

# The Link

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## The Lasting Gift Of Christmas

By Hassan S. Haddad

I can remember Christmas, at the age of six, as a dim picture of a shiny coin the size of a dime placed in my hand, soon to be translated into a few pieces of hard candy. Christians, in a rural community in the 1920's in northern Lebanon, as far as I can recall, did not attach too much importance to Christmas. The fact that I was the son of the Protestant minister of a small congregation probably made the Christmas season even less important.

Easter was a different matter. One could not help but observe the celebration of the spring season throughout the village. Colored eggs, sweets and new clothing were almost always in order. The bells of the Orthodox church nearby and those of the Catholic church on the neighboring hill rang most of the day.

When they observed Easter together, the celebration became clamorous. Young men held contests in bell ringing and weight lifting. This followed a three-day period of mourning for the death of the Sa-

vior. A real funeral took place on the Friday of Sorrows (Good Friday).

The vividness of these customs among the non-Protestants of the small village—the deep grief for the

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"The Wise Men Seeking the Christ Child," Collection of Eric Matson, held in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (By permission of the Trustees of the Matson Collection, Al Hambra, CA) This photograph, taken in the early 1900's by a commercial photographer

working in Palestine, was sold to pilgrims as a souvenir of the Holy Land. The subjects were Palestinian peasants living under British Mandate rule. Such pictures became the prototype for Christmas greeting cards in Europe and America.

# About This Issue

To reflect upon the meaning of Christmas is to return to the Middle East.

For historian Hassan Haddad this is not only a return to his childhood memories of Christmas in northern Lebanon as the son of a Protestant minister, it is a return of 1,400 years to the Koran and its beautiful retelling of the Annunciation and virgin birth, of 2,000 years to the Gospel stories of Matthew and Luke, of centuries earlier to the Sumerians and Egyptians, the Nabateans and Zoroastrians, and, beyond the Middle East, to Asia and the birth of Buddha.

Along the way, Professor Haddad is not uncritical of the ways Christmas has been exploited by one group or another. Still, he finds in the Christmas story, as in so many similar religious stories, a universal hope. It is that time of year when, confronted by sectarian bloodshed and fears of Armageddon, the way to peace is again pointed out to grownups by a child.

Our book review on page 13 is *The Menuhin Saga*, an autobiography by

another man who spent part of his childhood in the Middle East, in this case as a Russian Jewish immigrant in Palestine. Moshe Menuhin's journey eventually brought him to America, where he managed the illustrious career of his violinist son, Yehudi Menuhin. A close relative of the Lubavitcher rabbi, Moshe strove all his life to bridge the Jewish and Gentile worlds, a mission which ultimately led him to condemn Zionism as contrary to the universalist spirit of the great Jewish prophets. And, in light of our feature article, it is interesting to note, as our reviewer does, that it was a childhood experience in Russia, playing with Gentile children, that may have provided Moshe with the first joys of that universalism.

Our first issue in 1985 will examine recent bestselling books dealing with Palestinian history prior to 1948.

John Mahoney,  
*Executive Director*

dead God followed by exuberance and joy for his resurrection—contrasted favorably in my young mind with the sedate atmosphere of the simple Protestant church, with its blank walls and unimpressive bell mounted on the flat roof. The chanting in the Eastern mode inside an ornate church filled with incense sounded more “religious” to my ears than the singing of westernized hymns by a congregation possessing no musical talent.

Easter was the Big Feast and Christmas the Small Feast. That was how the villagers referred to them and that is how I remember them. People greeted each other on Christmas Day in a dry, formal way. But on Easter Day, with spring in the air and in the hearts of men, the greetings re-

flected the great hope that arrived in our rural community with the new season.

I still recall some of the Christmas cards sent by the American missionaries: snow on the ground, trees and roofs; horses pulling strange-looking vehicles without wheels. The cards alternated between the snowy scenes and those of men on camels in the desert following a bright star. Santa, the strange-looking fat man with the fuzzy white beard and unusually bright cheeks, was more alien to my vision of Christmas than even the wintry settings.

Perhaps Easter remains more vivid in my memory because of its connection to nature, to the spring season, to the chicken hatching, the sheep going out to pasture, the freedom of

children roaming barefoot, without fear of being cold or wet. Christmas, on the other hand, was relevant only in the colored pictures of Christmas cards. The shiny Star of Bethlehem on some of those cards never appeared in our sky!

More memorable are the hours I spent in awe of the drama played by the sea, the wind, the clouds and the mountain. The voices and colors of nature, its changing moods and seasons, were intimately experienced. I could almost touch the lightning, feel the mist gathering at the foot of the mountain bathed by the sea, ascending slowly to engulf the landscape and me. The sunsets were especially spectacular. Only the gods could produce such majestic displays.

I recognize now that as a child I saw the “mystery” from a favorite perch on the church roof rather than from the pew inside. Yet, in the vast and forgiving understanding of children, I accepted both approaches to the Mysterious. Fearing the authoritative God of the church, I prayed to him for security and reward. But I marvelled at the beauty and majesty of the sun, the sky, the fig tree with grapevine entwined in its branches. Silently I appreciated the generosity of nature and its continuous sensational performance, yet I was reluctant to relate the “roof” experience with that of the “pew.” If only Christmas could be attached to nature the way Easter was. Probably I would have more vivid memories of it! But my religious upbringing excluded this connection, which was prohibited and condemned as a return to pagan ways. God was not to be seen in the sun, the sea, the flowers and the stream in the nearby valley, but within the walls of the church, and in the words of a book that I could not yet read.

The book, I knew, told the story of the birth of God to a virgin (What was a virgin?). Mary and Joseph came on a long journey to Bethlehem, and Mary had her baby in a cave. The angels sang their song; the shepherds came to worship; the three kings from the Orient offered their gifts. The divine infant lay in the manger, and the bad King Herod wanted to kill him. God was the father of Jesus and Mary his Mother. Joseph's role

was not too clear to me. My mother would say, "You will understand one day; you are too young to know." But I was not really concerned. I enjoyed the story and that was enough.

Slowly, however, I became aware of the importance of knowing and believing just the right version of the story. Around me were endless arguments about the finer details of the birth, life and death of Jesus. Was the baby divine, human, or both? Was Mary always a virgin or did she have other children? One type of Christian was renouncing another because of disagreement on the nature of the newborn. The Muslims who lived in nearby villages that I had not visited did not believe that Jesus was God, I was told. I was not sure if that was only different, odd, or downright sinful. Much later I would learn that Islam had an equally miraculous story about the birth of Jesus, Son of Mary.

I went regularly to Sunday school (I had to) and I listened silently to the story told and interpreted every year. At Sunday school those who displayed a grasp of biblical details were rewarded with picture cards printed in America. The picture of Mary and the infant Jesus showed how beautiful and light-skinned they were. The houses, the trees, the sheep of the shepherds in those pictures looked somewhat unfamiliar. But that was accepted. After all, this was a divine family, and why should the divine people be like us?

