

**THE OLD CHRISTIAN RIGHT:  
THE PROTESTANT FAR RIGHT  
FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION  
TO THE COLD WAR**

by **Leo P. Ribuffo**

(Temple University Press; 354 pp.; \$29.95)

*Garrett Ward Sheldon*

This book is valuable for several reasons. It provides a careful historical study of some leading figures of the religious Right of the 1930s and '40s and the impact of those figures on American politics into the '50s. It employs a methodology uncommon in American historical writing, using both sociological and psychological analysis in daring, and often brilliant, ways. And it places the religious Right of our own time in historical perspective, showing Jerry Falwell et al. to be at once more tame and more sophisticated than their Protestant predecessors.

The "Old Christian Right" endorsed in varying degrees during the 1930s the fascist theory of an "international Jewish conspiracy" and advocated alignment with Nazi Germany. Professor Ribuffo presents the movement through biographies of three of its prominent representatives: William Pelley, Gerald Winrod, and Gerald L. K. Smith. Of the three, Pelley was perhaps the most explicit in his fascistic tendencies, organizing the "Silver Shirts" on the model of Hitler's Storm Troopers and publishing regular anti-Semitic diatribes in his journal, *Liberation*. Gerald Winrod was broad-minded enough to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Jews but, like Pelley, attributed the world's ills to a conspiracy of Jewish international bankers and revolutionaries; his argument was based equally on *The Protocols of Zion* and biblical prophecy. Gerald L. K. Smith combined fundamentalist Christianity with populist demagoguery in his appeals to good old lower-class envy:

"A favorite technique was to ask who in the audience owned four 'good suits of clothes, coats and pants to match,' or two pairs of shoes, or three sets of underwear with 'all the buttons on.' Whatever the item, few hands rose to confirm ownership. Then Smith preached on this 'text': J. P. Morgan possessed copious apparel, including shoes and underwear. . . ."

In his analysis of all three prominent Far Right Christians, Ribuffo finds a common social past and psychological disposition. Pelley, Winrod, and Smith all grew up in families headed by low church Protestant ministers who supplemented their preach-

ing income with pathetically unsuccessful business ventures. The sons inherited both their fathers' religious fervor and their penchant for failure, along with tremendous ambition and delusions of grandeur. Religion, then, became at once a way of rationalizing frustration and a means of achieving upward mobility. As their careers drifted downward, they were able to explain their personal failings in political terms, i.e., the international Jewish conspiracy. This allowed them to adopt a crusading Christian fascism that would cleanse the world of its leading malevolent force and propel them into their own proper position of greatness. In a society whose market values told them they were small and insignificant, the fascist cause offered them dignity and greatness.

Ribuffo finds many similarities between the social and psychological origins of American fascism and those of German fascism in the same period. But lacking a rich feudal heritage to transform into a fascist ideology, the Americans developed different political programs from their German counterparts. These ranged from Bellamian socialism to petit bourgeois capitalism, and sometimes both. It is not, therefore, for their theoretical sophistication or practical significance that such characters are worth studying. What makes them important, for Ribuffo, is the way in which liberal Americans responded to them and the subsequent effect that response had on American politics.

Despite their weak ideology and relatively insignificant following, FDR resented the vitriolic attacks of the three leaders on the New Deal and his administration's support for the Allies. Using constitutionally questionable tactics, Roosevelt prosecuted and suppressed them, all the while receiving the cheers of liberal academics and journalists—who would themselves suffer at the hands of right wingers using similar tactics during the cold war. The Left's Brown scare of the 1930s, Ribuffo argues, contributed to the Right's Red scare of the 1950s by encouraging public hysteria and diminishing regard for the due process of law.

*The Old Christian Right* concludes with a rather too brief comparison of the 1930s religious Right and the 1980s religious Right: Jerry Falwell et al. do not hold a candle to their predecessors of the Protestant Right. But if the Moral Majority is a pale imitation of Pelley, Winrod, and Smith, is it because of changed historical circumstances or because of the Moral Majority's concern with money-making or because fundamentalist rhetoric no longer grips the American public

as strongly as it once did? Has democracy's tendency to homogenize culture rendered all our "extremes" less extreme? Professor Ribuffo does not answer these questions. But he does make it clear that the contemporary Christian Right is far more the handmaiden of conservative politics than was its progenitor. As such, it seems much less ominous than the caricature of it painted by the liberal media. **WV**

**WINDS OF HISTORY:  
THE GERMAN YEARS OF LUCIUS  
DuBIGNON CLAY**

by **John H. Backer**

(Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. [New York]; 290 pp.; \$25.50)

*John B. Keeley*

The military is one of America's most isolated backwaters. Nevertheless, during the years between World Wars I and II, the military produced the group of extraordinary men who created and led the massive organizations that brought victory to the United States during World War II. To many Americans their names are legendary: MacArthur, Eisenhower, Marshall, King, Nimitz, Halsey, Stilwell, Clark, Patton, Bradley. It is remarkable that so many of these men emerged from among a cohort of officers only a few thousand strong. Equally remarkable is that these men of energy, determination, and imagination had spent most of their lives in organizations that were rigid and intellectually sterile.

