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and you have shown that, so you get an A."

The highly respectable place in the community the characters in situation comedies occupy would lead one to assume that many of them must be church members and that religion would have some effect on their concepts of right and wrong. But if that is so there is no evidence of it in the interpretations offered; references to religion seldom appear.

Potentially the greatest danger in television's use of deception as a comedy device lies in the portrayal of authority figures. What might be justifiable satire when well motivated and presented occasionally becomes incentive to disrespect when motivation is automatic and portrayals are repetitive. Such examples as the cook's addressing the commander as "Fatso" and the boy's calling his father a "creep" may be extreme, but they reflect the general tone of disrespect permeating many of the situation comedies. Of "Hank," a new N.B.C. offering this fall, an ad in *Broadcasting* tells us: "[Hank is] an unmatriculated (and undiscovered) undergraduate at Western State . . . who manages to attend classes under an ingenious and delightful assortment of aliases. . . . There's never been a campus hero quite as funny as Hank." Nor, apparently, as deceitful, or as disrespectful of an entire university.

Television, as our British critic reminded us in the opening paragraph above, supplies whatever sells. And today deception as comedy sells. The remedy, obviously, is to stop buying. There is no doubt that the ultimate check on content is audience rejection either through individual or group action — by selective viewing, by boycott of products, by letters to sponsors — or through political measures. Of these means, only selective viewing seems to me to be a long-range answer; the others would be effective only if employed on a scale almost impossible to achieve. Television has such a good thing going that it would take an overwhelming volume of mail and a product boycott of unprecedented proportions to effect more than temporary relief. And there is little hope in legislation. True, initiation of pay TV would undoubtedly result in improved fare — but only for those viewing it; the many who would profit most from higher standards would probably shun the kind of programs it would provide. Competition from pay TV would lead to improvement in commercial fare only if enough viewers switched to it to make that fare unprofitable — an unlikely outcome.

So we return to selective viewing, with its corollary: guidance in such selection. What is needed from schools, churches

and other agencies to which we can expect to turn for help is not guidance of censorial nature but a program that will explain the role of mass media, particularly television, in American life. We do have something of this sort now, but it is confined to higher education. Analytical study of the role played by mass media, particularly in the light of ethical and religious considerations, should have a place at all levels of education, certainly of religious education. In such study I would suggest high priority be given examination of television's currently successful comedy formula: Deception = Fun. A good text would be Sir Walter Scott's wise words from "Marmion":

O what a tangled web we weave  
When first we practice to deceive.

GLENN E. REDDICK.

## Books

### A Crucial Choice

THE HEART OF MAN: ITS GENIUS FOR GOOD AND EVIL. By Erich Fromm. Harper & Row, \$3.95.

✦ APOCALYPTIC expression has again become fashionable! It is to be found even in the most intelligent and educated circles. According to the mystifying but erudite editor of Harper's "Religious Perspectives" series, we are living in an apocalyptic epoch and Erich Fromm is one of our great prophets. Conveniently we don't need to go to the wilderness to receive his message; it can easily be perused in our own arm chair. But we must not let our cushioned environment deceive us! We are in for some chilling insights and we may find ourselves struggling with the old temptation to let our hearts grow hard so as not to hearken to his voice.

Like apocalyptic writers of old, Fromm sees history as hanging on a precipice above an abyss. Today man faces a crucial decision between two alternatives which may be his last: will he choose life or death? At times sounding like a humorless paraphrase of *Dr. Strangelove*, Fromm's book contains many exaggerated generalizations. But as soon as we begin to wonder what has happened to the old empirical-minded Fromm, the author shifts from pronouncements to keen analyses of people we too have been observing — aggressive manipulators, extremists, bigots, hateful opponents of significant change, militaristic opponents of disarmament and the more common hard-hearted, pusillanimous people who show no love for life.

Fromm's argument resembles apocalypticism in that he believes basically in

THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY



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two types of people: the "necrophilous" people who above all love death and the "biophilous" who supremely love life. These abstract types represent dynamic tendencies within man which determine his outlook and behavior. Fromm's principal concern is to identify and delineate man's capacity to destroy life – a "syndrome of decay" manifested by the love of death, incestuous symbiosis (relationships of unhealthy, infantile dependence) and malignant narcissism. The opposite of this is the "syndrome of growth," which is characterized by love of life, independence and healthy other-directedness.

The tendencies of the decay syndrome are actually directed against life. They form not only the nucleus of severe mental illness but also, according to Fromm, the "essence of true evil." This is seen particularly in the liking for that which does not grow, the preference for that which is mechanical, overly intellectual, inanimate, stable, orderly and predictable rather than that which is alive, earthy, growing, uncontrollable, free and spontaneous.