Christmas came and departed quickly. For the rest of the year, the infant Jesus gave way to the man Jesus, a teacher. He told us how to be good (which meant, in part, saying our prayers), how to pity the poor (we always found people around who were poorer than we were), and how to love the enemy (which was hard to swallow). Interspersed with his teaching was the recounting of his miracles, making the weight of his commandments heavier. The concept of the "only true religion" was slowly but surely forming in my mind.

From then on, the Christmas story was to be learned according to Matthew and Luke, unquestionable saints. No deviation from the text was even contemplated. My wonderment was giving way to compulsion for exact-



Andrea della Robbia, "Madonna and Child", c. 1470-1475, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Gift of the Edith and Herbert Lehman Foundation, 1969)

ness in religious matters. The wonderful story of Jesus' birth had to be accepted as presented. There was no room for wondering. Wondering was doubting, and doubt was not "good."

Today I no longer wonder. Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem, or in Beirut, confirm the Western-American origin of Christmas. Trees that are not indigenous to the area are decorated with artificial snow. Presents, including the boxes and wrapping paper, are imported. Even the greetings, the carols, the bells and music are Western. "Bethlehem at Christmas is the kitsch capital of the world, one of the noisiest, most outrageous places."<sup>1</sup>

The original meaning of Christmas, a celebration of the gift of life, of fertility, of the salvation of the soul, was, over two thousand years, covered up by the cults of state, church, revolution, evolution, reason and theology. In its most modern form, Christmas has become a celebration of the consumer society.

Although the man is separated from the child by many years and many more miles, I cannot escape the influence of the wondering child still within me. It is through continued reflection on the history and the meaning of Christmas that I have come to recognize the wonders of a very familiar story.

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## Christmas And Other Birth Stories

To the ancients the birth of a child was a mystery, a sign of the continuity of life and the process of regeneration in nature. Archeological finds of prehistoric statuettes of pregnant women strongly suggest the "religious" significance of motherhood and childbirth. Historical documents from the ancient Near East are rich in references to the birth, the death and resurrection of the gods, as well as myths dealing with fertility and the continuity of life. The two pillars of Christian belief, namely the incarnation of God in Jesus (the virgin birth) and the death and resurrection of the Savior, reflect, therefore, a long line of common beliefs in the Near East, especially the Syro-Babylonian area.

We can safely assume that the cult of Mary and the story of the virgin birth belong to an ancient type of mythic expression common to the peoples of the Near East. Judaea, although part of that same environment, developed specifically different mythic and cultic expression that set it apart from the wider religious context of the Near East. The focus of religious life in this system is not on

cosmic, natural or even individual salvation, but on the community, on Israel as a political entity.

Christian theology, based principally on Paul's teaching, tries to reinterpret the cosmological nature of the Near Eastern religious tradition in the context of the historical-political thrust of the Old Testament. The problems resulting from this attempted union played an important role in the fragmentation of Christianity.

Jesus of Nazareth has three important titles. The first, Son of David or King of Israel, reflects the aspirations of those Jews who believed he was the Messiah (king). The second title is the Son of God who, as man, died to redeem the world of sin. The third title, Son of Man, reflects, though dimly, the religious atmosphere of the Hellenistic Near East. The virgin birth does not figure prominently in early Christian theology. It was totally absent from the Gospel of John and from St. Paul's theological discourses. This is possibly why, during the first four centuries of Christianity, no official date for the celebration of the birth of Jesus was assigned by the

Church, although two of the gospels already accepted as canonical by the Church, presented the virgin birth as an important ingredient in the sacred history of salvation. It was probably easier to fit the ancient myths of the dying-and-resurrecting god into the new syncretism of Paul than to find a place in it for a child-god. But the child-god, and the virgin birth, did prevail in the tradition of Christianity, a sure sign of the prevalence of this tradition among the converts.

The European Church, in fact, tried to suppress the celebration of Christmas when it realized that "pagan" customs within it would remain strong. These customs had their origin in the Yule feast of the Norsemen and in the Roman Saturnalia. The Yule feast gave Christmas, among other things, the evergreen decorations in houses and churches. Gift giving is borrowed from the Saturnalia. The old custom allowing slaves to change places and clothing with their masters, the election of a mock king (a custom found in very ancient Babylonian festivals) survived in modified form in Christmas celebrations for more than a thousand years. The Feast of Fools is one of these wild pagan customs. The Normans, in the 11th century, introduced into the English Christmas a master of ceremonies known as the Lord of Misrule (in Scotland, the Abbot of Unreason). A boy bishop was elected at this time from among the choir boys, and a mock king was also chosen.

Naturally, the Church heavily censured these pagan customs. But the celebrations of the Midwinter Festival, the birth of the invincible sun, and Mithra were too popular and too entrenched in the lives of the commoners to be easily abolished. The Church finally decided to recognize the feast, making it a celebration in honor of the Christian God. But Christmas never completely shed its pagan clothing.

The date of December 25 was not recognized officially as the date of the birth of Jesus until late in the fourth century, and it was not known officially by the name "Christmas" until about five hundred years later. During this time people referred to the celebration by the name of Mid-

winter Feast, which extended through the New Year into January 6.

Some measure of intemperance and debauchery of the old Roman Saturnalia has survived to the present in the celebration of the Midwinter Feast (including Christmas and New Year). Drinking and gambling are common in the Mediterranean countries, including the Near East. The Germanic Yule, with its old tree worship, greenery, mistletoe and wassail remains clearly in evidence in the Christmas of today.

The Reformation, at first, had little effect on Christmas customs. The Boar's head, once symbol of the Scandinavian Sun Boar, was joined by the newly discovered turkey on the Christmas table. Extreme Protestants, however, severely criticized these pagan practices. But it was not until the Puritans came to power in the 17th century that Christmas was attacked as "the old heathens' feasting day to Saturn their God." Christmas cards were forbidden along with most of the old customs. The English Army enforced the new rules by pulling down the greenery that festive "pagans" had attached to their doors. These rules spread to the Puritan territories in the American colonies. But this anti-Christmas wave did not have lasting effects. Christmas revival came about steadily. In America, Christmas first became a legal holiday in Alabama in 1836.

