

with an overdose of a powerful sedative." Regarding himself, "And I? I have three failed marriages and have fathered a son who is sullen, suspicious but brilliant in computer science."

Religion had no real role in his upbringing. His family was nonobservant, although they did celebrate the Jewish holidays, perhaps as many putative Christians still observe Easter and Christmas, without these Christian solemnities having any real impact on their thought or behavior. Quite striking is his description of his childhood concept of God: "My childhood image of God was, as I reflect on it six decades later, the brooding, majestic, full-bearded figure of Michelangelo's Moses. He sits slumped on what appears to be His throne, pondering my fate and at the brink of disgorging His inevitably damning judgment. This was my Jewish God: massive, leonine, and forbidding." This description fits very well with the noted psychologist Paul Vitz's view that almost all serious atheists are the victims of abusive or absent fathers. At a later period in his life, during a stint in the Air Force, to while away the idle hours he took a Bible study course and "discovered that the New Testament God was a loving, forgiving, incomparably cossetting figure in whom I would seek, and ultimately find, the forgiveness that I have pursued so hopelessly, for so long."

During his medical studies at McGill

University in Canada he had as a professor the famous Jewish psychiatrist Karl Stern, an émigré from Nazi Germany. This relationship would have positive consequences decades later, when Nathanson began to examine more closely the arguments for Christianity:

Stern was the dominant figure in the department: a great teacher; a riveting, even eloquent lecturer in a language not his own; and a brilliant contrarian spewing out original and daring ideas as reliably as Old Faithful. I conceived an epic case of hero-worship of Stern, read my psychiatry with the diligence of a biblical scholar, and in turn was awarded the prize in psychiatry at the end of my fourth year. . . . There was something indefinably serene and certain about him. I did not know then that in 1943, after years of contemplating, reading, and analyzing, he had converted to Roman Catholicism.

Later on Nathanson read Stern's famous autobiography *The Pillar of Fire* and realized that the man "possessed a secret I had been searching for all my life, the secret of the peace of Christ."

In subsequent chapters Nathanson relates a compulsive promiscuity, which resulted in his first encounter with abortion, one performed on his first girlfriend

and paid for by his father; the story of his first two marriages; and, in what is perhaps the most shocking and chilling incident in the book, an abortion performed by himself on another of the women with whom he had affairs. But in time Nathanson saw clearly the scientific evidence against abortion, due in great part to new technology which enabled him to see the child in the womb. What he had been aborting by the thousands (he estimates that he was involved, directly or indirectly, in over 75,000 abortions) was in fact a human being from the moment of conception. Consequently, he stopped performing abortions, and became the best-known advocate and convert to the pro-life cause in America.

He ends the book on a note of hope in Christ's mercy, forgiveness, and offer of salvation. As is often the case in a story of conversion, it is the prayers and personal example of so many of his pro-life friends and coworkers that over time melt down the resistance of a hardened atheistic sinner so that he can see that there might be room in God's heart even for the likes of him.

The Reverend C. John McCloskey III is a priest of Opus Dei in Princeton, New Jersey, and the United States representative of the Pontifical Atheneum of the Holy Cross.

LIBERAL ARTS



THE 5-H CLUB

According to the December edition of *Pro-Family News*, published in Minneapolis by the Minnesota Family Council, the state 4-H Club must now sign a statement declaring that it will not discriminate on the basis of "sexual orientation." Because the 4-H program is run by the Minnesota Extension Service of the University of Minnesota, it is subject to all the state's civil rights laws. In order to have their clubs recognized at the state level, club leaders are required to allow homosexuals to participate in all 4-H programs and activities, including some involving youth under the age of 18. When volunteer Joyce Stuewe asked Michael Charland, assistant director of 4-H Youth Development, if a gay man would now be eligible to take over leadership of the club, he reportedly replied, "That's correct."

City of God

by Philip Jenkins

Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths

by Karen Armstrong

New York: Alfred A. Knopf;

471 pp., \$30.00

For better or worse, British religious writer Karen Armstrong is rapidly becoming a publishing phenomenon. Partly because of the demographics of an aging baby boom, religious books are becoming a very hot item on the best-seller charts, ranging from reports of cuddly angels who allegedly guard our steps, through the *pour épater les bourgeois* efforts of the Jesus Seminar and the like, to valuable popularizations of complex religious thought and history. In recent years, this last category has included

best-sellers and prize winners like Jack Miles' *God: A Biography* and Armstrong's *A History of God*. The *History* was a distinctly mixed project, evincing as it did conspicuous learning about abstruse byways of Islamic philosophy and mysticism, above all from the Sufi tradition she clearly loves. However, this sensitive treatment was constantly juxtaposed with malicious digs at every aspect of Western intellectual tradition. The Greeks achieved this . . . the Muslims discovered that . . . the Hindus began their golden age of intellect . . . meanwhile Western European peasants like Thomas Aquinas shambled out of their caves long enough to write simplistic trash gratuitously perverting the cultural treasures they had stolen from their neighbors. . . . Not a direct quotation, to be fair, but a reasonably accurate rendering of a pervasive sentiment in that odd and wrong-headed *oeuvre*.

