

talents and aspirations. After all, he is a man who strives for that formula of elegance which can be derived only from a secret mixture of self-assurance and self-deprecation—the quintessence of Style. In *Bauhaus*, Mr. Wolfe is sometimes on target in his pursuit of that elegance, but often he is not—which I deplore, for he *is* one of my most-preferred presences in today's cultural landscape. He correctly punctuates the modern arts' original sins—their bonds with totalitarian ideologies, their mental slaveries, their pomposities that pass for idealism—but his polemical thrust occasionally suffers from indulgences of a skewed argument. It is improper to leave out the warmth of art nouveau, the sensuousness and sinuousness of Secession, but it serves Mr. Wolfe well to ignore them. He does not dwell sufficiently on the relationship between the modern arts' depersonalization and their wicked, antibourgeois absolutism. His choice of criteria and their practical application brings him dangerously close to socialist realism's ukases: in the end, it's as hard to extrapolate aesthetic canons from popular taste as it is to obtain them from demented bureaucratic communist precepts. Wolfe tiptoes toward the status of the chief American anti-European—a healthy chauvinism to my mind, but not where it is most needed, namely, in politics. (Let's hope this will come; what is necessary *now* to say about Europeans is that they have squandered their own civilizational treasure—their sense of heroic commitment to rationality—which makes them behave like sheep both in the arts and elsewhere.) Finally, he has yet to convince me, with a precise quotation, that Dostoyevsky said “ideas have consequences,” as he claims on page 15; to the best of my knowledge, it was the eminent American philosopher of culture, Richard Weaver of University of Chicago fame, who constructed that phrase.

Thus the main problem with Mr. Wolfe's subtle views of architecture is that one is not certain whether to accept

them at face value or as *bon mots*. And which is the most desirable aim for a creative intellectual: to emote a lasting perception, a lasting verbal synthesis or a lasting truth? Much can be said about the possible dissections of the semantic, cognitive and analytical worth of Wolfe's “radical chic,” the “me generation” or “the right stuff”—but these phrases have influenced contemporary cultural ambiances, are mightily alive in the realm of language and are here to stay. After all, is “to be or not to be,” or “there are things on earth . . .” more or less of a literary achievement than *Hamlet's* impact on the literature of torment and guilt? It would be hard to say, but the immediacy and clarity of a *mot juste* may be the most substantial contribution. And that's what is missing from *Bauhaus*. As we all know, it is difficult to produce a flawless intellectual provocation, a classy stunt on a tightrope stretched between fact and interpretation, an effort to make people bark at one another and, at the same time, be hailed as the grand *observateur*. Mr. Wolfe's argument is that the modal concept of the alleged modernity of architecture was conceived in Europe and

imposed on the American culture by the impure tyranny of fashion, and that America, as a nation, hated it and rebelled against it. He seems unaware of the fact that, from the turn of the century until World War II, European architects who preached constructivism, functionalism and formalism were vehemently denounced as promoters of American technological simplism, faceless industrialization, the mass-manufactured Americanization of ancient city landscapes. The universe of cubes, lines and planes was abhorred as demeaningly American. Mr. Wolfe himself loses track of the consistency of fairness: he winces at the curvilinearism of Mendelsohn's Einstein Tower—admittedly a Gaudi-like grotesquerie—but he sees no echoes of it in the curvilinear concept of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum.

I made my choice between syncretism and fantasy, or eclecticism and tolerance, long ago. It was on the Rue Vaugirard in Paris where I saw for the first time, within a neatly composed row of 17th-century townhouses, a gleaming glass-and-steel structure by someone from the Corbu school. I liked it. □

The City of God & Man

Malachi Martin: *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church*; G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York.

by Ellen Wilson

Edward Gibbon's monumental study of the decline of the Roman Empire argued that Christianity contributed to Rome's collapse. In Malachi Martin's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Church*, the Empire strikes back: Martin shows that the great false step of the papacy was the acceptance of Constantine's patronage and the consequent

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contamination of the Church of God by the things of Caesar. From the time of Pope Sylvester—when the newly Christianized Constantine began to load the Church with the trappings of a state religion—to the present, when, in Martin's view, John Paul II is negotiating the Church's passage from a disintegrating Western order to a post-Western universal technocracy, there has been a litany of botched opportunities and progressive decay.