Our legendary heroes of wartime, however, were not the only extraordinary men of that generation. There were other officers whose greatest success and opportunities for service came after the war, in the crises and confusion of setting the world right-side-up. It is perhaps understandable that these men did not at the time receive recognition for their extraordinary achievements. One of them is Lucius D. Clay, general, U.S. Army, military governor of the United States occupation zone of Germany from 1945 to 1949, the subject of this volume. John H. Backer's exceptional book has saved General Clay from any danger of obscurity.

*Winds of History* is the third of Mr. Backer's volumes on Occupied Germany. The first two—*Priming the German Economy* and *The Decision to Divide Germany*—have provided the foundation for this comprehensive analysis of the victorious powers' single most serious challenge in postwar

Europe: a Germany that was utterly defeated, economically prostrate, and politically destroyed.

There were few illusions about the complexity and severity of the problem: de-Nazification, reparations, prevention of starvation, revitalization of the economy, creation of some kind of internal political process, and, ultimately, reunification of Germany. One illusion, however, was strong and persistent. Despite the difficulty and complexity of the problems, Americans in general and General Clay in particular thought the Allies would be able to shape compatible if not identical policies for their resolution. We all know now that such compatible policies were not to be. The values and interests of the major powers, and especially of the Soviet Union, were too divergent to permit the forging of common solutions.

For the period 1945-49, Backer narrates exceptionally well the complex, difficult, often painful evolution of U.S. policy toward Germany. The story is engrossing. If this can be considered the gestation period for the birth of today's Germanies, then General Clay can be considered the midwife who delivered one of them—the Federal Republic of Germany.

General Clay had spent the war in Washington, D.C., as a high-level Army troubleshooter in relations with American industry. He was well known in government for his intelligence, integrity, energy, and dedication. His savvy, both bureaucratic and political, was impressive for an Army officer and was duly noted by individuals in the Army and elsewhere in government. These talents and attributes were put to the test immediately upon Clay's arrival in Europe in the spring of 1945.

At the time, neither the U.S. Government nor the Army had a clear idea of how to organize, control, or govern a defeated Germany. As the problems of the war itself were unprecedented, the problem of governing a defeated country was new to the Army. A clear statement of goals and policies for governing Germany had yet to be formulated. There were policy disagreements within the Army and between the Army, the State Department, and the Department of the Treasury. The policy statement that eventually emerged—Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum No. 1067—was an unhappy compromise. The task of governing Germany under such ground rules must have been an appalling prospect. General Clay was one of only a handful of men both willing and able to accept a position with responsibilities so grave and with authority and policy so uncertain.

Within a policy framework both ambiguous and overly specific, it was General Clay's task to meet the demands of a starving Germany, to achieve the goals of war reparations and economic recovery, to deal with the vindictiveness of the victors while promoting a democratic society, and to unify where no unification was possible.

General Clay rode this maelstrom for four years. Germany and German policy were constantly buffeted by the developing cold war and by serious policy disagreements among the British, French, and Americans. It was during this period that Western policy-makers began to recognize Germany as not so much a defeated enemy as it was a vital element of European security. Clay was one of the first to see that an economically vigorous and democratic Germany was essential to the long-term stability of Europe. He stubbornly resisted all policies that undermined these goals. However confusing and contradictory American policy may have been, judging by what actually happened, it was remarkably successful. General Clay made it so.

Clay brought intelligence, energy, ambition, integrity, and bureaucratic wisdom to his responsibilities and, most important,

an enormous determination to get the job done. An unwavering sense of duty, ingrained by West Point and his Army service, left him little choice but to perform to the utmost of his abilities. Clay was often frustrated by bureaucratic in-fighting, by ignoramuses in Washington, and by the unwillingness of policy-makers to face reality. He offered his resignation on several occasions.

In each instance the silken cords of duty were twisted tighter (General Eisenhower was a master at playing on the emotions of hard-bitten generals), and General Clay carried on. Though he is not remembered now, Clay returned to the United States in the spring of 1949 to a ticker tape parade down Broadway and the opportunity to address a joint session of Congress. As John J. McCloy states in the foreword: "[T]here are few army officers whose military careers had a more direct bearing on the course of this country's history than did that of General Lucius Clay."

