

in the magazines

T. Philip McKenna on "God in Political Theology" (*The Ecumenist*, November-December, 1969):

"... We have all met Christians, I suppose, for whom intellectual orthodoxy has been a 'bad trip,' and who turn to the works of love without more words about God or his kingdom. There is no doubt that such a conversion may be existentially necessary for an individual or a community. But it can be only one part of the dialectic, for if 'practical Christianity' is the only manifestation of the kingdom, then the fullness of the Gospel cannot survive in the world. Either a generation will occur wherein no one talks about God at all, or practical Christianity itself is proposed as the authentic meaning of the Gospel. In the first case most of the New Testament becomes unhelpful or even unintelligible myth; in the second we have a particularly depressing instance of reductionism. . . .

"Engels once wrote that the two great camps in philosophy are formed around the issue of creation—'Did God create the world, or has the world been in existence eternally?' The Christians he places among those who assert the primacy of spirit over nature. This goes to the root of things with admirable clarity. The Marxist sees such a premise as rendering impossible correct *praxis* because one is always led to place human action within a context of God's providence, thus unnerving man for historical life, and secondly, since man is in God's image, he continually hopes that his spiritual action escapes the limiting conditions of empirical existence. Christians must confess to serious historical failures on both counts. . . .

"Yet someone who understands two sides of a dialectical process can never simply retreat into one of them. Moreover, within the revolutionary vanguards themselves, analogues of the great theological questions reassert themselves. Can one hope against the probabilities (the past)? Can one avoid imprisonment in one's proximate ideology? Can one have passion for a future as yet undescribable? Can one hope for oneself and one's friends, or just for men in the future?

"It is at this point that the new political theology engages itself. Such questions cannot but be theological in the sense of ultimate. Nor can they intelligently be seen as totally unconnected with the Gospel and its history among us in the West. It is no surprise then that we see in the sixties, on the one hand, a theological movement toward contemporary secular categories, and, on the other, a revival of interest in the question of God."

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Wilfried Ver Eecke of Georgetown University has provided some brief "Reflections on Violence" for

the January, 1970 issue of *Ethics*. He writes, for example:

"Insofar as the rebellion or the resistance is peaceful or innocent [as in childhood], it is extremely healthy for human society. We would therefore not hesitate to call it moral. When we go from individual parents to society at large, the problem becomes more dramatic. In society we have institutions and organizations. People involved in these organizations are public people but at the same time private citizens. As private citizens they may need more directly the approval of the younger generation—their own children. As organization people they do not show this same sensitivity toward contact with adolescents. It is no secret that most of the educational system in the West is obsolete and inefficient. Who is capable of changing it? Or if we want a more symbolic example of insensitivity toward the reaction of youth, we have only to study certain key figures of the Chicago events and their reaction to the violence involved. It is here that as a philosopher one can only try to understand the painful necessity of violence to force needed change, without being able to approve or condemn this violence.

"We cannot approve, because a morally good purpose cannot justify bad means. We cannot condemn either. We can only deplore it, just as moralists do not condemn a just war but keep deploring it.

"When we look now to our own society, it becomes dangerously clear that a philosophical understanding of violence becomes imperative. . . .

"... all revolutions have an inherent danger of appealing to what we called the little barbarian in us. How dangerous this is Hegel has shown through his analysis of the French Revolution. We would call this dimension of revolutions immoral. We can therefore only deplore the confusion present in some of Marcuse's books and writings where he advocates abolition of all repression in society. If Marcuse means that not all repression is necessary, his appeal is justified. If he means to say that there will be a society in the future where the law of life will not apply, we would say that Marcuse's appeal is dangerous and immoral. Marcuse himself makes the distinction between repression and surplus repression in his book, *Eros and Civilization*. This distinction is nevertheless too important to be made only theoretically, and then to be overlooked practically.

"On the other hand we have to treat some violent rebellions as just wars. We cannot condemn them, we can only deplore them, because violent resistance has been in history, and is still today, a guarantee for reform. It may be that the threat of violence is enough and that societal institutions have the power to change

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before they have to be challenged, but that is not what history teaches us.”