During the 18th century, however, there was a decline in the popularity of Christmas, especially in England. The revival of the day occurred by the middle of the 19th century, this time as a season of charitable deeds and help to the poor. Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol* gave Christmas a great boost. The character of Father Christmas or Saint Nicholas introduced the custom of giving gifts especially to the children. Combined with the cult of the evergreen tree from Germany and the Scandinavian countries, the old festival of lights led to the present-day, most important symbol of Christmas: the lighted and decorated Christmas tree. Kissing under the mistletoe reflects an ancient Scandinavian custom, while the frolicking and partying on Christmas and New Year bring back memories of the Ro-

man Saturnalia. Modern-day Christmas is a mosaic of cultural and religious symbols that existed for

thousands of years in a large area of the globe, covering India, the Near East and Europe.<sup>2</sup>

## Older Birth Stories

The child-god is found in very early Sumerian and Egyptian texts. The Sumerian god Dumuzi (later, Tammuz-Adonis), whose death and rescue from the nether world by Inanna, his mother, represents the renewal of nature, was also worshipped in the form of the child-god Damu. This form of Tammuz probably stood for the power in the rising sap in spring, and was favored by the orchard growers. He was visualized as a young child flanked by two women, his sister and mother. The mother goddess Inanna sings a song to her child, a lullaby which alludes to the fertile aspects of the child-god:

My child was lying in the suppatu  
rush,  
and the suppatu rush hushed.  
My child was lying in the halfa  
grass,  
and the halfa grass hushed.  
He was lying in the poplar tree,  
and the poplar rustled to him.  
He was lying in the tamarisk,  
and the tamarisk sang lullabies to  
him.<sup>3</sup>

The best known mother and child theme in Egyptian religion is that of Isis and Horus. This myth also emphasizes the roles of Isis, the wife of Osiris, and Horus, his son, in bringing



"The Goddess Isis and her God-Child," 1st-2nd Century, Egyptian Museum, Cairo

the murdered god back to life. In most of the Roman Empire during the first two centuries after Christ, the cult of Isis, together with that of Mithra, rivaled the struggling cult of the Christ, and was responsible for many representations of the goddess nursing the child Horus. Although the strong resemblance of the figure of Isis and Horus to that of the Madonna and Child made some "ignorant" Christians worship the Isis figure,<sup>4</sup> this so-called ignorance was, in fact, a simple and straightforward expression of the great mystery of Motherhood embodied equally in Isis and Mary.

Adonis, a later form of Tammuz, whose cult flourished especially along the Syrian coast, had a miraculous birth. His mother turned into a myrrh shrub, which gave birth to the divine lad. Adonis was a god of plants and bread. At Bethlehem ("house of bread"), traditional birthplace of Jesus, a grove of trees was dedicated to "that still older Syrian Lord, Adonis," well into the fifth century A.D., "where the infant Jesus had wept, the lover of Venus was bewailed."<sup>5</sup>

The Tammuz-Adonis myth, as well as the myths of the Baals of Syria, stressed the aspects of death and resurrection of the gods more than their birth. But in these non-Hebraic religions we find childhood, motherhood and fatherhood as attributes of the gods. In most of the ancient myths of regeneration and resurrection the female divinity was a prime agent, a savior: Inanna rescuing Tammuz from the nether world, Anat saving Baal from the jaws of Mot (death), Isis searching for the body of Osiris and restoring him to life. The biblical religious system, reflecting a strict, male-dominated, patriarchal society, totally rejected the feminine and juvenile aspects of the deity. In Christianity the feminine element of the divine barely survives only in traditionalist churches. The child-god exists in the story of the virgin birth, which, if eliminated, would hardly affect the Christian theological system.

The date of the birth of Adonis is not known. On December 25, however, Petra as well as other cities to the north, such as Adraa and Bostra (in present-day Syria) observed the

birthday of another form of Tammuz-Adonis, the Nabatean god Dusares (Arabic Dhul-Shara), "the only begotten of the Lord," born of the virgin goddess Allat. And in Alexandria, a celebration known as *kikellia* took place at midnight on December 25 when a statue of an infant was carried from the temple while worshippers chanted, "the virgin has given birth."<sup>6</sup>

The traditional birth stories of Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and Buddhism contain elements closely resembling the Christian stories, establishing their influence on the younger religion. The birth of the Zoroastrian savior was described as "of a virgin who had not had intercourse with a man." One of this story's most significant and poetic features is that, instead of crying as newborn babies do, this infant laughed. Moreover, his birth brought hope not just for men, but for all of nature:

In his birth, in his growth, the waters and trees rejoiced.

In his birth, in his growth, the waters and trees increased.

In his birth, in his growth, the waters and trees exclaimed with joy.<sup>7</sup>

It was Mithra, one of the deities of Zoroastrianism, that had the greatest affinity to the Christian infancy stories. The parallels between Mithraic beliefs and festivals and those of the emerging Christianity were so obvious that the early Church fathers denounced these similarities as the work of the devil, an attempt to discredit the true religion of Christ.

Mithraism spread throughout the Roman Empire beginning with the first century B.C. It remained strong and a serious rival to Christianity for three more centuries, declining, then disappearing when the Church declared Christianity the official religion of the empire.

Mithraism, a personal faith, emphasized the conflict between good and evil, and reward and punishment in an afterlife. Mithra, son of the Sun, was born in a cave of a virgin mother at the time of the winter solstice, December 25. Mithraists held a midnight service on that date to commemorate his nativity. Other points of similar-

ity between Christianity and Mithraism include the belief in the divinity of Mithra who, while on earth, devoted himself to the service of mankind and, after a "last supper" celebrating the end of his mission, ascended to heaven, from there to keep watch over the faithful.<sup>8</sup>

He was also identified with the invincible Sun (*sol invictus*), making the date of his birth correspond with the "return" of the Sun from its southward journey and of the renewed hope for the continuity of life. The celebrations of Mithra-sol *invictus*, so common and so popular in many of the Roman provinces, prompted the Church to assign that particular date to the birthday of Jesus. Many other dates had been suggested for Christmas, but December 25 seemed to satisfy the faithful for its appropriateness and its affinity to established traditions, and, at the same time, helped Church authorities overcome the Mithraic influence.

Ancient traditions are full of accounts of miraculous birth attributed to immortals as well as to famous mortals. King Sargon of Akkad, Amenophis III of Egypt, Ashurbanipal of Assyria, Alexander the Great, even Plato, were fathered by gods. Virgin birth was attributed to Aesculapius, Dionysus, Heracles and Hermes. Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome, descended from a vestal virgin. Augustus Caesar (during whose reign Jesus was born) claimed that his mother Atia, while asleep in the temple of Apollo, was visited by the god in the form of a serpent. The virgin birth of Augustus was assigned to the tenth month of the year, December.<sup>9</sup> In Hinduism, accounts of Krishna's infancy are particularly cherished, such as the touching story of Krishna being nurtured by his foster mother Yashoda.

Only one other story, however, equals that of Jesus' birth in beauty, symbolic significance and popularity. It is the story of the birth of Gautama Siddhartha Buddha, the light of Asia, born more than 500 years before the Nazarene and acknowledged by more than one quarter of the world population today. Buddhism was known, though not practiced, in the Near East long before the Christian era.



