

Civil Rights, the Left and Vietnam

No More Strangers, by Philip Berrigan, S.S.J. Macmillan. \$4.95.
by Arthur J. Moore

Perhaps the most interesting development in political debate in the last several years has been what might be called the "reentry of the left." In the current debate on Vietnam, the struggle over tactics of the civil rights movement and the discussion of the control of the war against poverty, much of the initiative for the criticism has come from the left. President Johnson's consensus politics has worked in such a way since the election that the right is comparatively quiescent and any really sharp questioning is from the other end of the political spectrum.

Now, of course, the left never entirely vanished from American political life. Even in the heyday of Senator McCarthy, there were leftists around. For quite some time, however, there seemed to be a tacit agreement among the American people not to notice or to hear any political arguments from that direction. The leftist, except to the extent he was mythologized and made into a threat, was the invisible man of American life. Emotionally speaking, he was either a "spy" or non-existent.

Such an artificial state of affairs, with one whole wing of thought shut out of the debate, obviously could not continue indefinitely except in a closed society. It was under the administration of that resolute foe of ideologists, John Kennedy, that conditions made possible the visibility of the American left. The Bay of Pigs fiasco made clear the limits of purely military containment in suppressing political

foes. The Cuban missile crisis proved anew the strength of American determination in repelling a physical threat. Both pointed to the necessity of political settlement. The test-ban treaty seemed to indicate that military detente was possible. All of these sharp blows to the American psyche made possible the "emotional reappearance" of the American left in world affairs.

Coupled with these developments was the continuing struggle for racial justice in the United States, with its inevitable overtones around the world. As the immediate threat of a world war seemed to fade, Americans were free to give more of their attention to this long-neglected problem. American Negroes and their allies, energized by Supreme Court decisions, were not remiss in seizing this opportunity. Many of the leaders of this movement were pacifists, who made brilliant use of the strategy of non-violence to dramatize the morality of their cause.

•

Thus, it seemed that many of the long-standing diagnoses of major world problems made by the left had been vindicated. What would have happened had President Kennedy continued to live is a matter for interesting but fruitless speculation. The intense shock of his assassination could only introduce a deep strain of uncertainty and mistrust into American life, even with a smooth transition of power. The escalation of the war in Vietnam, which seems to plunge us back into a dark forest from which we so recently were thought to have emerged, has terrified and embittered many on the left who cannot help but conjure up their return to the political desert.

Paralleling this period in Amer-

ican life was the brief, marvelous reign of John XXIII and the entry into the promised land of the Catholic left. These two developments interacted and produced a period of ferment and excitement in American Catholic life which was as unique as it was unforeseen and which still continues. It is this combination which has produced such men as Father Philip Berrigan and which his book, *No More Strangers*, reflects.

(It should be obvious here that "left" is a loose term of reference, used only to distinguish from "right" or "center" and certainly has no connotation of membership in any organized political movement, let alone that old bugaboo, Communism. It is regrettable that it is necessary even to make this distinction but the case of Father Berrigan himself indicates that this is so. Because of his stand against the war in Vietnam, many complaints came to his superiors at Epiphany Apostolic College at Newburgh, New York, who reacted shamefully and transferred him to a parish in Baltimore. This is a reminder, if one was needed, that the well of political discourse in this country does not yet run completely free of poison.)

All of this rather ponderous background may seem irrelevant and even unfair to Father Berrigan. He has not written a book about politics in the usual sense. He has not attempted to indicate detailed political solutions. What he has written is an examination of Christian witness for today. In covering this broad subject, he treats of such topics as the formation of the laity, the nature of marriage, the ecumenical movement, the race question and the arms race. To all of them he brings a passionate intensity. In essence, what he has written is a series of ringing moral exhorta-

Mr. Moore is editor of *World Outlook* and a frequent contributor to other journals.

tions—a sermon for our times.