We therefore approach Armstrong's successor volume with some trepidation: surely she has by now worked out of her system all the bile against Catholic and Western traditions that she seems to have acquired during several years of convent life? The answer is mixed. Armstrong depicts the city as flourishing according to its own terms and traditions, except at such times as its life is violated by disgusting barbarian killers from the West. Now this characterization may well be justified on occasion; certainly the assault by Crusaders on the city in 1099 would find few modern defenders. But if the whole Crusading movement was really "a travesty of religion," why does Armstrong not condemn likewise Muslim military atrocities? She displays a marked tonal difference in passages describing the annexation or destruction of Christian holy places (presumably part of the onward march of history) and those of other religions (brutal persecution by Christian bigots). As in *A History of God*, which is extensively rehashed throughout this volume, she is open to any Muslim account implying tolerance or reasonableness by partisans of that faith. Accepting the accounts most favorable to the one side and those least flattering to the other, she falls considerably short of the ideal of historical balance. Armstrong even contrives to blame Franciscan Catholic clergy for the first anti-Semitic pogroms in the Muslim world, which is stretching fact to breaking point and beyond. Her distaste is palpable when she dismisses the Ugly

Westerners who come to Jerusalem to pursue "Biblical archaeology . . . an expression of the rationalized religion of the West based on facts and reason rather than on imaginative mythology." Scientific method has wrought such harm on the world! Paradoxically, it is denounced by authors like Armstrong who work with word processors rather than with quills.

Fortunately, there is a positive side to Armstrong's book, making it well worth reading for anyone interested in the nature of Jewish and Christian cultural traditions. She is, for example, extremely sympathetic to the Eastern Orthodox tradition; once again, her account of life under Islam is very well informed. Numerous scholars are comfortable with either the Jewish or the Christian side of the story, and some specialists are qualified to recount the Muslim one. Very few, however, have either the ability or the nerve to attempt a synthesis of this kind, which relates the story of Jerusalem and its environs from archaic Rushlimum to the modern city ruled by the State of Israel. (Her story is sufficiently current to embrace the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.) Armstrong's book is especially valuable for the accounts of what are, for most Western readers, the "dark centuries" in the city's life: the early Middle Ages, for example, and the early modern period.

Armstrong highlights the city's attraction for successive waves of mystics and fanatics—Sufis, Karaites, and Hasidim—who found Jerusalem to be the only environment in which they could practice a religion as rooted in the next world as in this. For all three faiths, moreover, there was always the recurrent belief that the Holy City would be the geographical setting for the events of the End Times, however these are conceived. Another and curious element of the story is the city's success in civilizing its successive waves of residents and visitors, including such apparently hopeless cases as the Franks and the Turks. No matter how uncompromising their initial rejection of culture or cosmopolitanism, these people came, they saw—and Jerusalem conquered.

Also perennial has been the city's attraction for religious reformers who, affecting at first to deny that one place was more holy than another—God being omnipresent—ended by taking root themselves and venerating Jerusalem's holiness as sincerely as their pagan ances-

tors had done. Truly, as Armstrong remarks, the concept of sacred geography strikes deep into the human psyche. Intentionally or not, she leaves the reader with a strong feeling that a depoliticized and unified Jerusalem would indeed make an ideal world capital of sorts: certainly we can understand why for two millennia cartographers persisted in depicting the city as the center of the known world.

Armstrong strives for balance in her account of the modern Arab-Israeli conflict, offering a sympathetic history of the Zionist movement and its aspirations and confirming the Zionist claim that the Jewish presence never vanished altogether from the city over two millennia of exile, while remaining critically important to the life of the region. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the role of Jewish forces in atrocities like the Deir Yassin massacre of 1948, and describes the terrorist campaigns by Zionist Ultras in the last two decades. She shows little sympathy for the more bizarre Zionist claims to every square inch of *Eretz Israel*, and is appropriately horrified by the lunatic schemes of extremists who fantasize about the destruction of the Muslim holy places and their replacement by synagogues—even, perhaps, by a restored Temple. As she rightly remarks, such a policy would be a high road to World War III. On such contemporary matters, Armstrong's opinions fit well enough with those of irenic Jews or Arabs who yearn to see the city as a genuine "City of Peace."

Armstrong ably communicates the powerful sense of continuity associated with the Holy City, in which it seems that virtually every decade brings some new find or reinterpretation which is hailed by believers as a major contribution to religious truth. She also makes painfully clear that this process of constructing and reconstructing religious memory is very much alive. Ironically, it was only a very few months after her book appeared that a dispute over a tunnel connecting holy sites near the al-Aqsa Mosque erupted into a shooting war between Israelis and the new Palestinian authority. People are still prepared to kill to defend the secrets of the city of life.