**"Yashoda and Krishna," Vijayanagar period, c. 14th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Purchase, Lita Annenberg Hazen Charitable Trust Gift, in honor of Cynthia Hazen and Leon Bernard Polsky, 1982)**

Although open to debate, Buddhist traditions very likely influenced the Christian birth stories. The similarities between the two traditions attest to the common concern of men all over the globe, and to their eternal quest to fathom the mysteries. F. Max Muller wrote: "If I do find in certain Buddhist works doctrines identically the same as in Christianity, so far from being frightened, I feel delighted, for surely truth is not the

less true because it is believed by the majority of the human race."<sup>10</sup>

The beauty of the narrative, and the artistic works representing the great event remain to this day a great source of inspiration. The mother of the future Buddha

... was beautiful as the water lily and pure in mind as the lotus. As the Queen of Heaven, she lived on earth, untainted by desire, and im-

maculate. The king, her husband, honored her in her holiness, and the Spirit of Truth, glorious and strong in his wisdom, like unto a white elephant, descended upon her.

The queen was travelling to her ancestral town to have her baby. In a beautiful grove along the way, the pain of travail came upon her.

Four pure-minded angels of the great Brahma held out a golden net to receive the babe, who came forth from her right side like the rising sun bright and perfect.

At her couch stood an aged woman imploring the heavens to bless the child. All the worlds were flooded with light. The blind received their sight by longing to see the coming glory of the Lord; the deaf and dumb spoke with one another of the good omens indicating the birth of the Buddha to be. The crooked became straight; the lame walked. All prisoners were freed from their chains and the fires of all the hells were extinguished.

No clouds gathered in the skies and the polluted streams became clear, whilst celestial music rang through the air and the angels rejoiced with gladness. With no selfish or partial joy but for the sake of the law they rejoiced, for creation engulfed in the ocean of pain was now to obtain release.

The cries of beasts were hushed; all malevolent beings received a loving heart, and peace reigned on earth. Mara, the evil one, alone was grieved and rejoiced not.

The Naga kings, earnestly desiring to show their reverence for the most excellent law, as they had paid honor to former Buddhas, now went to greet the Boddhisatta. They scattered before him mandara flowers, rejoicing with heartfelt joy to pay their religious homage.

A holy hermit came to pay his respects to the divine infant, and he spoke thus:

"I do not worship Brahma, but I worship this child; and the gods in the temples will descend from their places of honor to adore him.

"Banish all anxiety and doubt. The spiritual omens manifested indicate that the child now born will bring deliverance to the whole world.

"Recollecting that I myself am old, on that account I could not hold my tears; for now my end is coming on and I shall not see the glory of this babe. For this son of thine will rule the world.

"The wheel of empire will come to him. He will either be a king of kings to govern all the lands of the earth, or verily will become a Buddha. He is born for the sake of

everything that lives.

"The heavy gates of despondency will be open, and give deliverance to all creatures ensnared in the self-entwined meshes of folly and ignorance.

"The king of the law has come forth to rescue from bondage all the poor, the miserable, the helpless."<sup>11</sup>

The universality of salvation in this story goes beyond the goodwill to men to encompass all beings, the totality of creation.

standing still, and I observed the air in amazement, and the birds of Heaven at rest. Then I looked down at the earth, and I saw a vessel lying there, and workmen reclining, and their hands were in the vessel. Those who were chewing did not chew, and those who were lifting did not lift up, and those who were carrying to their mouths did not carry, but all faces were looking upward. I saw sheep standing still, and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, and his hand remained up. I observed the streaming river; and I saw the mouths of the kids at the water, but they were not drinking. Then suddenly all things were driven in their course.<sup>13</sup>

The universe, according to this account, held its breath for a moment when the divine child came into the world. Meanwhile, a cloud that shrouded the place

withdrew from the cave, and a great light appeared in the cave so that their eyes could not bear it. After a while the light withdrew, until the baby appeared. It came and took the breast of its mother.

Christmas lore today would be different and richer had some of these infancy books blended into the canonical books of the Bible. Some of the gap that exists in Matthew and Luke, between the nativity and manhood of Jesus, would have been filled. One of these infancy gospels, for example, portrays the boy Jesus as a divine prankster, who amazes and sometimes frightens the townfolk with his tricks and magical power. Despite their exclusion, these stories influenced the early Christmas customs and arts.

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## The Christmas Story

There are two different versions of the birth of Jesus that are generally accepted by Christianity, and a few others still extant in the apocryphal gospels. Matthew tells of the Immaculate Conception, the birth of the infant in Bethlehem, the visit of the three kings from the Orient, Herod's seeking to kill the child, the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, and their return, not to their original home but to Nazareth in the Galilee. Matthew is more concerned with proving that this event, in most of its details, was a fulfillment of prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel. Luke, on the other hand, details the circumstances of the birth. We learn that the parents of Jesus, Joseph and Mary, lived in Nazareth, and went to Bethlehem for the census ordered by Caesar. Here also we find other charming touches: there was no place in the inn; the baby was born in a manger, and wrapped in swaddling cloths. Also present are mythical aspects which make this version the most preferred and remembered. The shepherds were tending their flocks, the angels came to them and sang the famous Christmas carol: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." Matthew's oriental kings and their rich gifts are not in this version, and the shepherds are not in Matthew's.

The complete story of Christmas is

usually a combination of these two versions. But more details can be found in the apocryphal gospels, some just accounts of the infancy of Jesus, telling of his magical and miraculous deeds as a little boy. Portions of these gospels, probably quite popular in the Near East for centuries, are found in Islamic literature. The story in the Koran of the boy Jesus fashioning clay figurines of birds, then causing them to come alive and fly away, is found in one of these gospels.<sup>12</sup>

The most detailed story of the birth of Jesus appears in the Gospel of James, which dwells at length on the family history of Mary, and expands the birth story. One of the most beautiful passages in this version tells of Joseph's experience at the moment of birth:

Now, I, Joseph was walking about, and I looked up and saw the Heaven

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## Islamic Traditions

Less than seven centuries after the birth of Christ, the Near East was engulfed by the tide of a new religion. Islam recognized Jesus and the biblical

prophets as true Muslims, preceding Muhammad as messengers of the One God. Jesus is unique among all the prophets in that he was born of a



virgin mother, and did not taste death, but still lives. The Koran describes the miraculous birth and the Annunciation in beautiful rhymed prose.

Tell in the Book the story of Mary: how she withdrew from her people to a place in the East, and there wove a curtain to separate herself from them. Then We sent her Our Spirit, who took the form of a comely human being.

"May the Merciful One protect me from you," she said. "Leave me, if you are pious."

"I am your Lord's messenger," he said, "to give you a pure son."

"How can I have a son?" she asked. "No man has ever touched me, nor have I been unchaste."

"So shall it be," said he; "your Lord has said, 'it is easy for me; We shall make him a sign to the people and a blessing from Ourselves. So it is decreed.'"

Thereupon she conceived, and retired to a distant place. When she felt the birth-pangs she seized the trunk of a palm tree, and said, "Would that I had died ere now, alike forgetting and forgotten." Then the child called to her from beneath, "Do not grieve! Your Lord has placed a rivulet at your feet. Shake the trunk of the palm tree, and it will let juicy ripe fruit fall. Eat, drink and be of good cheer. If you see any human being, say, 'I have vowed a fast to the Merciful One; I will not speak to any man today.'"

