

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Science Ponders Religion*, edited by HARLOW SHAPLEY (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1960).

*Reviewed by* Moses L. Isaacs

After many years of dormancy, the subject of Science vs. Religion seems once again to have become popular. Among the pieces of evidence is a movie on the famous Scopes trial of the Twenties, and, what is perhaps even more significant, a re-publication of the monumental *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, by Andrew D. White, a well-known practicing atheist of the last century. The book reviewed here, *Science Ponders Religion*, edited by Harlow Shapley, is another straw in the wind, and undoubtedly is the forerunner of more to come.

This book is a series of eighteen essays by members of a group of scientists who met on Star Island, off the New England coast, to do necessary creative pondering. The authors are, for the most part, past or present university professors in the fields of biology, physics, astronomy, geology, and mathematics.

Except for one chapter which we shall mention later, religion, as readers of TRADITION know it, does not fare very well. The first chapter called "Stars, Ethics and Survival" by Shapley might better have been titled, "Cutting Man Down to Proper Size." Equipped with apparently nothing more than a sharpened pencil and a pad of paper, he calculates that there must be in space, conservatively speaking, of course, at least ten billion planets which have the same conditions for life as our earth. With such a high probability, it is easy for him to jump to life on other planets as a *certainty*. All of this leads to the conclusion stated in the preface of the book: "The anthropomorphic one-planet Deity now has little appeal."

All that Shapley needs to start the course of evolution, not only of animals and plants, but of matter itself, is hydrogen, plenty of it; and with time — plenty of it, too — he sees as inevitable all that we now have, even up to man with all of

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

his complexities.

With this start, we can see that man, in the phraseology of one of the authors, is not "a little lower than the angels, but just a little higher than the apes." Most of the authors are not saddened or depressed by this conclusion. They think of a religion completely dominated by science, which would be based on something like the following reasoning: I, Man, am the highest product of Evolution and on the basis of *noblesse oblige* it behooves me to conduct myself in an ethical fashion. This ethical conduct turns out to be indistinguishable from the conduct taught by religion, but would come from an unemotional scientific consideration of the problem, with man's responsibility atop the evolutionary pile ever in mind. There are other suggestions for this new "religion" such as a "ritual" based on great works of music and art. Another point of view is also expressed: "some liberal denominations could save themselves by conforming wholeheartedly to science." The authors grant that science is constantly changing, but then religion should be flexible or agile enough to keep pace.

In the fifth chapter, entitled "Notes on the Religious Orientation of Scientists," by Gerald Holton of Harvard, there is a classification of present-day scientists into six groups. This reviewer looked in vain for a group into which he could put himself and other Orthodox Jewish scientists, namely among those who see science as dealing only with *relative* truth, and who therefore consider that science cannot be a yardstick of religious

faith. Such a scientist can use a theory as well as any other scientist, and, as a matter of fact, can change it or discard it more easily than one to whom Science is a sort of religion. No such classification is given, so that I am afraid that if Professor Holton were to classify us we would be dumped into Group IV. Says he:

"A fourth group is also not large. It contains those who are devoted members of an explicitly fundamentalist sect or other religious group with doctrinal positions in matters which most scientists would regard as questions of scientific fact; yet they can attain in their scientific work complete autonomy. From the outside it is neither proper nor simple to explain this compartmentalization of mind, and one is tempted to compare it with the contradiction between Sunday profession and weekly behavior of many a churchgoing businessman." "Us" poor hypocrites do not even excite his pity.

Judging from the unanimity of the basic thinking of the writers, the Star Island conferences must have been love feasts from the start or perhaps there were powerful persuaders to bring about such homogenized uniformity of approach. Parenthetically, I should say, there were one or two chapters where the point of view was so obscured by verbiage that I might be doing the authors an injustice by lumping them with others. In addition there are two chapters that are different enough to merit closer attention.