Many of these subjects lie outside the scope of this journal; others, some specifically Catholic, lie outside my scope. It is Father Berrigan's strong contention that they are inextricably interwoven, but the two more public themes of racial justice and arms may perhaps be lifted out and examined by themselves.

On the subject of race, Father Berrigan has good credentials and makes an impressive case. The case against racism is by now one that hardly needs to be made. (We all know that racism is a sin even if we do not stop sinning as a result of that knowledge.) It may be that this is a catechism we need constantly to repeat and Father Berrigan puts us through the paces well. There are emphases and details that one might question. (He asserts, for example, that assimilation has constantly broken down on a racial barrier, oriental as well as Negro. There are indications that this is changing for the Oriental and the difference in treatment of other races might be an instructive subject to explore.)

Father Berrigan, despite his real and abiding commitment to racial equality, is after bigger game than this. It is his conviction that racial injustice, like the other ills he examines, is a symptom of the failure to love. "If the white man must learn anything, he must learn this: his only debt to the Negro is love; a love which is inescapable, too long unpaid, one which he owes to the Negro, but to himself as well."

It is through this failure to love that domestic racism and foreign policy are connected. "It may become clear that . . . segregation is psychologically creating a climate in which our massive reliance on nuclear weapons may flourish. It may become obvious that we as a people are losing more and more command of our own morality, and that it is being more and more dictated to us through

our refusal to accept others. It may become obvious that the tyranny we impose upon our own citizens, one-tenth of our population, has now threatened to take an international form in the larger neighborhood of the world. It may become obvious that human injustice is no longer content to take specialized forms, but like a Hydra contrived a new face for every area of the world. . . ."

This is powerful stuff, and not to be lightly dismissed. Father Berrigan means to dig out the root of our problems (in this, he would admit to being radical) and thus purge us. It has, however, one flaw that may be fatal.

To subsume all problems under one moral absolute can be thrilling. If it does not thrill, however, it does nothing. One problem with moral absolutism is that "all hearts do not vibrate to that one great string," or at least not continuously. One can heartily agree with Father Berrigan that "a painful and realistic distinction must be made between pure Christianity and what we practice, because they are not the same thing." One can only too easily see that we do not love enough or easily enough or openly enough. The question is, what happens after the admission?

There is an assumption among moral absolutists that to admit that evil exists is to get rid of it. If we admit that we do not love, then all that is needed is to shape up and start loving. There are no intractables, such as the problem of power. Let us "speak truth to power with love" and evil will crumble before good.

Ah well, it is the ancient argument between pacifist and non-pacifist again. This is where the emotional reentry of the left has made itself most felt. The combination of nuclear terror with the effectiveness of a non-violent strategy in the civil rights movement has produced a pattern of plausibility for pacifism that it has not enjoyed since the nine-

teen-thirties. It seems to me a false plausibility which overlooks the fact that all of the support enjoyed for policies by pacifists (such as the test-ban treaty, the Russian-U.S. *détente*, etc.), is political support, based on a combination of morality and self-interest rather than on pure morality. Whatever the American people decide about the war in Vietnam will be decided upon the basis of opinions about the political correctness of that conflict. There is no more indication at this point that the pacifist left can pull off a holy no-war than that the right can pull off a holy war. It is the strength of consensus politics, despite its apparent weaknesses, that it can embody the pragmatic temper of the people. As Harvey Cox says in *The Secular City*: "He (urban-secular man) devotes himself to tackling specific problems and is interested in what will work to get something done. He has little interest in what have been termed 'borderline questions' or metaphysical considerations." This seems to describe the attitude prevalent today. Is it an attitude lacking in morality or is it a realistic and profoundly moral position?

The downfall of the right in recent times has been its intransigence and its air of superiority. Gradually, it became apparent that its moral absolutes (Communism as unfailingly evil; the Western "free world" as unfailingly good; neutralism as moral cowardice) did not correspond to reality and hence did not work. The left can expend its credit even faster if it insists upon moral rigidity. It has done it before.