Then she brought him to her people, carrying him, and they said to her, "Sister of Aron, this is extraordinary! Your Father was not a bad man nor was your mother a harlot." So she pointed to the child, but they said, "How can we speak to an infant in a cradle?" The child spoke up, "Indeed, I am Allah's servant. He has given me the Book; He has made me a prophet. He has made me blessed wherever I go; He has enjoined on me as long as I live prayer and almsgiving, and filial duty to my mother; He has made me neither arrogant nor miserable. Peace be upon me the day of my birth, the day of my death and the day of my being raised up alive!"

Such was Jesus, Son of Mary, the true Word concerning which they doubt. Far be it from Allah that He should beget a son! When He decrees that something shall be so, He has only to say "Be!"—and it is.<sup>14</sup>

Another Koranic text details the story of Mary and Anna, mother of John the Baptist. The angel tells Mary in that version: "Allah gives thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the hereafter . . . He will speak unto mankind."<sup>15</sup>

The story of the birth of Isa, Son of Maryam, was retold and embellished in many of the later Islamic commentaries and in the popular traditions. Al Ghazali recounts the events of the momentous day:

It is related that when Jesus, Son of Mary (peace be upon him) was born, the devils came to Iblis and said, "This morning the idols have been thrown down on their heads." Then he said, "This is a new thing which has happened. Remain where you are." Then he flew till he came to the East and the West of the earth, but found nothing. Afterwards he found Jesus (peace be upon him) already born with the angels doing him honor. Then he returned to them and said, "Verily a prophet has been born last night; no woman ever became pregnant or gave birth to a child without my being present, with the exception of this [child]. So despair of the idols being worshipped after this night; but attack the sons of men from the side of haste and levity."<sup>16</sup>

Islamic popular tradition contains miraculous birth stories about the Prophet Muhammad, and among the Shi'a in particular, about Fatima, his daughter, and Ali, her husband and the fourth Caliph. The mother of the prophet was informed of her being pregnant by an angel who came to her in between sleep and wakefulness. He spoke at birth. A bright light spread from him as far as Bosra in Syria, and the sacred fires [of Zoroastrianism] in Persia were extinguished for the first time in a thousand years. The throne of Khosroes shook and all the idols bowed down. Gabriel,

the archangel, came to him when he was a small child, opened his chest, and cleansed his heart.<sup>17</sup>

Shi'a traditions tell of Ali's miraculous birth. He was the only one to be born in the holy Kaaba, and to have immediately recited all the holy scriptures of the Jews, Christians and Muslims. Fatima, called also the Virgin and Zuhra (Venus), gave birth to both her sons, Hasan and Husain, in a supernatural way. She was attended at her labor by Mary, Mother of Jesus, and other famous women of the past.<sup>18</sup>

Isa (Jesus) and Maryam, his mother, were elevated to the mystical spheres by the Sufis (mystics) of Islam. The miracle of the virgin birth, according to their mystical interpretations, confirms the closeness of the Divine and asserts the truth of man's partaking of God's divinity. The Sufis venerated Maryam, the Virgin, Zuhra, the Immaculate. "She is often taken as the symbol of the spirit that receives divine inspiration and thus becomes pregnant with the divine light. Here the purely spiritual role of the female receptacle is fully accepted, and few stories can compete in tenderness with Rumi's description of the Annunciation as told in the Mathnawi."<sup>19</sup>

Mary in her chamber saw a form that gave increase of life—a life increasing, heart ravishing one. That trusted Spirit rose up before her from the face of the earth, like the moon and the sun.

Beauty unveiled rose up from the earth in such splendor as the sun rises from the East.

It blossomed from the earth like a rose before her—like a phantasy which lifts its head from the heart.

Mary became selfless, and in her selflessness she said, "I will leap into the Divine protection."

Because the pure-bosomed one had made a habit of betaking herself in flight to the Unseen.

Since she deemed the world a kingdom without permanence, she prudently made a fortress of that Divine Presence.

Zuhra hath not the courage to breathe a word; Universal Reason, when it sees Him, humbles itself.

"What shall I say? For He has sealed my lips; His furnace has consumed the channel of my breath. "I am the smoke of that fire, I am the evidence for it."<sup>20</sup>

According to Sufi reasoning, Jesus as man and as the Spirit of God and his Word brings two poles of existence together and annuls the gap. This truth is not reached by the rational workings of the mind but by

the heart. The heart could be compared to Jesus, who was nurtured by Mary's milk. The Sufi's quest for the truth goes through the heart by the method of dhikr (meditation on and rhythmic repetition of the Divine Name). This attitude towards God is direct, unmasked and unhampered by beliefs, books or loyalties—like a child's. Religions and sects become irrelevant. There is nothing between the I and Thou.

All sects but multiply the I and Thou;  
This I and Thou belong to partial being;

When I and Thou and several beings vanish,  
Then Mosque and Church shall bind thee never more.<sup>21</sup>

A partial being, in this sense, is one who grows out of his child-attitude, his thinking with the heart, to become involved in sectarian concerns. Salvation from this "fragmentation" is to return to the child in us. Jesus said: "Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."<sup>22</sup>

## The Child And The Kingdom

After more than 30 American-style Christmas celebrations, with decorated trees, Santa Clauses, and frantic shopping, the little boy from the "Mountain of the Gods," grown up,

emigrant and wise to the world, goes back to the scene of his childhood. In a land torn by sectarian wars, the theology of politics has turned the sectarian gods, saints and prophets

into advocates of war and destruction. The cross of the Savior decorates the uniform of a killer; the crescent of the prophets is raised on the flag of the fighting militia; and the Star of David on the wing of a killer airplane rains death on innocent children. Over Beirut, on Christmas and New Years eves, the feasts of peace and hope are celebrated with tracer bullets, streaking with bright blue lines through the crisp Mediterranean night sky.



Monsignor John G. Nolan at the Pontifical Mission Orphanage in Bethlehem, Christmas morning 1982 (Courtesy of Catholic Near East Welfare Association)

Ironically, churches of Lebanon and Palestine repeat the two thousand year-old chant of the angels: "Peace on earth, and goodwill to men." The chants and the aroma of incense, however, are overpowered by the smell of gunpowder and the stench of death, in Sabra and Shatila, in the villages of South Lebanon, in the hills of Galilee, at the gates of Jerusalem, and right by the cave in Bethlehem where a star marks the spot of the birth of the infant-god, the "Prince of Peace."

I looked for the infant prince on Christmas in Chicago and New York, but what I saw was a paunchy old man with a fuzzy white beard who often scared little children in the cathedrals of consumerism. The little god had been chased out of the "temple" by the money changers.