The first of these for us to consider is called "Science, Faith, and Human Nature" by C. Judson Her-

## Book Reviews

rick, a zoologist, an Emeritus of the University of Chicago. While not in disagreement with the notion that "viridical" knowledge takes precedence over religious belief, he shows caution in defining the boundaries of science. He feels that "nature as envisioned by science may be only a small fraction of that which is." "Even if this possibility is recognized," he adds, "I grant that it remains true that the unknowable is none of the naturalist's business." He shows the important part that faith, not often recognized or admitted, plays in the working and thinking of science. All in all, Herrick, whose chapter is the last in the book, is as cautious as Shapley, the author of the first chapter, is rashly dogmatic.

The one chapter that runs definitely counter to the trend of the book is called "Faith and the Teaching of Science" by E. C. Kemble, a physiologist of Harvard. From the old-fashioned religious standpoint this presentation is generally acceptable. This is fortunate, for it removes the suspicion that we are claiming that everybody is out of step but us. Referring to his teaching of elementary science to students, he says, "I make clear to them my own belief in the value of religious faith for those who can achieve it. In addition, it means that I make an effort to protect students from too easy an acceptance of the conclusion that belief

in God is incompatible with the facts of modern science and that religious interpretation of life is no longer intellectually respectable." He then lists the familiar claims of the materialist: that impersonal laws govern biology, that mind is explicable wholly on the basis of nonliving forces, that God is needed neither as Creator nor as Maintainer of the universe, etc. In reference to these he says, "Many scientists believe or half believe these propositions. To me they stand as an unproved and dubious extrapolation of the legitimate conclusions of science." Further on he writes, "I remain skeptical of the possibility of explaining mind in terms of matter, or energy, or any purely physical conceptions. The faith of the materialistic biologist that he will ultimately succeed in understanding man as a physicochemical system, and nothing but a physicochemical system, is understandable as a professional bias, but to me the case is *not yet proved*."

The reviewer's job is not complete until he gives an opinion as to the value of a book in one's library. The purchase of this book is not recommended. It does not say anything that was not said over and over again in the Twenties when the controversy last raged. Even to the foot-loose scientist who might like to try some new faith, it gives no solid ground on which to stand.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

*Ramban, His Life and Teachings*, by Rabbi CHARLES B. CHAVEL  
(New York: Philip Feldheim, Inc., 1960).

*Reviewed by*  
Abraham N. AvRutick

There is an amazing dearth of material in English on Ramban (*Rabbi Moses ben Nachman*, or Nachmanides). The known sources are the articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, the essay by Solomon Schechter in his *Studies in Judaism*, and an article by Mayer Waxman published in a recent issue of *Orthodox Jewish Life*. All other references regarding Ramban are scattered in the standard histories of the Jewish people and literature. (Not too much more may be found even in Hebrew).

Rabbi Charles Chavel should, therefore, be commended for presenting to the English-speaking world a book exclusively devoted to *Ramban, His Life and Teachings*. True, more emphasis is placed on the teachings of the Ramban than on his life. But more can be learned about the personality of an intellectual and spiritual giant through his works and thoughts than through a recitation of biographical details.

The book is divided into two parts. The first, on the life of Ramban, delineates for us the role Ramban played in quieting the storm that broke out between the Maimonists and anti-Maimonists, his historic disputation with the apostate Pablo Christiani, his exile, and his final years in the Holy Land. Part two deals with Ramban the

teacher. Here we are introduced to the master's views on Creation, Man, The Patriarchs, The Coming Redemption, etc.

It would not be in character with the humility of Ramban to speak of his works as a philosophical system. The Ramban was too appalled at the arrogance of the philosophers to consider himself one of them. He could not comprehend the presumptuous air of those who speak with such final authority on so many matters "when they do not even know the structure of their own bodies completely, to say nothing of their souls." One may, however, speak of Ramban's outlook.

For a thorough insight into Ramban's Jewish views one must study his Commentary on the Torah. (Of the sixty statements quoted from Ramban by Rabbi Chavel, forty-four are from this commentary.) It was his last work, and in a sense his *chef-d'oeuvre*. Here he brought into play his peculiar genius and his warm and tender disposition. Here we are introduced, though hesitantly, to kabbalistic interpretations, thus opening new paths in the *pardes* of the Torah.

