

"Everyone, especially the young, seems to agree that the synagogue is irrelevant. . . . In all that interests them — peace, race, poverty, the meaning of morality, freedom — the synagogue says and does little that seems to them useful or important," writes Milton Himmelfarb in *Commentary* ("Relevance in the Synagogue," May).

What is new about criticism of both church and synagogue "is that it is made at all," he notes. "Criticism arises from expectation. In the *entre deux guerres*, enlightened, progressive people didn't make the criticism. They didn't have the expectation. They simply took it for granted that religion was so thoroughly stupid and out of the question that it needn't be thought about at all. We all say and believe that the world is more secular than it has ever been. Simultaneously, enlightened, progressive people are more disillusioned with irreligion and more expectant of religion than they have ever been. If a New Leftist can bring himself to think of coalition at all, he will include not the trade unions but the churches."

But what of charges aimed at the synagogue itself? Himmelfarb takes a look at the relation of "social action deeds and sermons," the fact of synagogue as a "minority church" in America, and at considerations of temporality and temporaneity. The conclusion which emerges from his brief analysis is that "the synagogue is, it has to be, our contemporary and our ancestor."

Consider one example: "At the time of the revolution of 1848, the leading Jewish educator in Germany was Samuel Ehrenberg. . . . Exulting in the emancipations decreed by the revolution, Ehrenberg wanted to remove from the [Passover] Haggadah the passage which reads, 'Now we are slaves, next year may we be free men.' He was trying to make the synagogue relevant. Could anyone have been more irrelevant?"

"Even politically," Himmelfarb continues, "it is still too soon for us to stop saying, 'Now we are slaves.' And beyond politics, not until the Future Passover will we stop being slaves (or enslaved, or slavish). Despite Israeli independence . . . those Orthodox are right who say that only the future Passover will abolish the fast of the Ninth of Av, which laments exile. The Jews' physical or political exile may be passing — let us hope so — but the passing of the exile of the children of Adam from Eden is not yet on the horizon. Until then, on the Ninth of Av let us lament exile, and let contemporaries think all that to be irrelevant. . . ."

"If the fathers are . . . taken to represent history (the past, tradition), and the sons to represent contemporaneity (the present, relevance), we must conclude that until the Messiah comes we have to live, uneasily, with both. Since it isn't the characteristic

temptation of our generations to slight the present in favor of the past, for us a call to present relevance may not be the needful thing. For us the needful thing may be to remember that relevance, unlike ripeness, isn't all."

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Twenty-two years of living with the bomb has taught six large lessons, says Louis Halle (*Encounter*, March). Among them:

"1. that nuclear weapons are virtually unusable in combat;

"2. that in a nuclear environment wars must be limited;

"3. that the usefulness of nuclear armaments in diplomacy is limited to deterrence and defense of the status quo;

"4. that nuclear weapons have, consequently, strengthened the status quo;

"5. that in a nuclear environment a bipolar balance of power may have a greater stability than the classical balances of the pre-nuclear age"; and, finally,

6. "that in the nuclear age it is even more important to have good communication between antagonists than between allies."

Certainly "this is not to deny the danger that still persists, the danger against which we must take all possible measures, the danger by which we must constantly govern our thinking. It is hard to believe that mankind has been rising in consciousness, understanding, and vision for a million years only to go smash in the end. But accidents happen that cut off the most promising lives of individuals, and cataclysmic disaster brought on by itself has often been the lot of mankind." Yet "it is precisely because we have so much reason to look forward to a larger future that we should cultivate an understanding of the factors that make for the limitation of conflict."

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In a paper on "Marxism, Religion and Revolution" delivered at a symposium sponsored by World Fellowships in March and reprinted in *Cross Currents* (Spring), Herbert Aptheker, Director of the American Institute for Marxist Studies, commented: "Early Christianity, as befits its revolutionary character and composition, denounced the ruling gods and so was called atheist, excoriated the secular powers and so was called seditious, upbraided the rich and so was called deluded, pointed to private property and the accumulation of profit and its twin, covetousness, as the chief source of evil, and so was called a dangerous madness to be extirpated from the earth."

From a later period "one has the traditions of the
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in the magazines . . .

