distributed by McKay. \$6.95. Eight nationally known trial lawyers here present their "most memorable" cases, with extensive citations of testimony; only two (Eichmann and Chessman) are criminal, the rest civil; all are fascinating.

The Secret Service Story. By Michael Dorman. Delacorte. \$5. This lively account of the work of the nation's oldest law enforcement agency is particularly enlightening and amusing in its treatment of the protection afforded a President's sisters and his cousins and his aunts.

Wolves, Widows and Orphans. By Dan Tyler Moore. World. \$5.95. Here are thirty-five brisk little narratives of con men and other slick operators who capitalize on the something-for-nothing yen we all have. Rules for self-protection are appended.

The February Plan. By James Hall Roberts. Morrow. \$4.95. USAF lieutenant's death brings father to Japan, where details of diabolical plot emerge. Beautifully integrated performance is headed for Hollywood under MGM auspices; novel is also BOMC alternate selection.

Smiling the Boy Fell Dead. By Michael Delving. Scribners. \$3.95. Connecticut manuscript dealer seeking prize item in rural Gloucestershire runs into oddballs, right guys (and gals), and murder; Anglo-American amity abounds (but not all the time.) Delightful. (Come again soon!)

The Terrible Pictures. By Ben Healey. Harper & Row. \$4.50. English artist enjoying working vacation on Côte d'Azur runs into rough stuff, including murder; light-hearted tale is skillfully wrought but accumulation of personnel is mildly bothersome.

Cable Car. By June Drummond. Holt,