The “hope” Martin holds out is that, when the transition is completed and the world is managed by godless technocrats, when religion is no longer a partner to the counsels of the mighty and no longer informs the consciences of those who oc-

cupy the seats of power, *then* the Church will return to the witness-bearing purity of her earliest days, a time when martyrdom was the usual outcome of an ecclesiastical career.

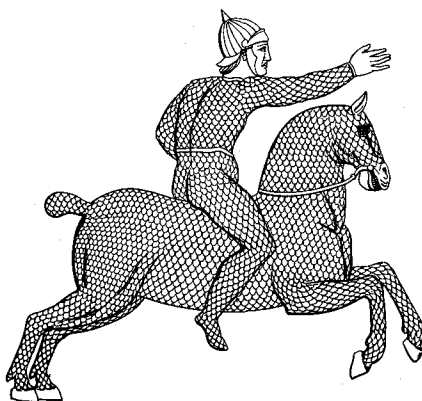
One should not underestimate the strength of his case: every student of Church history can produce his own examples of the Church's collusion with the City of Man. And Martin—whose novels, *The Final Conclave* and *King of Kings*, demonstrate his fascination with scene-painting and dramatic encounter—pulls out all the stops in chapters that read like a script for an ecclesiastical docudrama: popes rivaling Satan in pride and Sodom in debauchery; papal murders and kidnappings; medieval torture presented with a pathologist's scrupulous detail. There are poignant deathbed scenes of popes in exile, popes in prison, popes broken by the collapse of worldly schemes of conquest and power. *I, Claudius* cannot match it.

The format is simple: each chapter describes an aborted opportunity for the occupant of Peter's chair to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, renouncing once and for all temporal power and influence. It is *The Shoes of the Fisherman* replayed in different settings amid shifting alignments of worldly power.

Martin dispenses his own brand of high-grade Irish blarney, and he cannot write a dull book. But there are grave problems with this one which fall into two categories. First, the New Journalism novelization of history leaves one to wonder how much is true and how much is creative writing. Much is clearly fabricated: most of the dialogue; the long internal soliloquies of popes, bishops and kings; perhaps some of the machinations of the papal elections as well. And some of what purports to be straight history is inaccurate or misleading: Martin consistently downplays the role of theological differences in religious controversies, sentimentalizes the history of religious minorities like the Palestinian Christians and the Albigensians, and commits out-and-out bloopers, as in dating some of

the early Church Fathers after the papacy of Leo the Great.

But the larger question, and the greater difficulty, concerns the thesis of Martin's book. That there have been corrupt and myopic bishops and popes no one denies. That they have done Christianity incalculable harm is a painful—and shameful—truth. But the route from these observations to Martin's conclusion that the City of God and the City of Man can and must be cleanly divided is not syllogistic. Spiritual pride and ambition corrupt just as surely as their temporal counterparts, and confining clergy



to a purely spiritual role would not necessarily ensure pious and edifying clergy. Martin's book is marred by his nostalgic romanticization of the age of the Christian martyrs. He turns away from the sorry compromises of Western Christianity to prophesy another age of Christian martyrdom.

An all-or-nothing attitude toward Christian commitment is not only understandable, but also admirable. The West has reached the dead end of liberal pluralism, a largely secular culture espousing values antithetical to Christianity and pursuing goals incompatible with the Christian life. The moral perils of what cocktail-party hostesses call "mingling" are obvious: the immoderate desire to fit in, to "pass" as a normal product of one's time. In reaction to the increased pressure to conform, we have seen the opposite response in recent

years: Christians tend to huddle together for warmth in shared opposition to the World. The emergence of the Moral Majority and the proliferation of private religious schools are two examples of this trend. How far one should go in this direction is a matter of judgment and circumstances. But there are no easy distinctions between the City of God and the City of Man. How should the early Church have responded to a barbarian Europe? Should it have withdrawn into Graeco-Roman purity and taken up permanent residence in the catacombs? Should it have labored patiently to break off a convert or two from the Goth or Vandal hordes? Or should it have acted as it did—tackling the conversion of entire tribes and nations, which at that time necessarily entailed the conversion of their rulers? And if this last choice was the proper one, or even an acceptable one, wasn't some degree of political entanglement inevitable? Such an inquiry attempts simply to understand the context in which the Church's worldly sins were committed. How else could Christianity have been conveyed to the post-Roman world? The Scriptures, the creeds, the writings of the Fathers, the hymns and liturgies had to be shared with the Germans and Slavs and Angles and Saxons; the treasury of ancient civilization had to be shared.

