

Nazareth (Stein & Day, 223 pp., \$6.95) recapitulates the substance of *Jesus and the Zealots*, but with the trial of Jesus as the main focus. I would doubt that that mythical person, the "intelligent layman," could easily handle *Jesus and the Zealots*. In *The Trial*, sacrificing technicalities but not scholarship, Brandon writes for the general reader most clearly and communicably.

NOW, if Jesus was indeed a political rebel, and if the Gospels conceal this reality, then Brandon's procedure must necessarily be what it is: an acute cross-examination of the witnesses—the authors of the Gospels—as to their historical reliability. Repeating from *Jesus and the Zealots* that Mark was an apology to Roman Christians, Brandon concludes "Mark's presentation . . . is a *tour de force* that . . . will not stand up to detailed scrutiny. Its weak links and absurdities are quickly discerned." Holding that Matthew was a Jew by birth (something I doubt), Brandon says of Pilate's washing his hands: "That Matthew could describe such a piece of play-acting as constituting a valid repudiation of responsibility, without some comment on its specious nature, reveals how powerful was the motive . . . to exculpate the Roman so absolutely." He describes the trial in Luke as "a tendentious presentation designed to convince gentile readers that the crucifixion of Jesus was a Jewish crime, which Pilate had striven hard to prevent." Of John's account he writes: "We cannot evaluate it as a record of a trial. . . . The crucifixion of Jesus [in John] must be seen as a Jewish, and not as a Roman act, which in fact it was. This pretense is maintained to the end."

The motif that the Jews are Christ-killers, which has greatly receded from its once-dominant position in the medieval world, would, of course, be completely undermined or even demolished if Brandon's view were to influence Christian scholarship and thereafter permeate the universal Christian awareness. Jews, however, should not expect such an outcome, certainly not to any noticeable degree; historical scholarship such as Brandon's exerts a limited influence. It is the growing sense on the part of Christians of the injustice of, as it were, blaming me and my children for the death of Jesus, and not a drastic revision of the historical data, that has propelled what change there has been.

Mr. Brandon does not himself move from historical presentation into the question of the theological significance of his contentions. I should imagine he feels this to be outside a historian's scope or, possibly, competence. But surely that is a next step someone must take in what is an internal Christian affair.

Theology for Our Time

What Do We Believe? The Stance of Religion in America, by Martin E. Marty, Stuart E. Rosenberg, and Andrew M. Greeley (Meredith, 346 pp. \$6.95), and **A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural**, by Peter L. Berger (Doubleday, 129 pp. \$4.50), assess the role of religion in contemporary life. Lowell D. Streiker of the Department of Religion at Temple University is author of "The Promise of Buber," to be published next spring.

By LOWELL D. STREIKER

CAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION and its institutions survive the onslaughts of modern secularism? Are Americans truly living *post mortem dei*? Should we not expect that the churches of the United States will soon go the way of their Scandinavian and British counterparts, becoming nothing more than deserted monuments to the faith of earlier generations?

All too many observers of the American religious scene have answered such questions on the basis of feelings in their bones rather than hard data. In 1965 the Gallup organization polled a representative cross-section of America's 120.5 million adults (2,783 persons eighteen years of age and over) in order to determine a) the religious beliefs and practices of Americans, b) the attitudes of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews toward each other, and c) what changes, if any, had occurred since a comparable study in 1952.

What Do We Believe? presents the pollsters' tabulations, together with interpretive essays by Martin E. Marty, Stuart Rosenberg, and Andrew M. Greeley. Assigned the task of "representing, respectively, Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism," journalist-theologian Marty, rabbi-scholar Rosenberg, and priest-sociologist Greeley do their damndest to act as representatives and to make the "dull and hence obvious" (Greeley) results of the poll sound significant.

Despite a decade of theological innovation and ecclesiastical revolution, the character of American belief and the patterns of religious practice have changed little. As Marty notes: "In a time of 'the death of God' or the presence of 'the secular city' or the time of 'the world's coming of age' one is naturally surprised to see that the number of people who believe in God has dropped only from about 99 per cent to 97 per cent." Americans continue to believe, to pray, to attend services, to support their churches and synagogues, to send their children to Sunday school—or to say that they do.