Fromm in this book develops more fully numerous ideas which he has introduced elsewhere. He moves further along in his redefinition of Freud's theories and seeks to enlarge Freud's

narrow understanding of evolution so that his insights into the dynamics of human behavior can be fitted into a perspective that will deal meaningfully with freedom or with chosen existential orientations. It is within this perspective, which goes beyond sheer determinism, that Fromm's own message can have import. As a humanistic psychoanalyst, Fromm aims to increase our awareness of the polar tendencies within and around us and to alert us to the narcissistic, symbiotic, necrophilous tendencies which he believes are gaining ascendancy in our anxious, impersonal, mechanistic, warmongering era. This awareness will enable us to resist evil and to preserve life.

This book might be classified as a philosophical essay in what Fromm calls dialectical humanism. However, it is also a religious book in that it is marked by discernment and commitment – indeed a forceful and impressive commit-

ment to life in the face of dynamic destructive tendencies now at work.

Yet like a former enlightened prophet of Jewish tradition, Fromm reveals in his discernment an underlying mood of pessimism, and his commitment is bounded by despair and futility. In this respect his book, like Ecclesiastes, is profoundly non-Christian. He is unable to perceive that there is more at work here than merely a human conflict of opposing tendencies and that we may hope realistically for the victory of life "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/ World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

A discerning Christian can learn from Fromm but then must move beyond him to the deeper truth that grace is everywhere. Fromm has provided us with a revelation of man which we ignore at our peril – but his is not the ultimate apocalypse.

WILLIAM A. SADLER, JR.

## This Week



# FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

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THE QUEST FOR SUMER. By Leonard Cottrell. Putnam, \$4.95. Sept. 23.

Sumer, a mud flat in modern Iraq, was the site of an ancient civilization which only recently yielded its secrets to archaeologists. Cottrell's narrative reads like a detective story.

DON'T RETIRE FROM LIFE. By Horace Greeley Smith. Rand McNally, \$3.95. Sept. 23.

The former president of Garrett Theological Seminary comments informally on meaning in life after retirement.

THE SECRET SOCIETIES OF ALL AGES AND COUNTRIES. By Charles William Heckethorn. University Books, \$15.00 (two vols., boxed). Sept. 24.

Heckethorn completed his last revision of this work on druidism, freemasonry and gnosticism in 1897. Modern research dates his book, but as a turn-of-the-century view of tribalism it is still of some interest. Whoever reads a few hundred pages concerning initiation rites in such arcane societies will be led to ponder man's natural affiliative and ceremonial tendencies. Our own pondering was low-keyed, cheerless.

POPE JOHN AND THE REVOLUTION. By E. E. Y. Hales. Doubleday, \$4.95. Sept. 24.

A distinguished historian of modern Catholicism who admires Pope John sets into critical perspective John's efforts to renew the church.

IMPERIALISM. By J. A. Hobson. University of Michigan Press, \$2.45. Sept. 24.

An Ann Arbor paperback of a still up-to-date criticism of the imperialist tendency. The first edition: 1902.

WANDERING THROUGH WINTER. By Edwin Way Teale. Dodd, Mead, \$6.50. Sept. 27.

Teale's fourth book in a sequence based

on the four seasons in outdoor America is an engrossing account of his treks. An ideal early winter gift book.

CHURCHILL'S HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLES. Arranged by Henry Steele Commager. Dodd, Mead, \$7.95. Sept. 27.

Only Churchill's words appear in this boiled-down version of his four-volume history; it should appeal to those who like his joy history and style but whose time is limited.

MEDICINE IN TRANSITION. By Iago Galdeano. University of Chicago Press, \$5.95. Sept. 28.

Books whose theses relate to "transition" usually promise more drama than they deliver. This physician's report on change in his profession is no exception.

THE FAITH OF JFK. Edited by T. S. Scully. Dutton, \$3.50. Sept. 28.

John F. Kennedy was a very Catholic and a very secular man. Someday an analysis will deal with this fact informatively. For now this very religious anthology is a convenient but only mildly interesting guide to one side of his thought: how did he quote the Bible, what were his favorite poems? We need more than this.

THE HONEY BADGER. By Robert Ruark. McGraw-Hill, \$6.95. Sept. 29.

Mr. Ruark made his reputation writing about Africa. His last novel is about America. He should have stayed with Africa.

CONVERSATIONS WITH BERENSON. By Umberto Eco. Morra. Houghton Mifflin, \$5.95. Sept. 29.

These snatches and snippets from the conversation of Berenson in the 1930s will be cherished by art lovers even if they do not reveal the merits which Berenson's longer essays suggest.

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