Jesus was condemned by the Jewish hierarchy not because he claimed to be the Messiah, but because he failed their test of Messiahship; because he rejected the confinement of God in a temple, the limitation of the law in a book, and the reduction of God's rule to a tribal kingdom. The Roman authorities also condemned Jesus because, like all colonialists throughout history, they ruled their subjects according to the demands of political expedience rather than the code of justice.

The Child Jesus began to die, in fact, the moment when theologians of established Christianity chose to treat the divine story of his birth and sacrifice as only history:

It is true that the birth of Christ is told as a history—that it happened in that particular place and that particular time; but history has an eternal significance only when it is also myth, when the past fact symbolizes the timeless present reality. Otherwise, its significance is merely temporal, since it is nothing but a past event whose effects must in time wear off, and pass into oblivion. To say that this historical event was the Incarnation of God is, quite necessarily, to say that its significance is eternal rather than temporal since God, the Eternal, is what it signifies. But it is almost nonsense to say that it is the only

historical event, which has this significance.<sup>23</sup>

The story of the newborn Jesus, Son of Mary, is a symbol of birth and renewal, of the eternalization of hope by a basic, yet mysterious human condition—which is the greatest gift bestowed by the gods on humanity. It represents salvation in a living icon of mother-and-child. It is the forgiveness of the transgressions of adults in the manger. Within those miraculous birth stories from all over the world is the yearning in the human soul to be uplifted to the spiritual level of the child-divinity. In them we partake of God's divinity while God is partaking of our humanity. Between birth and death, man gravitates away from and back into the divine. "We are God's and to Him we shall return," states the Koran, describing the life orbit. Childhood is the starting point of that orbit, the closest to God.

The beauty and the meaning in the birth stories lies not so much in their supernatural elements—at least not in some of the awkward details—but in the simple but mysterious truth of a common everyday occurrence: the gift of new life. The mother-and-child image is the primary symbol of linkage between God and man. In it the simple innocence of childhood and the deepest ponderings of the philosopher stand on equal footing. It represents the ideal of love, a primary attribute of God, that rises above the good and the evil that adult men and women can do or imagine.

The birth of the infant-god is a cause of enlightenment, not only because it is a chance to have a glimpse of the splendor of God, but, probably more so, because it raises questions and creates wonderment. Still, the myth of the divine infant conveys a simple truth, that of the common origin and destiny of all humanity.

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## A Child Shall Lead Them

The Prophet Isaiah's vision of the golden age to come, of the reign of peace, consists of images of harmonious coexistence among all creatures:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with  
the kid,  
and the calf and the lion and the  
fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.<sup>24</sup>

In this passage, the child symbolizes the indispensable requirements for the Peaceful Kingdom: a pure heart and a generous toleration of differences.

While the birth of the divine child is a symbol of human destiny, childhood stands as the beacon of the human condition. This is possibly the cornerstone of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. More important than the Sermon on the Mount is his child-sermon, a short, demonstrative sermon (comparable to the silent lotus sermon of the Buddha).

At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, "Truly, I say unto you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>25</sup>

The question of the disciples was a political one. They were concerned with rank and tenure in the kingdom.

The three gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke refer to the child-sermon in different ways. But the treatment of this theme in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas gives it more emphasis:

Jesus said, "Let not the old man who is full of days hesitate to ask the child of seven days about the place of life; then he will live.

Jesus saw some infants at the

breast. He said to his disciples, "These children on the breast are like those who enter the kingdom."

His disciples said to him, "When will you appear to us? When shall we see you? Jesus said, "When you disrobe yourselves without being ashamed, when you take off your garments and lay them at your feet as small children do, and trample on them, then you will become the sons of the living God, and you shall have no fear."<sup>26</sup>

In his child-sermons, Jesus answers the basic question of the road to salvation. He stresses the being-like-a-child as the primary requirement. This supercedes and rituals and the sacraments. The child-god does not recognize the original sin. The child-god has abolished hell.

The virgin birth, and the lesson of the child as a model of the saved person were, unfortunately, left out of the theological system of Paul and of the Gospel of John. Paul's theology of pre-existence did not find room for the divine birth or the divinity of childhood. The "Word is God" of John's gospel is not linked to the human condition, neither through the birth nor the childhood. Besides the synoptic gospels, and some of the apocryphal writings, this theme is ignored. The Book of Revelation, a basic gospel for the prophecy-oriented churches, is filled with frightful images of dragons and beasts, yet devoid of any reference to the children in the kingdom of heaven.

All this may explain why Christmas was not an important day in early Christianity, or why, even today, it is more of a celebration of Santa Claus from the North Pole, rather than of the myth of the eternal child from Bethlehem. Although the early Church belatedly acknowledged a day of celebration for the birth of Jesus, and lent some importance to the Mother of God, it did so probably because of the pressure from the "common flock" (the closest religiously to the nature of the child), rather than due to the conviction of the theologians. Mystics, in such cases, usually come to the rescue. But Christianity had very few mystics. The mystics of Islam (Sufis) reflected more on Jesus

and Mary as symbols of the link between the divine and the human.

The Protestant Reformation further demoted the mother (feminine) and child elements in its theology. By insisting on the exclusive and literal authority of the Bible, including the Old Testament, Jesus as Son of David prevailed over Jesus as Son of Man. The preoccupation with covenant, chosen people and eschatology prevented the child from reaching the inner circle of faith. The cult of Israel, which has replaced the simple faith of the child-sermon, dominated the minds of Jesus' disciples and most of those who followed him. "Master," they kept asking, "when are you going to return the kingdom to Israel?" And he would set a child in their midst, but they would not understand. And he would say, "The kingdom I am seeking is a spiritual one, not of this world." But they kept on asking.

As one writer has pointed out, "What a people does with its gods must always be one clue, and perhaps the safest, to what it thinks."<sup>27</sup> The demotion of the Child and the Mother in favor of the strong-armed deity, and the replacement of the spiritual kingdom with earthly Israel, points to one thing: the road to Armageddon. Only the religion of the heart can set the rules for peace in the "Holy Land" and in all the holy lands of the world. Ibn 'Arabi, one of the greatest masters of Sufism, sings of the religion of the heart:

My heart is capable of every form:  
A cloister for the monk, a fane for  
idols,  
A pasture for gazelles, the votary's  
Kaaba.  
The Tables of the Torah, the Koran.  
Love is the faith I hold: wherever I  
turn  
His Camels, still the one true  
faith is mine.<sup>28</sup>

In the Christmas season of 1984, the Land of Jesus, and the great nations of Christendom, still reject the child-god and the childlike religion of the heart. Wars are waged in the name of the Yahweh, Jesus, and Allah. We still want to establish kingdoms in service to our war gods. The simple teaching of love in the mode

of the child has been replaced by militant sermons by priests, ministers, ayatullah and rabbis. We have hardly any Sufis left, hardly any mystics, and poetry of religion is rare. God as the Child, the Singer, the Poet, the Heart is not in the manger.