The investigators' conclusions offer poor support for the journalistically ac-

credited spokesmen of "secular theology" and "Christian atheism." Not only is faith flourishing, but real gains have been made in the reduction of Protestant-Catholic intergroup tensions. But do the hard data of the questionnaires in any way demonstrate the vitality of American religion? For what emerges from the survey is the image of major stress and strain. As the religious declarations of President-elect Nixon all too clearly reiterate, a civic religious establishment has developed which exploits the emotionally powerful but cognitively empty symbols of Christianity and Judaism to underwrite the existing order. The God of America's societal religion is neither the just and demanding Lord of the Old Testament prophets nor the transforming Presence that bound the early Christians together for loving service. The God confessed by Americans is a deification of the American Way of Life, a defender of the *status quo*.

Church historian Marty finds that "we are not as Christian a people as our



Christian apologists claim, nor so secular as our prophets of change or our newer theologians want us to be." Should Protestantism ever discover its true prophetic or "protesting" role *vis-à-vis* American culture and national policy, he maintains, it will at least "not lack raw materials, nominal members, and reasonably warm bodies. . . ."

Rabbi Rosenberg chooses to snipe at the pollsters' methodology. He rightly calls attention to the numerous inadequacies of the questionnaire. Often the interviewee is given no real choice, *e.g.*, the following loaded question: "Do you believe the Bible is really the revealed word of God or do you think it is only a great piece of literature?" Frequently the questions presuppose an understanding of religion as beliefs, sanctuary rituals, and expectations about life after death—a conception highly compatible with Christianity but largely inapplicable to Judaism. Rosenberg supplements the survey with a cornucopia of historical observations, data from other surveys, and painful puns.

Sociologist Greeley's contribution is an arrogant, self-conscious attack on journalists, secularists, critics of questionnaire sociology, and critics of Andrew M. Greeley. He notes slow but steady changes, particularly within Catholicism, where organizational restlessness draws upon doctrinal stability (rather

than upon its lack) to effect change. Also he calls attention to an alarming rise in Jewish anti-Catholicism at a time of greatly diminished Catholic hostility to non-Catholics. Should Jewish suspicions of their Catholic neighbors focus upon the touchy issue of public aid to parochial schools, the consequences could be dire.

Peter L. Berger, professor of sociology in the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, has been a persistent and effective critic of the societal faith that has replaced traditional religion. A behavioral scientist who has always sounded suspiciously like a theologian, Berger in *A Rumor of Angels* finally attempts a constructive theological statement. Fearing that his earlier works will be taken as a phenomenology of atheism, Berger has decided to stick out his professional neck by offering proof that the "supernatural" has not departed from the modern world. He employs four inductive arguments based on "prototypical human gestures" in order to support belief in "another reality . . . of ultimate significance for man which transcends the reality within which our everyday experience unfolds." He contends that "signals of transcendence within the empirically given human situation" are provided by certain reiterated acts and experiences that express essential aspects of the nature of man *qua* man.

In man's confidence in the orderliness of reality, his hope for a better future, his expectation that the moral record books will eventually be balanced, his sense of joy and play in a world of disappointments and frustrations, Berger sees intimations of a transcendent order, a final judgment, and an eventual consummation of human aspiration. Unfortunately Berger's arguments are haphazard and unconvincing, his constructive suggestions random and confused. Style, anecdotes, and humble confessions of the author's inadequacies are too often substituted for exposition and argumentation.

Nonetheless, there is both wit and wisdom in Berger's essay. His skill at "relativizing the relativizers" is particularly admirable. For not only do the so-called radical theologians fail to grasp the dynamic relationships between history, culture, and social groups, but they are totally unable to anchor their speculations in fundamental human experience. Although theology must relate to the mood of an epoch, Berger hopes that "there may be theological possibilities whose life span is at least a little longer than the duration of any one . . . crisis of the times." Certainly, Berger's commitment to enduring human truths in a rapidly changing world should provide a model for those who pursue the theological task.

Book Forum

Letters from Readers

Organic Philosophy

I AM SHOCKED BY Chaim Potok's comments on James Yaffe's *The American Jews* [SR, Dec. 7], as I was by the book itself. In distinguishing between fact and opinion, the following are just several of the "tiny errors" (Potok's phrase) in the first thirty-five pages of the volume. Consider, too, how these errors involve basic values and attitudes of Jews and Judaism.