Two subjects touched in this volume are of current interest. Should secular education be encouraged? (This is the "great debate" at many Yeshivot today.) If the conditions of the times demand it, asserts Ramban, secular knowledge should not be denied to the students. Many Jews must pursue it to earn a livelihood (p. 37); others

## Book Reviews

to understand deeper God's ways (pp. 70 and 111); still others for the purposes of *da mah she'tashiv* (p. 71). Ramban warns, however, that the attainment of wisdom need not necessarily come by way of Athens. The "beauty of the tents of Japheth" is one of language and art, but not of absolute truths (p. 68). True wisdom can only be found in the Torah (p. 82).

Was the establishment of the State of Israel a miracle? Ramban would answer with an unequivocal Yes. To Ramban, the history of Jewish existence is one long series of *nissim mefursamim* and *nissim nistarim* — miracles visible and invisible (p. 85).

Rabbi Chavel has paid careful attention to Ramban's scholarly works, his homiletical and exegetic writings, his poems, and his ethical epistles. The result, however, is not a sweeping history of the man and his times, but rather an intimate discussion of a teacher, his ideas, sentiments, and thoughts. What is

covered in the one hundred and twenty-eight pages of the book does leave the reader with a sense of the greatness of Ramban. It also leaves the reader with a desire to know more about him. To what extent did he practice medicine? Was he the head of a Yeshivah? What about Jewish life in Aragon? What were the political and economic conditions of his days? Such questions Rabbi Chavel has left for future biographers.

It is altogether fitting that Rabbi Chavel should be the first to present a study of Ramban. He is a devoted student of the Ramban, having written much about this "great giant of Spanish Jewry." Recently the Mosad Harav Kook published his two-volume edition of his *Perush ha-Ramban Al ha-Torah* with references and explanatory notes based on manuscripts and early printings.

*Ramban, His Life and Teachings* is a scholarly work written with warmth and love, and is a worthy contribution to current Judaica.

*Guide to Jewish History Under Nazi Impact*, by JACOB ROBINSON and PHILIP FRIEDMAN (Jerusalem: Yad Washem Martyrs' and Heroes' Memorial Authority; New York: YIVO Institute for Research, 1960).

*Reviewed by* Jacob I. Dienstag

This is not merely a bibliography in which close to 4,000 entries in 24 languages on the *churban* are carefully and systematically classified. The purpose of the work is to guide students of the plight of the Jews under Nazi rule from a

historical perspective, beyond that of the direct role of the Nazis in the Jewish tragedy.

The reader is introduced to the general works on the Third Reich, totalitarianism, and Nazism "because they give an extensive account of the Jewish tragedy within their more general narratives or be-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

cause they give a more profound reflection than is usual to those phenomena which more directly related to the Catastrophe" (p. 10).

The historiosophical consideration of the Jewish Catastrophe and its background are carefully analyzed. These interpretations are divided into two sections: a) by Jewish writers, some of whom discuss the philosophy of Jewish history and its course under the impact of the Catastrophe; also a re-evaluation of the so-called success of Jewish Emancipation; b) by German writers, who considered the many, complex factors which comprise the German responsibility for World War II and German attitudes at the close of the War.

An interesting chapter is entitled "Historical 'Analogies.'" Therein the reader will find important material by authors who sought historical analogies to the Nazi period. The antecedents in Jewish history which are chronicled and interpreted in this bibliography provide the student with the possibility of studying Jewish martyrology from a historical perspective.

A useful excursus is the chapter on Toynbee's "Parallels" and the

controversy surrounding them. This section, which was provoked by his anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli utterances, gives us an insight into the scope and erudition which the scholarly authors displayed in the compilation of this work. This chapter will for a long time provide scholars interested in the Toynbee heresy with reference material.

Another excursus, dedicated to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, is a similar example of the approach and goal of the *Guide*.

Among the other features of the valuable work are lists of research institutions, archives and depositories, libraries, museums, and exhibitions. Close to one hundred pages are dedicated to the various indices which enhance the value and usefulness of the work.

Multilingual bibliographical typography is an extremely complex task even for the most experienced printer. Mr. Israel London, president of the Marstin Press, is therefore to be commended for so faithfully living up to the age-old Jewish tradition in which printing has always been considered a "Sacred Art."

