

claimed by the pope . . . to be his devout son, the son's all-too-serious sin, even suspicion of it, would fall too heavily on the father's shoulders."

The immediate objectives may have been achieved, but the Church's strategy has proved disastrous in the long run, diverting attention from the real issues and exposing the Church to centuries of ridicule. While many Christians justly denounce the methods used by the Inquisition, it remains true that Galileo's philosophy (apart from his science) did subvert religious faith. For the orthodox, Galileo's debt to Copernicus is far less troubling than his borrowings from the pagan philosophies of Lucretius, Democritus, and Epicurus. Redondi concludes that Galileo's was "the anxious faith of the heretic, a faith that is always searching and never satisfied."

For Copernicus, the heliocentric system served as a mystical symbol, with the sun representing the glory of God the Father. But Galileo used "Ockham's razor" of explanatory simplicity to pare away from Copernicanism all of its author's spiritual passions, leaving behind only the formulae needed to make predictions about matter in motion. Redondi indeed identifies Galileo as a probable influence upon René Descartes, who regarded the world as a matter-motion machine wholly explicable without reference to spirits, angels, or miracles. Like Descartes, Galileo helped to turn Western civilization away from the awe-inspiring God of Scripture, toward the rationalized Clockmaker God of Deism.

As a set of equations, Galileo's scientific world view provides a set of tools for the mind to use. But as a philosophic cosmology, it fails to provide a transcendent metaphor that can shape the mind through contemplation. Galilean man exerts ever-more technical power while dwindling into spiritual sterility.

Three centuries after Galileo, it is past time to give Ptolemy his due. By any scientific standard, Ptolemy's geocentric system is useless. But that uselessness need not repel us if we remember with Leszek Kolakowski that "science . . . does not deal with reality at all, its meaning being utilitarian." Let those who wish to make predictions about the motions of planets or stars cull their equations from Copernicus, Kep-

ler, Newton, or Einstein. While scientists fret about "saving the appearances," the reality beneath all seeming breaks through in prayer—and poetry. To appreciate the abiding truth captured in the Ptolemaic world view, read again Dante's *Commedia* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, both depicting a Ptolemaic universe. As a Catholic who lived 300 years before Galileo, Dante had little choice in the matter. But in Milton we confront a militant Protestant who had himself visited Galileo in Fiesole and had probably accepted the scientific validity of Copernicanism. Yet the poet speaks truer than the scientist when he nonetheless uses a Ptolemaic setting for *this* planet's drama of human sin and divine redemption. Besides, all poetry shares with Ptolemaic astronomy the attribute of sublime uselessness (W.H. Auden: "Poetry makes nothing happen").

An increasing number of scientists now in fact share the view of British

physicist Steven Hawking, who believes that an "anthropic principle" governed the mysterious "Big Bang" in which the universe began. Man does somehow define the "target" at which the universe was "aimed." For locating the nub of the universe, Ptolemy proves a better guide than Galileo.

Bryce Christensen is editor of *The Family in America*.

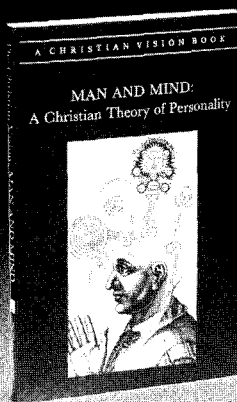
Pilgrim's Progress

by Don Feder

Lovesong: Becoming a Jew by Julius Lester, New York: Henry Holt; \$17.95.

Like many black intellectuals of his generation, Julius Lester went searching for his roots. Unlike the vast majority, he found them in a most extraordinary place.

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Why are so many psychologists hostile to religious explanations of human behavior? In what has been hailed as a path-breaking study, nine psychologists, theologians and philosophers offer the reason: Thomas J. Burke, Stephen R. Briggs, Mary Vander Goot, Paul C. Vitz, Charles Ransford, Merold Westphal, William Kirk Kilpatrick, John S. Reist, Jr., and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen.

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A professor in the department of Afro-American studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Lester converted to Judaism in 1983. A metaphysical prodigal son, Lester would say he simply came home — after a hazardous journey, at that.

The intellectual odyssey of this minister's son started in the 1940's South, when as a child he discovered that one of his great-grandfathers, named Altschul, was a German Jewish immigrant who married an ex-slave.

As a boy, Lester recalls playing the melody to the Kol Nidre on a piano, ignorant of its significance but drawn to its haunting refrain. For his 12th Christmas, his mother presented him with a volume of Shakespeare's plays. Reading "The Merchant of Venice," he identified with Shylock.