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“Violence Pays,” notes George Gale in the *Spectator* (February 28). And particularly as an instrument in the Middle East conflict. “. . . The normal response to the attacks upon aircraft, or in airports, is one of shocked outrage: it is disgraceful, how dare they, they are thugs. The attacks are, of course, disgraceful. That the terrorists dare may be surprising. That they behave like thugs is true, just as it is true that soldiers and sailors and airmen behave like thugs. That innocent, or, more accurately, that random people get killed is undeniable, in war or in peace. Practically all the self-appointed moralizers and preachers of our day, myself not excluded, go on and on deploring violence, especially when the violence is of the imaginable, small-scale kind, and the victims are people like us. What we neglect to say is that violence often works. At the beginning of this week the airlines reacted to the apparent bomb outrages by banning the carrying of cargo to Israel. . . .

“. . . The terrible thing is that a bomb exploding in an aircraft’s hold, destroying that aircraft and its innocent or random passengers in a European forest far away from the land of Palestine, is, in a world which heeds violence, a success. It would be foolish to pretend otherwise, simply because such a bomb is also outrageous.”

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“How about the attitude of religion toward war, particularly of Jewish religion and its daughter religions? On the face of it,” says Mordecai M. Kaplan (*Reconstructionist*, January 23) “those religions seem not only to have suborned war but to have sanctioned and thereby to have contributed to its having become the most deeply rooted human institution. A careful study of the facts, however, will present a different picture. . . .

“. . . Those facts do not have to be dug for by archaeological research but are there on the surface of the texts for any literate person to grasp. . . : God created man in His image. That means that God intended all mankind to display traits that would distinguish it from other animate species. Those traits would be such as to reflect the nature of Divinity. Instead, mankind disobeyed the will of God and brought upon itself the disaster that might almost have destroyed it. That means that the human species resorted to violence—the term actually used in the Bible—for which, from the standpoint of the purpose for which God had created it, it deserved to be destroyed. Mankind was given a second chance,

despite its handicap of ‘original sin.’ It might have reverted to the practice of violence on a large scale when it planned to remain concentrated as one body, had not God divided mankind into nations.

“The Biblical version of the division of mankind into nations is, accordingly, one which views it as a divine plan for the moral education of mankind. The plan consists of two parts: one is to take the most promising nation from a moral standpoint, and give it detailed directions by which it should govern its life, so that it might achieve a form of national existence that would be emulated by the other nations. In the second part of the plan, the other nations are assumed to have retained the basic laws of distinctive human behavior. Those are known as the six or seven laws revealed to Noah, the father of mankind. Being free to choose between obedience and disobedience to God’s law of righteousness, the other nations as well as the people of Israel are all too apt to revert to the sub-human traits of the beast and to commit violence. Instead, however, of waiting till violence once again becomes a universal contagion, God employs its manifestation in international wars as a means of punishing His chosen people for its crimes and of all other nations, when their measure of sin becomes full.

“That religious version of international war . . . envisages that in the end of time there will arise powerful nations which in their unlimited greed for power and in their unrestrained violence will embroil themselves in universal war. . . . When that would be over, so the religious tradition has taught, a new era would dawn upon mankind, an era of universal peace. . . .”

Thus: “Neither the ultimate sovereignty of nations nor international war is a permanent and ineradicable state of nature, as both politics and philosophy assume. They are part of the beast nature which man has not yet overcome, but they are not part of the distinctive human nature which mankind is on the way to achieve. They are part of the interim condition of mankind, interim between, on the one hand, the ideal mankind in the image of God, which ancient tradition ascribed to man’s beginnings, and, on the other hand, mankind’s destined future. . . .”

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A fine, comprehensive history of “opposition to the [Vietnam] war in American religious bodies employing for insight categories of just war theory” is to be found in the Autumn, 1969 issue of *Journal of Church and State*. Of value to teachers and researchers, especially, are James H. Smylie’s extensive notations of book and magazine materials which mark the course of Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish sentiment “from the fall of Ngo Dinh Diem to the fall of Lyndon Baines Johnson on March 31, 1968.”

PAMPHILUS

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