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religiously inspired mass rebellions of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries in England, Bohemia and Germany, with the words and activities of Wycliffe, Huss, Prekop, Münzer, Winstanley and Ball, and in the 16th and 17th centuries the great dreams of More and Campanella.

"And some, honored and influential within the Church while they lived, also reflected this egalitarian and communistic tradition. Notable in this regard was St. Ambrose (d. 397), Bishop of Milan. Although he was as otherworldly as the most intense traditionalist could desire, this did not keep him from demanding justice on earth and asserting that such justice could not appear so long as the private possession of the world's goods prevailed. To seek profit is to attack public interest, to be rich is to flaunt sin, and both violate the 'essential nature of justice': 'For so long as we eagerly strive to increase our riches, to accumulate money, to occupy lands as our possessions, to be distinguished for our wealth, we put away from us the essential nature of justice and lose the spirit of common beneficence.'"

Thus "there is a thread — a red thread, no doubt! — that runs through the history and teaching of Christianity. It appears in the actions and writings of those already mentioned; in the Christianity of a Nat Turner, a John Brown, a Dorothy Day, and, increasingly, in personalities not associated with the marked radicalism such names suggest." And "of course, the most striking illustration of the shift in recent thinking on property — and on revolution — bringing that thinking very much closer to that which dominated early Christianity, appears in certain Encyclicals coming from the present Pope and his immediate predecessor." (Indeed, "as a Marxist . . . I must admit that the Pope's Encyclical [*Populorum Progressio*] was enunciating — in mild, though significant, form — the traditional levelism and the original revolutionary quality of Christianity; on both these matters, let me confess, Marxism is a latecomer.")

To Aptheker "the evidence — and this paper has presented only fractions of what is available — suggests that advocacy of Christian-Marxist *rapprochement* need not be confined to the (so-called) practical. It is not uncommon now — both from the Marxian and the religious sides — to see the advocacy of cooperation in terms of deeds or 'works.'" But, Aptheker contends, there is "not only a certain congruence in practice between Marxists and Christians *but also in theory*. That there is this theoretical affinity has not been emphasized; the contrary has been done, by both sides." He is "urging that such emphasis — where it excludes the other — militates against fully implementing the practical cooperation so widely suggested."

• "It is not enough to suggest that one of the most significantly misreported news stories of the past three years has been the growth and depth of disaffection toward the American commitment in Vietnam. The imperative next question must be: Why did it happen this way? One probable answer is that it always has happened this way and we have been looking at the history of the American press through an unfocused microscope," asserts Nathan B. Blumberg, dean of Montana School of Journalism, in the most recent issue of the *Montana Journalism Review*.

"So long as the mass media are dealing with political parties, groups, movements or individuals seeking reform or change within the explicit structure of the current society, they generally perform with fairness and objectivity. But let someone or something advocate a fundamental change in the status quo — opposition to a war or a contemplated war, the abolition of slavery, Wobblyism, communism, socialism, anarchism, fascism — and the press moves over to join those in political or economic power who also have a stake in the continuation of things the way they are."

Similarly, says Dean Blumberg, "the mass media, wittingly or not, have minimized the nature and extent of dissent from the war policies of the government. It is essential to recognize that dissent has come to be regarded as a threat to the existing order because it has moved out of the halls of the Capitol, where a Fulbright balks or a Mansfield broods, into the streets, to the ballot box, to the very places where men are asked to give their lives. It is in the main a movement, furthermore, of the young, who are in revolt in a way this nation has never before seen. It has, finally, become linked with yet another threat to the political and economic power structure — the drive of the black American for a fair share of his political and economic rights."

By use of a few examples — three referendums dealing with U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the October '67 march on the Pentagon and "the strange case of Pfc. Guinn" — Blumberg has attempted to document "the fact that newspapers, wire services, news magazines, general magazines, radio stations and television networks have failed, in varying degrees, to report accurately the high degree of discontent with American policies in Vietnam." This is not "to suggest a publishers' plot or an electronic conspiracy to deceive the American people. It is reasonable to suggest, however, that the press, as an important part of the established system, has been reluctant to report on the growth of dissent, especially when the expressions of dissent have moved beyond traditional political advocacy. Although the press constitutionally was set outside the framework of government to serve as a check on the errors and excesses of government, it nevertheless in its reporting of militant dissent has served to support policies of the governmental industrial-military complex."

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