*The Jews of Ancient Rome*, by HARRY J. LEON (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1960)

*Reviewed by* Jacob Petroff

From the fall of Carthage until the dedication of Constantinople, Rome was the cultural and bureaucratic center of western civilization; it was Washington and

New York rolled into one. All roads did, indeed, lead to Rome. It was sought by merchant, politician, and poet; it was the goal of African, Gaul, and Greek.

And yet, though Jews too have lived in Rome for more than two

## Book Reviews

thousand years, how much do we know of the early Jewish community there? Professor Leon has undertaken the task of answering this question. He has tried to give us a history of the Jewish community in Rome from the second century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E.

His credentials are impressive. He has been concerned with the topic since 1924. His dissertation and many published papers deal with different aspects of the subject. This volume, as is evident from many footnotes, is a systematic reworking of his efforts over a period of more than thirty five years.

The author's purpose is two-fold. He wishes to present all the available data on the Jews of ancient Rome. He also wishes to give his interpretation of the material.

To what extent has he succeeded? First, let us view the work as a presentation of data. The references to Jews in pagan and Jewish authors have been examined so often that the writer does not feel called upon to give us an appendix of literary sources, and he uses them for interpretative purposes in the text itself. The specialist in the period knows these references, the scholar can find the sources, and the layman is not interested in references per se. No one suffers from the lack of such an appendix.

We have a different situation when we deal with the Jewish catacombs and the funeral inscriptions. Much of the information is not widely known and it is widely scattered. In this area, in which he is especially expert, Prof. Leon has done yeoman service as a compiler

of data. Chapter II is an account of the discovery of the Jewish catacombs and their description. Chapter III is an account of the discovery of the inscriptions. Chapter IX includes detailed descriptions of the Jewish art remains. While the accounts and description may be considered too detailed by the layman, they will be welcomed by the specialist.

Furthermore, there are thirty-two plates of illustrations that will be appreciated for the light they shed on the text, as well as an appendix of all the inscriptions that the writer believes are of Jewish origin (these are printed with a translation and comment to each). The general reader will be thankful that only such sources as are necessary for the elaboration of the author's ideas are introduced into the text; the expert will be grateful for the extensive bibliography, and will be overjoyed to find such a body of primary sources within the covers of a single volume.

On the dust-jacket the publisher announces that "Professor Leon has achieved an authentic portrait of that community (the Jews of Rome) by means of a thorough investigation of the Jewish catacombs. The brief inscriptions revealed to him a great wealth of significant information: the language of the people, their labors, their religion, their manner of life."

The results of the author's research add up to to a total that is far less than that claimed by his publisher. There is considerably less than "a great wealth of significant information." Yet this is not the fault of the writer. Imagine a schol-

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

ar two thousand years hence trying to reconstruct the history of the twentieth century Jewish community of New York. Imagine that he has nothing to work with but a few remarks in non-Jewish sources that class the Jew with the Italian and Irish minorities, a few references in the writings of an ambassador from Israel, and a relative handful of inscriptions from shattered tombstones, some of which are not decipherable. Such remains would reveal little of the true picture. And yet, it is with such remains that Prof. Leon must work. It is for this reason that the overriding note is that of caution.

The work sketches the picture of a poor Greek-speaking community, ignorant of Hebrew, and uneducated secularly. Though they still clung to their ritual, many Roman Jews adopted Latin names, some the Latin language, and a few took their motifs from pagan themes. They were a despised minority which managed to grow and win proselytes. If we press for names of personalities, for more exact

data, the answers are vague. The writer is forced to give us the probable; more often, only the possible.

As though dismayed by the scarcity of fact, Prof. Leon, at times, forsakes his caution and relies on his instinct. He thinks there was no Jewish dialect comparable to the Ladino and Yiddish of later times. I am inclined to agree with him. Yet how much of a trace of Yiddish would remain if there were only epitaphs and chance references as evidence? Such lapses, though, are rare.

Prof. Leon has been unable to give us an detailed picture. But he has done both the general reader and the scholar a great service. He has shown how groundless the so-called proofs of earlier scholars are; how they have built castles of theory without, at times, the slightest foundation of fact. He has not been afraid to show that we can know relatively little of the Jews of ancient Rome until further information comes to light.