"Yet in Shylock, I see myself as I do not in Du Bois, Johnson, Langston Hughes, Robeson or any other black figure. Is it because they are models of success and I need a model of suffering, someone to reflect a child's pain and confusion at being condemned because of the race into which I was born, someone whose anger at outrageous injustice gives me permission to be angry and through that anger to defend my soul? Or is it simply that through Shylock I learn that blacks are not the only people in the world who must ponder in their flesh the meaning of meaningless suffering?"

That a 12-year-old was preoccupied with such thoughts is understandable, given the times and circumstances. There was pain in Lester's boyhood, the mortification of seeing his proud father humiliated by service station attendants ("Fill 'er up, boy?"), averting his gaze as he passed white women, lest they think he was leering and invoke the horrors of the lynch mob. Indignation led to involvement in the Civil Rights struggle (when he was a student at Fisk University in Nashville) and eventually the black power movement, via the ironically misnamed Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

Julius Lester, author of "Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!" — the ultimate black macho flash which became the movement's manifesto.

Julius Lester who hosted a black-consciousness talk show on WBAI-FM in New York, in the late 60's.

Julius Lester who, during the city's 1968 teachers' strike, permitted a guest to read on the air an anti-Semitic poem by a black schoolchild, which earned him the distinction of being the Jewish Defense League's first target.

Julius Lester the radical, who wanted to save the world through political action, but — like countless pilgrims who preceded him — soon perceived that ideology is graven image, unable to comfort or heal.

Paralleling his political development is a spiritual quest. Having rediscovered God, after the typical collegiate fling with atheism, Lester wonders how he can "live in holiness." His search leads him to a Cistercian monastery which once sheltered Thomas Merton, the Taos Pueblo, the site of a Shaker community at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, and other religious landmarks across the country.

None of it seems quite right. Perhaps it's an ancestral call, but gradually, over the years, he grows closer to Judaism: studying it, defending Jews against attacks by black militants (he's the author of a 1979 *Village Voice* piece on Andrew Young's dismissal as UN ambassador, rebuking black leaders for their condemnation of Jews over the affair), feeling its emotional tug.

Still there's a reluctance to go all the way, theologically. "For the rest of my life, do I want to hear people say, 'Gee, you don't look Jewish,' thinking they are being clever and witty? Do I want to be an object of curiosity, a side show freak: Julius Lester, former black militant, former anti-Semite, becomes a Jew? I would be less odd if I grew another head."

Such understandable apprehensions are overcome by a need frankly, yet eloquently, stated: "Why do I want to be a Jew? The answer is simple: I am tired of feeling guilty for not being in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I am tired of feeling lost on the first night of Passover. I am tired of feeling jealous when I see Jews going to or coming from synagogue."

Lester is drawn to the faith of Israel by what he terms its "curious mixture of the rational and the mystical." He exalts in Judaism's ability to sanctify the mundane, to imbue everyday activities with holiness, by blessings and commandments which raise eating, observing the wonders of nature, even per-

forming bodily functions to a spiritual plane.

He rejoices in the Shabbat in which participants — by abstaining from work, through prayers and memorials — recall that man is a transient on this earth, that life and everything in it belong to the Creator. This is the spiritual focus he has hungered for so long, his own method of "living in holiness."

With a greater understanding of the creed than most born to it, Lester affirms: "I choose and I am chosen. I choose to accept responsibility for the Sabbath. I choose to accept responsibility for bringing God into the world once a week."

"The unseen soul is as real as what is seen. That experience enters history with the Jews. To guard and embody that experience with attentiveness to the nuances and intricacies of holiness is the Jew's task. It is that for which God chose Jews."

The Talmud teaches that along with the Hebrews of the Exodus the souls of every Jew to come (the convert as well as those to be born to Israel) stood at Sinai to accept the law. A decade before his conversion, a monk at a Trappist monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts, told Lester: "When you know the name by which God knows you, you will know who you are." That name, Lester learned, is Yaakov Daniel ben Avraham v'Sarah, as he is called to the Torah at Saturday morning services, and as he is known in Israel.

Don Feder is a writer for the Boston Herald and a syndicated columnist.

Aristotle Shrugged

by Charles R. La Dow

Educating for Virtue, edited by Joseph Baldacchino, Washington, DC: National Humanities Institute.

"There are two kinds of mind in the world: the Platonic and the Aristotelian," goes an academic aphorism. To whatever degree this mental division may have been real, the Aristotelians seem to be practically extinct — the essayists in *Educating for Virtue* must, essentially, be Platonists. The key to