

his failures, and he does not mortgage his life into bondage to the failure of others' (p. 29).

This book consists of a collection of essays by Ayn Rand and a number of additional articles by Nathaniel Branden. After introducing the essential tenets of Objectivist ethics, the writers move into a wide range of contemporary problems such as intimidation, counterfeit individualism, racism, the nature of government, man's rights, the cult of moral grayness. They ask and ponder the questions: Isn't everyone selfish? Doesn't life require compromise? How does one lead a rational life in an irrational society?

In his reason-bound schema of reality, the Objectivist has no place for faith. He refers to it as "a malignancy that no system can tolerate with impunity," with the further qualification that "the man who succumbs to it, will call on it in precisely those issues where he needs his reason most" (p. 38). Despite all of his apparent air of bravado, the humanistic Objectivist seems to be whistling in the dark, a lonely itinerant without any "invisible" means of support. With his ultimate commitment to that which is less than ultimate, self, he cannot ever hope to regain that requisite relationship with his Maker and subsequent interaction with his fellow man, mediated by love, to acquire that wholeness which is holiness, which is blessedness, which is happiness.

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A Story of Friendship

R. EDWARD JOHNSON

THE CHOSEN

By Chaim Potok

Simon and Schuster, Inc., New York, 1967 284 pp \$4.95 paper \$3.95

The Chosen is a moving story of both generational and religious conflict among Hasidic and orthodox Jews in the late 1940's. The incidents that take place in a tiny section of Williamsburg in Brooklyn have universal implications. The struggles of Jewry in this regional microcosm are parabolic of the quest of those of each generation and religion who see themselves as "the chosen." Through this remarkable book, which offers a great deal of information about the complexities of Talmudic study, the origins of Hasidism, and Jewish customs, Potok portrays the intricacy and poignancy of human relations.

The protagonists are two fifteen-year-old boys, sensitive Reuven Malter and brilliant but troubled Danny Saunders, and their fathers. Danny is a member of the ultraorthodox sect distinguished by earlocks, broadbrimmed hats, and long, black overcoats. His father, Reb Saunders, is a tzaddik, a Hasidic rabbi, who believes that his sect alone is fulfilling God's will. Custom demands that Danny follow his father

as the sect's leader, though he is personally inclined toward psychology. Reuven practices a liberal Judaism. Malter, his father, is a Zionist writer and scholar.

Conflict begins with a rousing softball game between the two yeshiva (parochial) schools. A fever of competition drives the Hasidic team to defend its religious honor. Generations of Hasidic hatred for the Apikoros (educated Jews who deny basic tenets of the faith) seem now to be present in the overwhelming urge to "kill Reuven." Sensitive Reuven is frightened by the inordinate drive to win. "I felt as if all the previous years of my life had led me somehow to this one ball game and all the future years of my life would depend upon its outcome." Danny, a vicious place hitter, slams a line drive into Reuven's face. The hit shatters Reuven's glasses and lodges a fragment in the cornea of his left eye. Danny visits Reuven in the hospital while Reuven's sight hangs in the balance.

The vision of his newfound friend is recovered. Danny reevaluates his sect's concept of "the Chosen," and out of this incident a motif for the book emerges. Regaining the sight of the injured eye becomes the means by which the whole world is brought into clearer focus. The two former enemies see the parochial nature of their hatred. Danny begins to question his father and Hasidic ways. Both boys realize instinctively that it is the human factor in man, not the divine, that breeds distance and misunderstanding. Through this new perspective, the heterogeneous character of man becomes a delight to be appreciated and not a wrong to be deplored. The conflict that separated the boys serves to fuse their friendship. They even admire and respect rather than damn their religious differences.

Destined by Hasid custom to inherit his father's mantle of authority in the sect, Danny is brought up "in silence," that he might "know compassion," for "words conceal the heart." Reb Saunders believes silence to be the only relationship that a father and son should enjoy beyond the rigors of Talmudic study. In *The Chosen*, silence is the means of instruction, the ultimate in communication between a man and his soul. It has unique quality and dimension. Far from being a void, silence becomes a means to participate in and shape reality. Between the warmth of friendship and the ugliness of hatred, silence captures the characters' greatest moments of life. "The tzaddik sits in absolute silence, saying nothing, and all his followers listen attentively." As the Talmud says, "A word is worth one coin, silence is worth two."

Danny is not content with only Talmudic study, and his curiosity and intelligence carry him beyond the rigid confines of Hasidic ritual. His is the quest of youth who seek to relieve themselves of the traditions of a previous generation, to build their own futures. Danny goes secretly to the public library to read the "forbidden books," because his sect prohibits "secular works" of literature, science, and especially psychology. Extensive reading soon develops within him a growing interest in Freud. He wishes that he did not have to be a rabbi. An anguished struggle follows as he seeks to escape from the choking orthodoxy without breaking his father's heart. As a serious student, devoted to faith and family, he feels that rebellion is a hideous act.

The fathers split over the issue of Zionism. Reb Saunders, believing the Messiah will set up the kingdom when he comes, opposes the state of Israel as an interference of man. Consequently, he forbids Danny to associate with Reuven. Though disagreeing, Malter, the more liberal Talmudic scholar, feels that "honest differences of

opinion should never be permitted to destroy a friendship. . . . Ideas should be fought with ideas, not with blind passion." Refusing to tolerate the bitterness of his son toward Reb Saunders, Malter observes, "The fanaticism of men like Reb Saunders kept us alive for two thousand years of exile."

The two families are finally reconciled and the silence between the fathers is ended. Through Reuven, Reb Saunders reveals himself to Danny and thus frees his son to be a man. While Danny studies to be a psychologist, Reuven, ironically, enters the rabbinate.

The central theme of *The Chosen* is friendship. Friendship permeates the story and brings other themes into its larger perspective. The relationship of the two boys contrasts with the wide separation of their fathers. Reuven's father encourages his son to build lasting friendships; the conservative Reb Saunders does not like his son to "mix with outsiders." Yet they both agree with the Talmud, which says, "A person should do two things: one is to acquire a teacher, the other, choose a friend." In *The Chosen*, Potok dissolves generational and religious conflict in the depth of friendship. A knowledge of this abiding relationship helps us to see that all who choose a friend are in some sense *the chosen*.

How Can Man Find God?

PAUL O. CAMPBELL

JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

By R. Rubin Widmer

Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, 1967 142 pp \$4.50

To consider three views on how the light of salvation comes to men, Widmer classifies theologians — the liberals, the neotheologians, and the evangelicals — and explains the views of each group. He recognizes that theologians in the same group may differ and that group boundaries are not distinct, yet he names specific men as representatives of each group.

The liberals, as do the other two groups, believe that Christ is the One Light; but also they hold that all religions have some truth and that, hence, Christianity is not unique. According to this view, inspiration is not in the Word but in the message; emphasis is on the authority of man because of his judgment in science, his knowledge of history, and his feeling for worship.

According to the neotheologians and the evangelicals, Christ is the Light and reveals himself through the Scriptures, nature, and direct revelation. The evangelical view distinguishes itself from the neotheological view by the relative emphasis on the method of revelation: that knowledge obtainable through nature is not sufficient for salvation; that light is not automatically available; that God limits himself to working through men and the Holy Spirit.