

A Unique Global People

The Jews Among the Nations, by Erich Kahler (Frederick Ungar. 149 pp. \$4.75), considers the uniqueness of the Jewish experience, its sources and its effects. Books by anthropologist Ashley Montagu include "The American Way of Life" and "On Being Human."

By ASHLEY MONTAGU

THIS book is an extraordinary achievement. In 149 pages the author manages to tell the reader more than much larger volumes or even encyclopedias have about the Jews, their history, the problem of their identity, their relationships with various peoples including the Germans and the Arabs, and the attitudes of other nationalities toward them. I have not the least hesitation, having read a representative number of works on the subject, in declaring *The Jews Among the Nations* by far the best ever written. It could only have been accomplished by a scholar of Erich Kahler's quality.

As a Jew, European by birth and education and American by naturalization, Erich Kahler is among the last of the polymaths. The author of several of the great books of our time—*Man the Measure* (1943), *The Tower and the Abyss* (1956), and *The Meaning of History* (1965)—Kahler is in the tradi-

tion of the great humanist-scholars. He has great learning at his command, and he writes with sensitivity and compassion.

The Jews Among the Nations consists of three long essays and an appendix. In the opening section Kahler considers the question "What are the Jews?" This is a problem that has exercised many a scholar, and has defeated virtually all. Kahler, so far as I know, is the first to offer a genuinely convincing answer. The Jews, he shows, are neither a "race," a religious group, nor a nation. What are they, then? A transnational tribe, says Kahler, "a group that has grown out of religion, and whose primal core is religion." The uniqueness of the Jews as a tribe, however, lies in their involvement in and concern for the destiny of humanity at large. The substance of their particularity lies in their universality.

And, as Kahler says, "This combination made for an existence that was fraught with peril. Both these extremes, separately and jointly, alternately and concurrently, acted as a constant challenge to the peoples of the world; they were the source of the persistent hostility of the other peoples toward the Jews. And yet it is this very combination that helped the Jewish people to survive . . ."

Kahler's discussion of this whole matter is the most penetrating I have read, and while some objection may be foreseen to the characterization of the Jews

as a tribe, it will be neither scientific nor sustainable whatever its grounds.

Kahler's second essay, "The Jews in Europe," is an absorbing and moving account, and a masterpiece of condensation. It is a model of the way such things should be done, but I rather suspect it could be imitated only by those who possess Kahler's rare combination of genius, knowledge, and understanding. It tells a tragic and at the same time a heroic story of a people who have been made to suffer much because they have given much. Without harshness and without criticism the author presents the facts, and they are devastating—especially to the Christian church. Discrimination against and persecution of the Jews began very early in the church's history. These crimes, fully documented in Kahler's pages (as in numerous other works), led to a psychosis that ultimately resulted in Hitler's "Final Solution."

God, wrote St. Augustine, had set the mark of Cain upon the Jews, "lest any finding them should kill them." They should not be destroyed, therefore, but preserved as the "witnesses of their guilt and of our truth," servants to the Christian peoples forever (*"Ecce Judaeus servus est Christiani"*). St. Thomas Aquinas, and other Church Fathers, reiterated these views again and again. The attitude determined the fate of European Jews right down into modern times, and it is only from this point of departure that their fate can be accurately understood.

The third section, "The Jews and the Germans," presents one aspect of the progressive dehumanization that has overtaken the greater part of the Western world, culminating in the Nazi nightmare. It was, however, no accident that genocidal mania should have found its most ruthless expression in Germany. The relationship between the Jews and the Germans was, as Kahler points out, one of profound affinity and profound difference. Both are transnational peoples, even though in dissimilar and mutually antagonistic ways. The Jews transcended their earthly statehood by becoming a global people. The Germans never achieved anything more than a shallow, insecure unification. Their frustrated aspirations to power found a target in the Jews as readymade scapegoats.

The appendix records a debate that took place in early 1944 between the Arabic scholar Philip K. Hitti, Albert Einstein, and Kahler. Nothing could be more topical, for Professor Hitti presents the Arab case with which we are now all familiar, to which Einstein and Kahler reply, it seems to me, quite unanswerably.

Indeed, I can think of no book on the Jews in the modern world more timely than this.



"If yours is such a free-soaring, untrammelled, irrepressible spirit, why do you still want to live here at home with me and Mumsy?"

