

GOD'S MEMOIRS

*The life and times of a
popular deity*

**THE LIFE OF GOD (AS TOLD BY
HIMSELF).** By Franco Ferrucci.
University of Chicago Press,
281 pages, \$22.

BY PAUL SIGNORELLI

IF FRANCO Ferrucci's novel *The Life of God (as Told by Himself)* is to be believed, God has had a hard life. And why not believe it? Here, after all, is the big guy himself, admitting in the opening passage that "For long stretches at a time I forget that I am God. But then, memory isn't my strong suit. It comes and goes with a will of its own."

This God is very much the one who created man in His own image: curious, forgetful, petulant, angry when betrayed, and even suicidal at times. He is a philosopher, an observer, a traveler, and a first-rate raconteur who is delightfully droll as He tells His story from the time of the creation through the end of the 20th century.

Behind this tour de force is Franco Ferrucci, a native of Pisa who now teaches at Rutgers University. Working with Raymond Rosenthal, the novelist has partially revised the 1986 Italian-language version of his book (*Il mondo creato*) to produce an English-language edition that "departs freely from the Italian original and at points is better characterized as an adaptation than as a translation," he writes in a note at the end of the book.

He might just as readily admit to producing an adaptation of biblical stories and apocrypha, for as wild as his musings become they are generally rooted in the philosophical underpinnings of Christian theology. If, for example, one accepts that man was created in the image of God, then one should not be surprised to read that God admits to being "hypersensitive and moody, but also credulous enough to take the words of my flatterers as sincere." What could be more natural than a God who wakes up with nightmares, does lunch with Moses, and querulously details the sense of betrayal He felt when He realized that Moses was betraying Him by making up tablets of commandments that He had not dictated?

It becomes a natural manifestation of God's omniscience that He would pass entire lifetimes in the bodies of the people He created and, in the course of these lives, influence the work of philosophers, artists, musicians, and others who create.

Ferrucci's God is, of course, present at the creation of Earth—although He's not quite sure how it happened: "The truth is that the world began when it dawned on me that I was all alone and I tried to do something about it."

Things take a turn for the worse after the crucifixion of Christ: "Humankind talked mainly about death, as though a violent sadness had shadowed the world."

There are, however, plenty of moments of glory mixed in with the sadness. He helps Dante with his *Divine Comedy*. He stands in awe of the paintings of Caravaggio. As the Creator, He finds the work of Mozart, Beethoven, and others to provide a language particularly suited to His needs: "I would descend into the body and soul of a musician and emerge from it promptly when the creative work was done. The musicians sensed my arrival but did not know what name to give me or whence I came."

As His narrative nears contemporary times, He meets Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. He goes to the movies but avoids sporting events because He doesn't like crowds. He struggles to repress His craving for chocolate, rides on comets and beams of light, recalls buying His first car, and works on His biography while traveling by plane.

And to what end does Ferrucci put all these musings? To find the place of God in all of mankind's trials and tribulations. In so doing, he has created a consistently thought-provoking novel that celebrates faith and the wonder of creation. By the time we finish reading the book we can almost hear God relishing the hours he spent inspiring Ferrucci to be the conduit for *The Life of God (as Told by Himself)*—and Ferrucci clearly enjoys serving as the vessel for this particular story.

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