

Confronting Our European Christian Inheritance

The Intellectual History of Europe by Friedrich Heer. Translated by Jonathan Steinberg. World Publishing Co. 558 pp. \$12.95.

by Edward T. Gargan

An American medievalist working in the Cabinet des Manuscrits of the Bibliothèque Nationale when told that Friedrich Heer's *The Intellectual History of Europe* was now available in English replied, "Another synthesis, another waste of time—it can't be a good book." Yet W. H. Auden has praised Heer's work with the authority that belongs to the poet; the power that historians fear and can never possess. This fine translation provides a superb introduction to Austria's most original contemporary historian. Heer, a specialist in the history of the middle ages, a man who suffered persecution at the hands of the Nazis, is now professor at the University of Vienna. He has recently finished a study of the Christian historical genesis of Adolph Hitler which is certain to cause violent debate. Heer does not furnish his conclusions with emergency exits for the timid. He uses, to be sure, the scholarship of the day, but employs this literature in a deeply personal manner. He writes with wit and passion, delighting in his heroes and despairing of those he cannot abide.

It is not an accident that Heer concludes his book with a reference to the neglected comic genius Karl Krauss who, he said, left the Catholic Church "because it allowed Salzburg Cathedral to be used as a setting for Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann*." Heer too recoils

Mr. Gargan, who writes from Paris where he has spent the year on a Guggenheim Fellowship, will be teaching in the Dept. of History at the University of Wisconsin in the Fall.

at the abuses in a thousand forms of the things that consecrate our existence. His desire to protect what is sacred in the human condition sustains the spirit of his book. This same concern enables him to see the strength within the weaknesses hidden behind the force of the world's geniuses. This desire enhances his capacity to find what really matters at the core of each thinker and generation.

Heer wishes above all to praise whatever may be celebrated in Europe's spiritual history. It is thus the more frustrating to find his conclusions so severe in regard to our age. But at the close of his investigation he accepts the idea that all that will remain of Europe's history will be a few words. "In them a thousand years of experience will be concluded. They will bear the knowledge and conscience of European man to all mankind. They will be the harvest of a millenium in which men have listened to the WORD, tried to understand it and to answer when it has spoken."

For Heer the Logos of the Old and New Testament is the fixed sun of our historical universe, and man's inner response to that light constitutes the spiritual history of Western Europe. Only a man for whom time is not the enemy could have written this history. Only a man grounded in hope could be so perceptive in describing the bottomless stupidities and failures of the Christian world. Only one who loves that foolish effort could so correctly identify the futility of Christianity at the commencement of this century: "The Christian Word had become part of the small-change of daily life. It was stamped on both faces with the symbols of its age and jingled with superficial hopes and aspirations. It had no power to impress its own character on the age nor to bear witness to it."

Heer has written an inner his-

tory of Christianity which is the equivalent of Gibbon's great work. His Christian Europe is the barbarous thing Gibbon first exhibited for modern man. Yet Heer's work has a quality that could not be present in Gibbon because he is intensely engaged in the effort of Christian Europe to know, to love, and to serve its God. Every failure is for him a new beginning, every magnificent moment an eternity, every dark deed read to be re-enacted. His ultimate image of European man is an occasion for more joy than sorrow, for life rather than suicide. Heer has chosen to believe it all worthwhile and his reasons for this merit the attention even of those for whom the Word never was and cannot be.

The unity of the Western historical experience is viewed as the result of recurring patterns of response to the life of the spirit. Every era of history has witnessed a constant struggle between the culture of the establishment and that of the people who resent and transform the values which are presented to them as synonymous with intelligence and meaning. During this conflict no position is ever completely deserted or forgotten. The place where a significant idea first emerges is the place to which it returns in times of persecution. When challenged, the established order always transfers into a life and death struggle the ideas that explain itself, making an ideology of all metaphysics, theology, science, poetry. Orthodoxy always prefers to find enemies outside rather than to face the problematic character of its own teachings. When peace is restored it is usually the work of poets and artists who heal and revive men exhausted by the rigor and aridity of their official philosophies. The tension and energy in Europe's thought is the result of the Chris-

tian and anti-Christian, the theistic and anti-theistic convictions present in every serious philosophical system. This dualism is equally at play in the thought of an Aquinas as in that of a Marx. In Europe's history pride and guilt identify the writer who matters. The works of the mind conceived in dualistic cosmic order must be served by self-criticism, self-discipline, self-restraint, self-sacrifice. Failure here has delivered the best of men into the hands of ruthless dictators.

Heer is particularly convincing in his descriptions of the distinguishing psychological features of Europe's cities. He understands not only London, Paris and Berlin, but has important things to say about Frankfurt, Salamanca, Brussels, Amsterdam, Basel and Milan. His appreciation of these cities is complimented by his knowledge of their citizens. His historical imagination responds in kind to those thinkers such as Augustine and Kant whom he regards as "staggering" in their impact on our consciousness. These are the men who never quieted the explosions within their own minds, but who successfully transferred their own internal struggles into the serious problems of existence for every succeeding generation.