The Uncharted Future of Faith

The New Christianity: An Anthology of the Rise of Modern Religious Thought, by William Robert Miller (Delacorte. 393 pp. \$6.95); ***Alternatives to Christian Belief: A Critical Survey of the Contemporary Search for Meaning***, by Leslie Paul (Doubleday. 227 pp. \$4.95); ***No Other God***, by Gabriel Vahanian (Brazilier. 114 pp. \$4), and ***The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age***, by Leslie Dewart (Herder & Herder. 223 pp. \$4.95), express varying reactions to the current religious revolution. Rudolph Muska is professor of philosophy at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio.

By RUDOLPH MUSKA

IF NOTHING else, the current state of Christian faith and practice is certainly revolutionary. Neither the painfully slow concessions of the Vatican nor the stubborn resistance of Protestant conservatives should becloud the fact that the most fundamental truths and stable concepts of Christianity are now in the process of radical reappraisal, modification, even rejection.

The striking thing about all this, however, is that the new restlessness, skepticism, and atheism do not come from outside the church but from its own spokesmen and leaders. Nor do they involve trivial matters. One reads that Dutch Roman Catholic theologians are questioning everything from the doctrine of transubstantiation to the sinfulness of premarital intercourse. Or, again, one finds prominent theologians like William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer proclaiming that God is "truly dead"—not merely rejected by modern culture but irrevocably absent. In only a few years terms like "Christian Atheism," "Eclipse of God," "Secular Gospel," "Religionless Christianity" have become so common that even the layman cannot escape them in the daily news media, let alone in the sanctuary.

In one way or another, all the books in this review assess, react to, or contribute to the current religious revolution. Gabriel Vahanian's *No Other God* is essentially a declamation against the "Death of God" theology; Leslie Paul's *Alternatives to Christian Belief* is an

oblique apologetic for the Christian view of life, and Leslie Dewart's *The Future of Belief* is a prospectus for a radical reformulation of the basic structures of Christian faith. It is William Miller's *The New Christianity*, however, that provides the background for the whole business and enables the average reader to discern some of its contours and main ideas.

THE selections in Miller's anthology make apparent three main stages in the emergence of the present situation. The first—the nineteenth century—is the period of the precursors and predecessors, when the accepted concepts of religion were contested by seminal thinkers such as Schleiermacher. This was the era of the great challenges to traditional religion: Schleiermacher against the exteriority and transcendence of the divine, Feuerbach against the established dogmas of the church, Kierkegaard against the rationalization of Christianity, Nietzsche against the complacency of the religious.

The second stage comprised the first half of the present century—a time marked by cultural, political, scientific, and philosophical transitions, and of course the shock of worldwide conflict. It was during these years that the great systematic theologies were formulated by such giants as Barth and Tillich.

The third phase is the present decade, with its awareness that the post-Christian age has arrived. This is the era of radical theology, where a bewildered believer is confronted with the Christian Atheism of Altizer or Hamilton on the one hand, and the radically overhauled New Christianity of Robinson, Cox, or Dewart on the other. On either side such familiar conceptions as "God the Father Almighty" and "Christ His only Son Our Lord" seem to have been not only reformulated but lost or destroyed altogether. This is what the new theology

is all about, as Miller's choice of readings makes evident. He provides an excellent anthology—the best currently available of readable source material by representatives of the movement.

So much for the general view. Opening the texts by Vahanian and Paul, we find two reactions to the present situation. Both writers may be considered, with proper qualifications, defenders of the faith, for in the last analysis each repudiates the new theology. Leslie Paul's book is on the whole enjoyable and informative, ranging widely over the intellectual scene. The author maintains two arguments: one concerning contemporary theology, the other dealing with current ideologies. His own theological posture is revealed in the introductory chapter, where he deplores the present trend of Christian self-criticism to move from transcendent God incarnate in Christ to secular religion. "For reasons no matter how good, Christianity along this dimension becomes a kind of humanism or secularism, giving up that strong separateness and uniqueness of doctrine which made it a theological fortress down the centuries."

The bulk of the book, however, consists of a "critical survey of the contem-

WIT TWISTER #17

By ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word. A sample, well known among lovers of anagrams:

Good landlord, fill the flowing

Until their — — — — run over!
Tonight, we'll — — — — upon
this — — — —;

Tomorrow, — — — — for Doves!

(Answers: *pots, tops, stop, spot, post.*)

Now try this Wit Twister:

That — — — — parson,
whose mien seems meek,
Whose — — — — are modest,
and whose cheek
Says "Smite me if ye will, ye
vermin,"
— — — — us weekly with
his sermon.

(Answer on page 51)