All of this may be unfair to Father Berrigan's book, if not his thought. It is, as I have said, essentially a sermon. It raises fundamental questions and grapples with them in a forceful and lucid style. But, alas, like many sermons it may leave us shaken and edified but offer very little help for the day's labor.

Buddhism or Communism: Which Holds the Future of Asia?

Ernst Benz. Doubleday. 234 pp. \$4.50.

Basing his discussion in some measure upon findings he made when in Asia in 1957-58, the author examines "the role played by present-day Buddhism in shaping the political and social ideas of the Buddhist nations which achieved political independence only after the second world war." Chapters have been included on Buddhism in the USSR and in Red China, and there is one on "The Buddhist Critique of Communism."

Democracy and Nonviolence

Ralph T. Templin. Porter Sargent. 334 pp. \$4.00.

Dr. Templin looks at what he considers to be the failure of the U.S., both at home and in international affairs, to live up to its original democratic heritage: "personal sovereignty extended through organization and protected by 'revolution.'" But only methods of peaceful persuasion can help fulfill democracy's promise, he says, and these must be undertaken by the people when governments will not act.

The World Situation

Paul Tillich. Facet Books. 51 pp. 85 cents (paper).

Although the essay does occasionally reveal its age, the author's words are always interesting and often prophetic, notes the edi-

By special arrangement with the Foreign Policy Association, readers of worldview may obtain any book published in the United States (except paperbacks) from the FPA's World Affairs Book Center, at the Publisher's list price. Post free for domestic orders only. Send orders with check or money order to Desk WV, World Affairs Book Center, 345 East 46th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017.

tor of the "Social Ethics Series," in which this piece has been reprinted. Of his own purpose in writing in 1945, Dr. Tillich said, "it is not only possible but necessary today to speak of a 'world situation' to seek to discover the inner logic and meaning of that situation, and to ask what message Christianity has to offer it."

An Inquiry Into Enoughness

Daniel Lang. McGraw-Hill. 216 pp. \$5.50.

"Just how much is enough when it comes to nuclear weapons?" New Yorker writer Lang asked of highly placed government officials and scientists in Washington recently. The results of his inquiry appear here in company with five other pieces that view the meeting ground of science and politics in the atomic age.

On Escalation

Herman Kahn. Praeger. 308 pp. \$6.95.

This volume, first in the Hudson Institute Series on National Security and International Order, developed out of a series of lectures and briefings "to expert military or civilian audiences." It deals mostly with the 'political' use of force, says Kahn, as an instrument of "defense, denial, punishment, destruction, warning, bargaining, fining, deterrence."

worldview

volume 8, nos. 7-8 / July-August 1965

WORLDVIEW is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the Council on Religion and International Affairs
Subscription: \$4.00 per year.

Address: 170 East 64th Street, New York, New York 10021

EDITORIAL BOARD

James Finn, Editor

A. William Loos
William J. Cook

John R. Inman
Charles Frankel

Editorial Assistant, Susan Woolfson

worldview
170 East 64th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

Return requested



CONTENTS

With What Wisdom?..... 1
 Editorial
In the Magazines..... 2
The Burden of Freedom..... 4
 Quentin L. Quade
Vietnam: The Shifting Contours..... 7
 Gary Porter
Nuclear Weapons: Solution or Moral Bankruptcy?.... 9
 Other Voices
Correspondence 13
The Left, Civil Rights and Foreign Policy..... 14
 Arthur J. Moore
Current Reading 16

Opinions expressed in WORLDVIEW are those of the authors, and not necessarily of the Council on Religion and International Affairs. Copyright © 1965 Council on Religion and International Affairs.

Readers are reminded that worldview welcomes correspondence. Letters may be specific comments on articles in recent issues or general discussion, but readers are requested to limit their letters to 500 words.