

BOOK REVIEWS

The Passover Plot, by DR. HUGH J. SCHONFIELD (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1966).

Reviewed by Victor Solomon

According to Schonfield, the founder of Christianity was party to a big hoax.

He arranged to be arrested the night before Passover and crucified on the following day. He knew that the Roman crucifiers respected the requirement of the Jewish faith that the executed be interred before the onset of the Sabbath. Thus, "Jesus of Nazareth, the man who plotted his own execution . . . contrived to be given a mandrake potion instead of vinegar to put him into a death-like trance." He even arranged for Joseph of Arimathea to cut him down from the cross, nurse him back to health and "stage" the resurrection three days later. But a Roman soldier unwittingly spoiled the game with a spear thrust into the side of the anesthetized Messiah.

Fiction fans will enjoy this thriller. Imagine, Ellery Queen, Jewish style, with notes, references,

bibliography and index thrown in for the sake of "scholarship." Much of what Dr. Schonfield writes makes sense; most of what he relates is nonsense, especially the central theme of the "Passover Plot" which crumbles like a frail Matzoh between the hammer of Jewish tradition and the anvil of historical fact.

The most amazing thing about "The Passover Plot" is the fact that a scholar like Dr. Schonfield who has written popular works like *The Authentic New Testament*, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Jesus, a Biography*, could prepare such a potpourri of peculiar pedantry, and preposterous inanities — more of a seething pot than a sensible plot. All of this only serves to remind the informed reader that even scholars and "specialists" are not above error. To paraphrase the hero-plotter of Dr. Schonfield's book, "Forgive him for he knows not what he writes!"

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

David, King of Israel, by HENRY BIBERFIELD (Cleveland-Jerusalem-New York: The Spero Foundation, 1963).

Reviewed by Pesach Schindler

Scripture, in the main, abstains from direct character analysis. The recorded actions of the Biblical person imply his personality. This objective characteristic underscores the universal and classic dimension of the text. It remains for man to delve and discover, search and surmise, *drosh vekabel sachar*. This quest for truth and integrity in sacred text (via the endless struggle of *hafokh bah vehafokh bah*) provides man with the clue to his own existential search (since, *dekula bah*). In this search is embodied the timeless objective-subjective tension of man's confrontation with himself and the resultant problem: Who is Man?

In accepting this challenge the author performs the additional service of accentuating the general neglect of close analytic study of Biblical narrative in our schools. Fundamental and eternal concepts which transcend person, time and place and are the crucial components in the transfer of learning are more often than not, buried in a mass of factual details.

Against this background we may evaluate Henry Biberfeld's study of *David, King of Israel*. Employing *Peshat*, close reading of the text, and modern biblical scholarship, the author also draws from midrashic materials. The fundamental theme of "the unique and ultimate harmony of idea and physical reality achieved in the person

of King David" is convincingly developed. The mystical relationship of David to the Messianic idea becomes evident, since only in the Messianic days will this harmony be reinstated within the total society of man.

In a most absorbing and incisive manner Biberfeld weaves most of the various threads in David's life into an integrated fabric, while stripping away the superficial, the mythical and conjectural. Thus, the David-Goliath confrontation is set into the broad context of the conflict between two opposing civilizations rather than a physical tournament between two uneven gladiators. Similarly, Samuel's tortuous quest for Saul's replacement is contrasted, by implication, with subsequent turbulent events throughout Jewish and world history whenever succession to the throne became an issue. The universal component is thus accentuated throughout the David drama.

The general level of interpretation is high, but certain crucial areas suffer neglect. Thus, silence on the Jonathan-David relationship is puzzling. The brief comments concerning the shocking Bathsheba-Uriah-David affair are in distinct contrast to the thorough and involved treatment of the other aspects of David's character. Finally, the painful question relating to the justice and equity of Saul's tragic life in comparison with that of David's relative good fortune in light of their respective crimes and

Book Reviews

punishment, is not directly confronted by the author. Thus, while the ultimate destiny of Israel is linked with David, modern man intuitively identifies with Saul, his Jobian quintessence.

The Dynamics of Emancipation, edited by NAHUM N. GLATZER (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

Reviewed by
Bertrand G. Fink

Dr. Nahum N. Glatzer has attempted to present the great issues, intellectual trends and movements, the *Zeitgeist* of modern Judaism through a broad anthology of its writings.

It is almost axiomatic that in such anthologies the material will range from the excellent to the mediocre—from the brilliant to the trivial, but these selections represent a unique exception—they are virtually all superlative. This reviewer only laments the dearth of written material by our outstanding orthodox leaders—forcing Glatzer to make the selections of orthodox spokesmen rather scanty.

In his introduction Glatzer states that the variety of expressions of opinion, commitment, and ideas in the volume are indicative of the vitality and dynamism that he hopes justifies his title. Never before in Jewish history, he asserts, have there been so many threats to the

survival of Judaism — and never before has there been such diversity of opinion in response to the crisis.

The subtle combination of universalism and separation which was manifest in Jewish thinking and which characterized the very existence of the Jew in earlier periods is no longer a reality.

Needless to say, he continues, separation in some form is indispensable to all who would remain Jews—the form and the means of this separation and the extent of adherence to tradition varies from “the abnegation of Judaism, or its reduction to a bare minimum of ethnic descent or cultural background” to the “small but determined group of Jews [that] perpetuates the pre-modern isolation of Judaism in order to be able to lead a life guided entirely by the Law (halakhah). . . .” It is the spectrum of this variation which is covered so extensively in this volume.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

PESACH SCHINDLER, a prominent educator, has frequently contributed to this department.

VICTOR SOLOMON is Rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Achim in Fairfield, Conn., and lectures in Sociology at the University of Connecticut.

BERTRAND FINK has recently become Rabbi of Congregation Montefiore-Woodmoore, Baltimore, Md.