

of novelty that many have made about social movements of the 1960s. In the process, he illuminates important details of Friedan's early life by mining everything from her papers while a student at Smith College to her articles for the labor press.

At times bold and at others repetitious and contradictory, Horowitz tries both to unearth Friedan's early radicalism and to criticize *The Feminine Mystique* for its diminished, "lily-white," middle-class perspective. He thinks Friedan's opus denies her activities in behalf of blacks, workers, and other disfranchised groups—activities of which she ought to "be proud." He criticizes the book for not condemning capitalism by name and for not focusing "more fully on the issues of power, racism, systematic oppression of women, and politics."

Determined to resolve what he sees as a central contradiction between Friedan's own account of her life and his reconstruction of her story, Horowitz presents numerous possible explanations. Some of these, such as the lingering reverberations of McCarthyite persecution, might explain changes in emphasis from earlier drafts to the final *Feminine Mystique*. But in asserting that Friedan

engaged in a kind of "dissimulation" and created an alternate "persona" in the course of writing the book, Horowitz goes too far. Friedan's shift in emphasis might have had less to do with "dissimulation" than with a genuine discovery that postwar suburbanization and domesticity threatened to circumscribe women's horizons.

The single-mindedness of Horowitz's larger endeavor—to expose Friedan as a victim of false consciousness—keeps him from delving deeply into sources and aspects of Friedan's intellectual maturation that promise to be truly revealing: the influence of psychology on her interpretation of women's plight; her critique of consumerism; her particular brand of feminism, which rejected anti-male sentiment and embraced both family lives and careers for women; and her description of a postwar retreat into the personal sphere, caused in part by disappointments and terrors on the world scene. Horowitz points us down some of these avenues, but holds firm to his belief that Friedan, having been his kind of radical in her early years, must have decided to hide her true self.

—Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn

Religion & Philosophy

LETTER TO A MAN IN THE FIRE: *Does God Exist and Does He Care?*

By Reynolds Price. Scribner. 112 pp.
\$20

In 1994, the novelist Reynolds Price published a book about a terrifying struggle with spinal cancer that had left him unable to walk. The memoir, *A Whole New Life*, was a tale of resurrection from near-death laced with anger at the numbly uncaring treatment of his doctors. It won him, as such books do, a large and responsive audience among those similarly afflicted. One of those readers, a man in his thirties named Jim Fox who had been forced to drop out of medical school because of a recurrence of cancer, wrote Price in the spring of 1994 asking him the two questions posed by the subtitle of this book.

A contemporary American novelist might seem an odd person to direct such questions to. Fox undoubtedly chose Price because of a remarkable episode in *A Whole New Life* in which Price claims to have found himself, in something more tactile than a vision, standing in the Sea of Galilee, Jesus himself washing the "puckered scar" of unsuccessful surgery on his back. Jesus tells Price that his sins are forgiven, and Price has the temerity to ask if he is cured as well. Jesus answers, somewhat jauntily, "That too." Price offers this story unapologetically, insisting that it is not a dream or a metaphor.

But beyond this anecdote, and what it says about the religious conviction of its teller and the outside chance of a miracle cure for Fox as well, Price was a good per-

son to approach. Price's 11 novels, beginning in 1962 with *A Long and Happy Life*, cannot be called religious, in that they deal less with divine love than human, less with faith than faithlessness. Yet he has published two volumes of translations from the Bible (*A Palpable God*, 1978; *Three Gospels*, 1996) and has spent a lifetime reading and thinking about the nature of this God to whom he has always felt a personal access.

In his reply to Fox, Price makes no more serious argument for God's existence than that "my belief in a Creator derives largely from detailed and overpowering personal intuition, an unshakable hunch," and what he calls "demonstrations," of which the Sea of Galilee was the most dramatic. Most of the other demonstrations are closer to Wordsworthian "spots of time"—"moments of sustained calm awareness," as Price puts it, "that all of visible and invisible nature (myself included) is a single reality, a single thought from a central mind." To an unbeliever, this seems a fittingly modest approach, given the unlikelihood that Price might succeed where all others have failed in constructing an inarguable proof that God exists.

As to the question of whether God cares, Price suggests that part of the reason this question is so troubling has to do with our notion of God the Father. Price notes "how seldom the oldest strata of Hebrew scripture call God our father," and suggests that our inability to comprehend a God who is less than fully attentive to the world's suffering (and, indeed, often seems to pour it on with those he favors) has to do with our confusing his love for his creation with a benign paternal love. Even those believers who are not among the overtly suffering more often than not know God's inattentiveness, Price concedes, in the form of unanswered prayers. "I've come more and more," he writes, "to wish that scriptures of Judaism and Christianity—and a great many more modern clergy and counselors—had forthrightly confronted the silence at the very heart of any God we can worship." That divine silence apparently extended to Jim Fox, who died at 35 in February of last year.

—Robert Wilson

**ISAIAH BERLIN:
*A Life.***

By Michael Ignatieff. Metropolitan Books. 356 pp. \$30

Ideally, a biography of Isaiah Berlin should be as engaging as the man himself—no small challenge, considering Berlin's brilliance as a lecturer, author, and conversationalist. Ignatieff has more than met the challenge. He has written an intimate, intelligent, and succinct life of one of the more widely loved men of this century. Like Berlin, Ignatieff has Russian roots, is a political philosopher in his own right (and an accomplished novelist and memoirist as well), and shares with his subject a fine liberal temperament. Indeed, the making and sustaining of such a temperament during a century when liberal ideals faced grave threats from all sides serve as the guiding themes of this biography.

Ignatieff shapes the facts of that life (1909–97) into the story of a charmed, almost blessed existence. Even though political upheavals forced Berlin's family to flee first from his native Latvia to St. Petersburg, and then from Petersburg to London, Berlin had a comfortable, secure, almost Nabokovian childhood. Berlin felt the distinction of outsider status from his earliest years, but that sense of difference was never humbling or humiliating. If the Berlins were Jews, distantly related to the founder of the devoutly pious Lubavicher Hassidim, they were largely assimilated residents of a city that exempted its Jewish citizens from restrictions that so hobbled their coreligionists in most western provinces of the Russian Empire.

Flight to London in 1921 inscribed another degree of apartness on the Berlin family. But though exile, in Ignatieff's words, "consolidated detachment," Isaiah took to his adopted country with an avidity that evolved into an articulate embrace of that country's institutions and ideals. His regard for Britain's blend of resilient traditionalism, liberal constitutionalism, and ethos of inviolable individualism made him, in some ways, more English than the English. But Ignatieff does not neglect the power of Berlin's underlying Russian and Jewish identities, expressed above all in a need for passionate intensity, whether in friendships or in responding to ideas or