It is fitting to end with a short prayer for the Son of Man uttered by the man from Lebanon, Kahlil Gibran:

Poet, Singer, Great Heart,  
May our God bless your name,  
And the womb that held you, and  
the breasts that gave you milk,  
And my God forgive us all.<sup>29</sup>

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## Notes

1. William and Alma Clairborne, Christmas Where It All Began," in *The Washington Post Magazine*, December 20, 1981.
2. See L. Whistler, *The English Festivals* (Heinemann, 1947); Eric Maple, "Christmas" in *Man, Myth, and Magic* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corp., 1979), pp. 480-483.
3. Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 27, 70.
4. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough (Adonis, Attis, Osiris)*, vol. ii (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1933), p. 119.
5. *Op. cit.*, p. 257.
6. S. H. Langdon, *The Mythology of All Races*, vol. v (Semitic) (Boston: Archeological Institute of America, 1931), pp. 16-18.
7. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 210.
8. G. W. Gilmore, in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), art. "Mithra."
9. C. A. Beckwith, *op. cit.*, art. "Virgin Birth."
10. Quoted in Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha* (Chicago and London: Open Court Publishing Company, 1915), p. xi.
11. *Op. cit.*, pp. 7-10.
12. Koran, Sura iii. 49. *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, in Willis Barnstone, ed., *The Other Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 399.
13. *The Infancy Gospel of James (Protevangelium Jacobi)* in *op. cit.*, p. 390.
14. Koran, Sura xix. 16-35.
15. Koran, Sura iii. 45.
16. Quoted in James Robson, *Christ in Islam* (London: J. Murray, 1929), pp. 81-82. Cp. Tha-labi, *Qisas al-Anbia'* (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 213 ff.
17. Stories of the miraculous birth and infancy of the prophet and members of

his family are taken from Shablangi, *Nur al-Absar* (Cairo, 1963), *passim*.  
 18. Al-Bursi, *Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqin* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, n.d.), *passim*.  
 19. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 429.  
 20. *The Mathnawi of Jalauddin Rumi*, translated by R. A. Nicholson. E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, new series iv, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), verses

3700 ff.  
 21. Poetry by Shbastari, quoted in N. S. Fatemi, *Sufism: Message of Brotherhood, Harmony and Hope* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1976), p. 19.  
 22. Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17.  
 23. Alan W. Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (New York: Vanguard Press, n.d.), pp. 129-30.  
 24. Isaiah 11:6.  
 25. Matthew 18: 1-4; cp. Mark 9:36 and

Luke 9:47.  
 26. *The Gospel of Thomas*, sayings nos. 4, 22, 37. See *The Other Bible*, pp. 300, 302, 303.  
 27. Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. vii.  
 28. Quoted in N.S. Fatemi, *Sufism*, pp. 60-61.  
 29. Khalil Gibran, *Jesus, The Son of Man* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1983), p. 216.

## Book Views

### The Menuhin Saga

By Moshe Menuhin  
 Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1984,  
 278 pp., 15 pounds.

### By Henry G. Fischer

The principle "audience" of this book, as publishers put it, will very naturally be those interested in the musical careers of Yehudi Menuhin and his sisters, Hephzibah and Yalta. On that score it is of great value in correcting the innumerable distortions that have obscured the circumstances of their family life, their general education and their musical training. For readers of the *Link*, this aspect of the book will be outweighed by the story of Yehudi's father and his evolution, from an ultra-conformist Hasidic childhood in the Jewish Pale of Settlement of Czarist Russia, to that of a totally emancipated American, still deeply attached to his Jewish heritage, but increasingly hostile to Zionist nationalism, which he regarded as a betrayal of his heritage. His ideas on that score are well expressed in his *Decadence of Judaism in Our Time*,<sup>1</sup> but the present account of his spiritual and intellectual evolution has, in my opinion, even greater impact and immediacy.

Moshe Menuhin was no ordinary member of the Hasidic community into which he was born. He was a direct descendant, through his mother, of the founder of Habad Hasidism, Schneur Zalman of Liady—his great, great grandson to be exact. Further-

more, he was apparently the nephew (again through his mother) of the celebrated Rabbi Shalom Dov Baer Schneerson, and while staying at the Lubavitch court of that potentate would have his plates piled high at mealtimes, so that the leftover food could be carried home by other guests to confer a blessing on their families. He describes the extremely ritualistic life of Hasidism, that had its moments of exaltation and joy, but provided little outlet for a spirit that was already seeking wider horizons and human contacts. His yearning for freedom found escape in flying kites with the Russian peasant children with whom he even shared their non-kosher picnic meals on such excursions. After the premature death of his father, young Moshe found life more difficult in the crowded household of a new stepfather, and his mother sent him, at the age of 10, to Jerusalem, to live with his paternal grandfather, a saintly, pious man whom he greatly revered. His grandfather did not tolerate Moshe's continued passion for flying kites, and cut short an attempt to take violin lessons—these being activities unworthy of a Hasidic rabbi's grandson. Nonetheless, the boy was attracted by the music that emanated from the local Russian church, and, already well versed in Hasidic psalmody, he astonishingly had the courage to enter among the Christians who had been persecuting his kinsmen in the name of religion, and took part in singing their hymns and an-

them. He says: "Those hymns and anthems echo as powerfully in my memory as my grandfather's Hasidic songs." His contact with the world beyond the narrow confines of Jewish orthodoxy was further enlarged by having to do the family shopping at the Arab markets, and learning colloquial Arabic in the process. Although he never felt any hostility towards or from the Arab majority of the population, he enrolled at the age of 15 in the Gymnasium Herzlia, where nationalistic Zionism and hatred of the Arabs was dinned into him for four years. He was not altogether converted to this school of thought, however, and one experience in particular deepened his resistance. He wanted to be rid of a tooth that projected from his lower jaw in a disfiguring manner, and went to an Arab dentist in Jaffa.<sup>2</sup> Despite his being informed that the boy was a student of the Gymnasium Herzlia, the dentist took him on as a patient at no cost and repaired all the damage that had accumulated through years of neglect. After two months of treatment the dentist refused any payment and only asked Moshe to try to rid his heart of the hatred for Arabs pumped into it by his Zionist teachers. In his own autobiography, *Unfinished Journey* (p. 6), Yehudi belittles this story, saying that the dentist "all unwittingly supplied a grain of substance to my father's growing disillusionment with Zionism. However, it was exasperation with narrow religious orthodoxy that led to

his ultimate rejection of it, I believe." The first of these statements is patently untrue, for the dentist was clearly trying to demonstrate to a presumed Zionist that Arabs were capable of kindness and generosity. And from my own experience, I judge his action to be very much in character. As for the second statement, while it is perfectly true that Moshe was freeing himself from narrow orthodoxy, there was evidently nothing about his grandfather's orthodoxy that expressed Zionist sentiments. Any sentiments of that sort were the work of the irreligious Gymnasium.