1) An elaborate burial ceremony is prohibited not "to stop weeping and get back to the job of entering the Promised land" (Yaffe) but to affirm the equality of all people, at least at death, *i.e.*, rich and poor, famous and unknown, all have the simplest of burials prescribed by tradition.

2) The Kaddish—the mourners' prayer—"tells us that loved ones live on in our hearts." There is absolutely no reference to "loved ones" in the prayer. That is its uniqueness. It affirms God as the source of order and purpose in the world.

3) "The spirit of the Old Testament . . . something lonely and frightening about a God who never embodies himself in material things . . . who won't let you indulge in a bit of pomp and circumstance." The height of pomp and circumstance is the ritual of the Temple, Passover in the home, Purim in the synagogue, etc. God is the material manna from heaven, the holy land of milk and honey, the promises of physical riches to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David and Solomon.

4) In one paragraph on the "pattern of religious holidays" there is the omission of Hanukkah, celebrating the light of freedom; Simhat Torah, the rejoicing in the law; the ninth day of Ab, commemorating the fall of the Temple and the first and second Jewish Commonwealths. Yaffe's description of the post-Yom Kippur meal is from some strange world of fantasy when he refers to it as a "raucous family party." (Who has the strength!)

5) In the ritual bath of conversion, Yaffe has the woman immersed in water while "two learned men give her instruction in some major and minor commandments." (She'd freeze!) Actually, it is a sixty-second ceremony and the rabbi, while she is hidden from view, need only hear her recite a brief blessing!

6) In the Talmud, "doubt, controversy, even hairsplitting are part of our obligation to God." The Talmud says that finite man, trying to understand the infinite truth of God and the world, should preserve majority and minority opinion because the minority of one generation may become the majority of another.

Dozens of illustrations in errors of fact could be multiplied throughout the book. However, what is even less forgivable in a so-called study of the inner character of a community is Yaffe's obvious lack of sensitivity to the overtones of Jewish behavior and attitudes. Most of his judgments would be comparable to that of a foreign visitor

to Congress, for example, who saw no response to a roll call. Not knowing that it is a deliberate act to boycott a particular law, he might conclude the American legislators do not respect their own form of government.

Such inner knowledge and experience is necessary for an evaluation of Jewish life and thought. I fear that Mr. Yaffe never read Solomon Schechter's *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, any of the works of Professor Max Kadushin, or even relevant sections of Martin Buber and George Foot Moore. If he did, he could distinguish between the profundities of paradoxes and the existential dilemmas in life, and what Yaffe labels as "contradictions" and manifestations of a "split personality." Justice and mercy, law and spontaneity, tradition and change are all part of Jewish thought. They result in a philosophy which is organic rather than systematic and reflects life itself.

Finally, and only because even this is beyond the reasonable limits of a letter to the editor, Mr. Yaffe lists my name as one whom he interviewed for this study. I have no such recollection beyond two Eternal Light scripts which he wrote and I edited over ten years ago.

BERNARD MANDELBAUM,
President, Jewish Theological
Seminary of America.
New York, N.Y.

Responsible for Zenith

DAVID DEMPSEY IN THE PUBLISHING SCENE for Dec. 14 neglected to mention that, while Doubleday's Zenith Books series began to reach the public in 1965, it had been in the planning and developing stages for a few years before then.

The man responsible for the creation of Zenith Books—that is, the idea for them—was Charles F. Harris, a black editor now at Random House. This, I believe, was an oversight of gigantic dimension since his idea is being copied in many publishing houses.

JOHN A. WILLIAMS.
New York, N.Y.

Hero No. 12

IN "WHO'S WHO IN HEROES" (SR, Dec. 7) we invited readers to a friendly game of opinion-matching with the Overseas Press Club choice of the top twelve "heroes for our times." As things turned out, however, readers may have thought we intended a Guess-Who's Who game, too, since both photograph and caption for Hero No. 12 were omitted. The distinguished dozen should have included a portrait of Dag Hammarskjöld by Yousuf Karsh, along with Burnet Hershey's comment: "A man of rugged determination . . . whose techniques in quiet diplomacy are sorely missed by a world in turmoil."

MARGARET R. WEISS.
New York, N.Y.