Philip Jenkins is the author, most recently, of Floods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania 1925-1950 (University of North Carolina Press).

by Samuel Francis

First Things Last

If the election of 1996 turned out to be an even bigger snore than most citizens anticipated, the fall of the year was nevertheless enlivened by a dangerous outbreak of something resembling actual cogitation on the American right. Given the mentally paralytic cast of the Dole-Kemp campaign and much of the party that nominated it, the continuing sparkle of neurons among conservatives was surprisingly refreshing, not least because it immediately provoked a hostile response from some of the major illuminati of the "conservative movement." The November issue of the neoconservative journal *First Things* published a collection of essays that tried to raise some serious questions about the future of American government. The illuminati don't much like serious questions, let alone serious answers, and for several weeks afterwards, it seemed that organized conservatism in America was about to experience yet another of its periodic purges in which those who commit Thought-Crime are quickly and quietly removed to the American equivalent of Siberia.

First Things is a journal devoted to the discussion of religion and public affairs, founded and edited by Father Richard John Neuhaus, a gentleman in better days associated with The Rockford Institute who more recently has buzzed about the neoconservative hive in Manhattan. Father Neuhaus and his colleagues have long been preoccupied with the role of religion in public life and more particularly with such issues as abortion, euthanasia, and sexual morality. The November symposium concerned itself with these very subjects, but in a way that was distinctly out of character for neoconservatives.

The symposium consisted of an introductory essay by Neuhaus himself and other contributions by Robert Bork, Catholic legal scholar Russell Hittinger, Hadley Arkes of Amherst, Robert George of Princeton, and Charles Colson, once of Watergate but now called to a rather more ethereal vocation as the chairman of Prison Fellowship, an evangelical organization that preaches the

Good News to convicted felons. Concentrating on recent Supreme Court decisions on abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality, the symposium proceeded to raise some very hard questions about what the contributors kept calling "the legitimacy of the regime."

As Neuhaus himself rather breathlessly phrased it in his introduction, "The question here explored, in full awareness of its far-reaching consequences, is whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime." The general conclusion of the symposium is yes, we are reaching that point, and the closer we get to it, the more seriously we have to address the next question, what are we supposed to do about it?

We are approaching that point—of the illegitimacy of the American government or at least of its judicial branch—for several different reasons. Judge Bork seems to have reached the point for largely procedural reasons—that the courts are handing down blatantly false interpretations of the Constitution and imposing them in blatantly illicit ways. The other participants tend to dwell on the substantive content of the decisions themselves. Thus, Russell Hittinger, in what is perhaps the most closely reasoned contribution, argues that not only do recent court rulings violate traditional religious and moral taboos on abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality but indeed go much further and insinuate that any law or policy based on religious or moral principles is illegitimate. Professor George argues that the courts' rulings on abortion "have imposed upon the nation immoral policies that pro-life Americans cannot, in good conscience, accept." Mr. Colson perhaps goes even further in arguing that in the event of the legalization of homosexual marriage, "Christians . . . would be forced to live under a government whose actions violate the biblical ordering of social life and threaten the first institution ordained by God," that the Supreme Court's upholding of a ruling prohibiting states from preventing euthanasia would mean "that the medical murder of the sick and elderly has become our government's

national policy," and that President Clinton's veto of the partial birth abortion bill last summer "is tantamount to the affirmation of infanticide." "It would be hard to imagine," writes the man who once expressed willingness to murder his grandmother for Nixon, "that a Christian in good conscience could swear to uphold the Constitution or laws of a nation that practices the horrendous offense against God of taking the defenseless lives of the weakest among us: babies, the elderly, and the sick."

The symposium at once caused a fit of hiccups, not least because such desperate conclusions are not typical of the rather humdrum ruminations that habitually fill the pages of *First Things*, but more especially because of the reaction the symposium immediately provoked among the magazine's senior editors. Gertrude Himmelfarb, Peter Berger, and Walter Berns, three major neoconservative figures and longtime collaborators of Neuhaus, at once sent in their resignations and removed themselves from the magazine's masthead. Even more significantly, Norman Podhoretz, the Old Man of the neoconservative Mountain and long Neuhaus's major patron among neoconservative bigwigs, also wrote a quite snotty letter to Father Neuhaus about the symposium.

Himmelfarb and Berger as well as Podhoretz all wrote letters to Neuhaus elaborating their objections, which consist of three main points: (a) the symposium uses the term "regime" to describe the current system of government in the United States, (b) the symposium concludes that the "regime" is "illegitimate," and (c) Neuhaus in his essay had suggested a comparison of the contemporary and future United States with Nazi Germany. "America," Neuhaus wrote, "is not and, please God, will never become Nazi Germany, but it is only blind hubris that denies it can happen here and, in peculiarly American ways, may be happening here." Berger wrote to Neuhaus that this is "the most offensive passage" and "perhaps the most convoluted sentence you have ever written." In the words of the Great Pod himself, "I am appalled by the language the two of