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What Heer has to say about the willingness of those in power to corrupt rather than to confront the resisting mind is profoundly informed by his own experience of Nazi cruelty and will to power. He is most moving when he describes the moments in the middle ages when Jewish, Islamic and Christian scholars approached one another in understanding and love. And he is most unnerving when he recalls the manner in which on every such occasion the spiritual and temporal powers tortured poets until they became polemicists, philosophers until they did the work of propagandists, saints until they became sadists. Throughout Europe's history authority and coercion were used again and again as sur-

gical clamps to hold together gaping self-inflicted wounds. In the same manner our democratic society, despairing of its own philosophy and in agony at its own diseased body politic, seeks by bombs and napalm to sterilize the world. Our inquisitors explain also the need for fire and death, the reasons why the innocent must die to protect our truth. We are indeed the victims of our Christian inheritance, the crusade and the rack are embraced as our salvation when thought is too hard, when love is a torture we cannot endure.

Heer's study is of commanding value because he never fails to ask questions not normally pursued by historians of ideas. He examines not only the theology of Duns Scotus, but also the dimensions of his inhumanity. And the egotism of Ockham is stressed rather than his famous philosophical formula. The political realism of Machiavelli is placed within the context of the irrational, prophetic and speculative aspects of the thought of the great Florentine. Heer always asks who was a man's father? His relatives? His friends? What were his contacts with the people? Galileo's life with the simple soul Marina Gamba is meaningfully related to his knowledge of the people's poetry and satire which rejected the aristocratic humanistic tradition. The sickness of the age of Louis XIV is fittingly described by the observation that its greatest preacher, Bossuet, "was a perfect man of the baroque, preserving what he knew was false because he was afraid of what might replace it."

Heer refuses to join the new criticism which praises Herder's

historical insight. Instead, he views Herder as a vulgar enthusiast confused rather than informed by the principles of the Enlightenment. In an amazing passage Kant is compared to Theresa of Avila, the mystic poet of such beauty and passion. And Karl Marx is seen as consecrating and transforming in a real and substantial manner all of man's work and existence. Without blasphemy, Marx's intent is appreciated as equal to that of the priest who consecrates the host, rendering the profane divine and the partakers of the bread participants in that nature. Heer is shocking and dismaying when he expresses his distaste for Rilke, but it is impossible to brush aside his explanation as to why Rilke was "favorite reading among concentration camp commanders." He regards the film as the art most suited to our age in which "the mouth and anus have merged as in unicellular organisms."

Yet not all aspects of modernity are rejected. Some atheists are appreciated as knowing more about God than theologians; and some poets are gratefully thanked for ennobling the world rather than imitating the economists and politicians in their taste for brutality. Mies van der Rohe, Gropius and other architects and artists are honored for their witness to the possibility of freedom when this concept had begun to vanish from our universe. In the end it is the poets and the artists who are credited with keeping us human during the millenium of Europe's Christian history. Understanding and compassion have shaped this book and these talents have fashioned a work of the highest order.

Let there be no mistake about it, the United States has been at no disadvantage compared to the Communists in terms of the resources necessary for waging the struggle in Asia. Quite the opposite. The real difficulties that beset the United States arise primarily from the nature of the task she has set out to achieve.

from

**THE UNITED STATES IN ASIA:
EVOLUTION AND CONTAINMENT**

by David P. Mozingo

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Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal

Howard Zinn. Beacon. 131 pp. \$4.95

The arguments for continuing the U.S. effort in Vietnam are viewed from many perspectives by this "historian, civil-rights activist, ex-bombardier" — including a look at the war from the point of view of Japan and the American Negro — and found unjustifiable. But what of the alternative? "Withdrawal has not drawn large support," Zinn says, "because it has not been put forward by the Administration or by its most prominent critics," and he provides the President with a "withdrawal" speech to illustrate just how this might be accomplished.

The Church and the Crisis in the Dominican Republic

James A. Clark. Newman Press. 265 pp. \$4.50

Father Clark, who was in Santo Domingo in the Spring of 1965, sees in the literature about the Trujillo period and the 1965 crisis a "lack of appreciation for the work of the Church" in the Dominican Republic. He hopes to correct this imbalance by his examination of the role the Catholic Church has played in the area, and especially the response of fellow churchmen in the years 1960-66 — their "stand . . . on the side of the people, as the fearless defender of their rights."

Essays on International Law From the Columbia Law Review

Oceana. 435 pp. \$8.50

These 14 essays, culled from the 65-year old *Review*, fall under four headings: "Nature and Scope of International Law," "Sources and Development of International Law," "State Sovereignty and International Law" and "Aspects of International Organization." Philip Jessup notes in his foreword that "the significant changes in the pattern of international law," as illustrated in this collection, "are not those which place customary or conventional restrictions upon states' freedom of action. . . . The basic change is in the contemporary evolution of means and manners of international cooperation in the common interest."

Vietnam and International Law

Lawyers Comm. on American Policy Towards Vietnam. O'Hare Books. 160 pp. \$2.00/\$3.75

The Consultative Council of the Lawyers Committee on American Policy Towards Vietnam has prepared a volume which "documents the conclusion that the ongoing military involvement of the United States in Vietnam violates international law in several fundamental respects." Included here is the text of a State Department Memorandum of March 1966 — "Legal Basis for United States Actions Against Vietnam" — issued to refute points raised by the first Committee report.

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