The next step in his emancipation was his departure to America where he intended to continue his studies in preparation for an eventual return to Palestine. Before telling of his move to America, however, he portrays an Arab Palestine that is totally at variance with the picture recently presented by Joan Peters in *From Time Immemorial*, where she argues that the Arab presence only acquired importance during the British Mandate, not to be established for another ten years. "In those days," says Moshe Menuhin, "almost all the land, homes and businesses in Palestine were Arab-owned, and Arabs formed almost the entire body of its farmers and workers, skilled and unskilled." Furthermore:

They ran Palestine. They were not only its working people but also its officials, judges and policemen. Although the country was part of the Ottoman Turkish empire, I never saw a Turkish official in all the years I was there. Everything was Arab and there was no oppression. I was never molested, not once, and no one interfered in our lives.

The Zionist principles that the young Moshe took with him to America at the age of 20 were those of Ahad Ha-Am's cultural and spiritual Zionism. His next ever-enlarging source of inspiration was the universalist philosophy of Woodrow Wilson, compared to which "political Zionism seemed suddenly backward, negative and base." By then he had married Marutha, whom he had met in Palestine, and she shared his political views. His

disenchantment deepened when, in 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour made his famous (or infamous) declaration. For many years, however, Moshe's time was fully occupied, initially by his successful struggle to set up a system of Hebrew schooling in San Francisco, and to support a family of five, then by the responsibility, shared by his wife, of providing private instruction for his extraordinarily gifted children, and finally by the problem of managing Yehudi's career, and musical training. In all of this there is much that will interest those who are devoted to music, and the account of Yehudi's (and Hephzibah's) career occupies nearly two-thirds of the book, with only a brief mention of the deteriorating situation of "spiritual Zionism," resulting from a chance encounter with Dr. Judah Magnes in 1929 (p. 139).

But the book concludes with an informative account of the author's active political involvement in defense of Dr. Magnes' ideals of Jewish-Arab rapprochement, and against the brand of Jewish nationalism advocated by the Biltmore Hotel meeting in May 1942. In 1945 Moshe joined the American Council of Judaism in condemning "the political emphasis now paramount in the Zionist programme." And in 1965, when nothing remained of the old Zionism he once believed in, he published, at his own expense, a searing indictment of the nationalists: *The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time*. My review of it in *The Link*<sup>3</sup> led to a lively correspondence between us, which continued to his death. I was therefore aware of the progress he was making on the present book, and had an opportunity to see two versions of the complete manuscript. It came to more than 1,700 pages—about three times the length that any commercial publisher would accept—and this problem was resolved only just before the author's death, early in 1982. There is no question that the original version was too wordy and repetitious, although it was a difficult task to reduce it while still retaining the fire and spirit that were so characteristic of Moshe. The London editor to whom this task was entrusted failed in the endeavor, and

Colin Edwards, a close friend of Moshe's who had already done some editorial revision for him, and was delegated as his literary agent, was then saddled with the problem of producing an acceptable version on short notice and in the face of some unexpected obstacles. He has done a remarkably fine job in reducing an unwieldy manuscript into a very readable text.

Even if one has no ear for music, the third of this book that deals with Moshe Menuhin's emancipation from narrow orthodoxy and Zionism makes it uniquely valuable to all who are genuinely concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For that same reason, however, it seems doubtful that it will be published in this country; or that, if published, it will be widely distributed. Thus, because of Moshe Menuhin's magnanimous and independent spirit, the devotees of music will also be denied a fascinating series of accounts dealing with dozens of contemporary performers and composers.

The book concludes with a tribute to Hephzibah Menuhin by her brother, an Appendix on Hasidism, another Appendix on books dealing with the subject of Zionist collaboration with the Nazis and Fascists,<sup>4</sup> a series of notes,<sup>5</sup> and a very useful index. There are also eight pages of photographs.

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## Notes

1. The same theme has been taken up more recently by Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht in *The Fate of the Jews*, but she regretfully fails to mention Moshe Menuhin's earlier work.
2. The text says Jerusalem, but it is clear from the original manuscript that it was near the local bank in Jaffa. On the taped version of this story (see *Link* V, No. 3, May/June 1972) the dentist is identified as Dr. Zaharin.
3. Vol. II, No. 5 (Nov./Dec. 1969).
4. Greatly reduced by the publisher, much of this material will be restored in future editions.
5. The reference for note 3 on p. 211 (misnumbered, and consequently overlooked) is *P.M.*, Dec. 11, 1945. I cannot supply the missing note 7 on p. 258, or the missing note 1 of Chapter XXX.

# Books To Order

## New Selections

□ Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, South End Press, 1983, 481 pp., \$10.00. Examines the "special relationship" between Israel and the United States, and how this relationship has led to a disastrous U.S. foreign policy, dangerous tensions within Israeli society, and irrational hatred in the United States and Israel towards Palestinian and other Arab moderates. Our price, \$7.00.

□ Moshe Menuhin, *The Menuhin Saga*, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984, 278 pp., 15 pounds. Memoirs of a leader of the Jewish anti-Zionist movement from his childhood as an orthodox Jew in Russia and Palestine to his life in America as manager of his son's career as a concert violinist. Our price, \$17.50. See review on page 13.

□ Merle Thorpe, *Prescription for Conflict: Israel's West Bank Settlement Policies*, Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1984, 182 pp., \$7.95. Includes an 80-page photo study of life on the West Bank, plus a foreword by Amnon Kapeliouk, and an introduction by Simha Flapan. Our price, \$3.95.

□ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Palestinian Rights: Affirmation and Denial*, Medina Press, 225 pp., \$7.95. In this book of essays, seventeen distinguished international scholars examine, analyze and detail Palestinian national rights, including their right to national identity, sovereignty in Palestine, return and representation. The international assessment and response to these rights and their violation by Israel are carefully probed and documented. Our price, \$3.95.

□ Dewey Beegle, *Prophecy and Prediction*, Pryor Pettengill, 274 pp., \$5.95 (paperback). Refutes the biblical claim of Zionists to the Promised Land by discussing what the Bible teaches about prophecy, especially concerning the predictions of events which already have occurred and those which are to come. Our price, \$4.50.

□ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Bantam Books, New York, 1982, 622 pp., \$22.50. Drawing from the 5,000 page diary he kept as President, Carter

evaluates his accomplishments and disappointments. A sizeable portion is devoted to Camp David with minute-by-minute accounts of the negotiations and private meetings with Middle Eastern officials. Our price, \$9.50.

□ Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?*, Lion Publishing, Herts, England, 1983, 253 pp., \$3.95. Outlines the conflicting claims to the Holy Land from the time of the Bible on. Discusses the relevancy of biblical promises to the modern age. Our price, \$2.75.

□ Richard Curtiss, *A Changing Image: American Perceptions of the Arab-Israeli Dispute*, American Educational Trust, Washington, D.C., 1982, 216 pp., \$9.95. Traces the evolution of American public opinion on the Arab-Israeli conflict; concludes that it is becoming more balanced, and that this trend will continue. Our price, \$7.25.

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