Backer has an outstanding grasp of his subject, based on his experiences in Germany during the period as well as on extensive research. He offers a perspective born of long reflection on the issues and the

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actors in the drama of Occupied Germany. As a gifted writer he has been able to make all this into a book so uncommonly good it is difficult to do it justice. [WV]

### **THE BAD EARTH: ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN CHINA**

by **Vaclav Smil**

(M. E. Sharpe, Inc. [Armonk, N.Y.]; xvi + 245 pp.; \$25.00/\$13.95)

*Albert L. Huebner*

Any analysis of China's current environmental problems must begin with an acknowledgment of the severe constraints imposed by the country's geologic history. No other large, populous nation has so much of its territory in mountains, high plains, and plateaus and, consequently, so small a fraction of easily cultivated farmland. Geographic features combine to cause cold, dry outflows of the Siberian anticyclone in the winter, monsoonal flows in the summer, and serious droughts or floods every single year.

This harsh natural setting has been made worse by centuries of misuse. Wholesale deforestation and abuse of water resources have aggravated soil erosion, desertification, and pollution. Whether it was impoverished peasants cutting wood for fuel and shelter or an emperor having timber harvested to build fabulous palaces, millennia of environmental insults have taken an enormous toll.

Thirty-five years ago Mao Zedong proclaimed that a new China had been formed, a China which, among its other leaps forward, would reverse centuries of environmental degradation. In *The Bad Earth*, Vaclav Smil, geographer at the University of Manitoba and China scholar, contends that no such reversal has taken place. On the contrary, "a mixture of some excellent intentions and notable achievements with much casual neglect, astonishing irresponsibility, and staggering outright destruction" has accelerated the deterioration. Smil's basis for this assessment are the news accounts and articles that have been appearing with increasing frequency—and an increasing sense of urgency—in domestic Chinese publications.

Deforestation continues to be the most critical problem, and one that influences many others. Despite much-publicized new plantings, notoriously poor management has crippled reforestation. And old practices

continue: Accounts portray a destruction comparable to the disappearance rates in the worst-affected forests of the poor world.

As one participant told a nationwide conference on forestry: "According to the estimate based on the actual annual rate of reduction, by the end of this century there will be no trees to harvest."

Deforestation invariably increases erosion of topsoil, reducing crop yield. Most of the eroded soil is deposited in rivers and lakes, blocking outlets, lowering storage capacity, and elevating the dangers of severe flooding, which in turn causes more erosion. Drawing on official figures and numerous scientific sources within the country, Smil estimates that between 1957 and 1977 China lost a stunning 30 per cent of the hardly abundant total farmland it had at the beginning of that period. He comments: "This farmland, capable of sustaining some 200 million people (the equivalent of both Germanies, the United Kingdom, and

France, put together!), is gone—while China's population grew during that period by about 300 million people."

Smil's thorough description of the activities that are destroying physical resources in China will be of value to everyone concerned about widespread and potentially catastrophic abuse of the environment. Less useful is his analysis of its underlying political determinants. For Smil, the pervasive state ideology that accompanied the Communist regime made a bad situation worse. The doctrines of rapid industrialization and increased grain production at any cost only intensified the disastrous resource management practices common before 1949. As the quality of land, air, and water grew steadily worse, an unresponsive bureaucracy and frequently brutal suppression of all criticism made desperately needed reforms impossible. His political analysis might even be applicable to environmental decline and disaster in the Soviet Union, but it provides no model for the scores of ecologically damaged countries on the planet whose political ideologies differ sharply from China's and from each other's.

Smil's discussion of water resources in China illustrates forcefully the usefulness of his analysis of the activities that have led to the torrent of ecological abuses worldwide. Groundwater is being overused in many parts of China, threatening the availability, cost, and quality of water, leading to severe sinking of the surface as water is extracted, and afflicting many coastal areas with salt-water ingress into freshwater aquifers. Sewage pipes serving major cities are old and undersized. And surveys show that most rivers and streams are polluted, including all the major ones; the Ba He in Beijing is so contaminated with industrial waste that it once caught fire and burned. Despite striking differences in geology, history, climate, industrialization, population density, and, most pertinent, in political institutions, the United States too is plagued by each of these problems.

The intensity of concern recently expressed inside China seems to have provoked some serious attempts to arrest the dramatic decline of the physical environment. But the situation is grave, and Smil is justifiably skeptical about the chance of success in the face of awesome population pressures, lack of essential infrastructures, pervasive inefficiencies, and the "unpredictable ever-twisting Party line."

If these encumbrances can't be overcome and the decline of the environment reversed, China's reach toward prosperity will be doomed to failure. Perhaps the lesson that China offers the United States, virtually

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