Religion is transmitted through culture, whether native or acquired; this is true even though, as Christopher Dawson has pointed out, civilizations run the risk of identifying religion with culture. Any religion which claims universality and wishes to transcend its origins must work out the difficult questions this entails. The relations of church and state, the boundary lines of secular and religious, are merely one part of the greater question of the relationship of religion to life.

At times Martin seems to accommodate some of these complexities, but his novelistic presentation, his fondness for catalogues of horrors, his desire for a hierarchy fully detached from the world, render him impatient with compromise and

intolerant of errors of judgment. He presents each of his popes with the Great Choice, permits most of them some transitory glimpse of the truth, and then calls in human pride and "historical necessity" to explain the great refusal. In the process historical contexts, errors of judgment and moral corruption are all confounded. The temptation to judge and condemn much of the Church's history testifies to a healthy hunger for simplicity and *holiness* in a church which too often betrays its mission. But the temptation has its darker side. When the early Church emerged from her first great period of persecution and determined that penitent apostates could be readmitted into full communion with the faithful, she chose to become the Church of sinners as well as saints; she strove to follow the example of her Founder, who dined with publicans and forgave Peter's triple denial. That decision made the moral contamination of the hierarchy (not to mention the laity) virtually inevitable. The Roman Catholic doctrine of infallibility is less a proud boast than a desperate divine expedient. It is a concession to weakness, the supernatural supplement to what, in the best and wisest of us, remains a flawed nature.

Outside that narrow circle of security, all hell may literally break loose, with the spiritual authority contaminating the temporal, or vice versa. To baptize and confess and marry and bury the king is to affect, or attempt to affect, his morals and his conduct; there is no impassable wall, no watertight dike between church and state, between the king's confessor and the king's subjects. This does not let institutional religions off the hook, but, on the contrary, imposes on them a dilemma as insoluble as it is unavoidable, which is manifested in a succession of razor-thin decisions.

The alternative—a declaration of war against the World—cannot be chosen, but only accepted if it is imposed. Western Christians note the hardness of Christians in communist countries, contrasting their unambiguous witness with

our own on-again-off-again love affair with the world. But there is another side to religion in Russia or Hungary or Rumania: Dmitry Mikheyev, in an article in *National Review*, reminds us: "fame produces its own 'natural selection'; we know only the dozens of victors and forget that thousands, tens of thousands, did not survive. They were broken, and they perished." This is where the catacombs ends for too many—not in the martyr's palm of victory but in the despair of the apostate and the timeserver. If our generation, or our children's generation, ever faces something of the kind, we must hope for the grace of fortitude. But in the West, the present task of Christians is still to be *in* this world, though not of it. In this age of campaign-

ing priests, revolutionary nuns and Marxist bishops, Malachi Martin's denunciation of the church's involvement in politics is a salutary and well-earned rebuke. But his prescription for purity sounds worse than the disease. Though the middle ground must be negotiated with care, the extremes can be located with some degree of certainty by anyone except disciples of liberation theology. One need not embrace capitalism or Wilsonian democracy to perceive the incompatibility of communism and Christianity. The lessons of history should be learned, but this does not mean we can escape from history. For one of the implications of an incarnate God is that all matters are in some sense religious, but not all are matters with which religious authority should deal. □

Stories With & Without Character

Richard Yates: *Liars in Love*; Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence; New York.

Damon Runyon: *The Bloodhounds of Broadway and Other Stories*; William Morrow & Co.; New York.

by Richard Vigilante

Who is Jill Krentz? I know her only as "Photograph © 1981 by Jill Krentz" which I see everywhere. I don't follow photography and couldn't name another photographer except Mathew Brady. But I know her. She takes the authors' book-jacket photographs for *all* the books published by respectable publishers. She's a monopoly. Not that I wish to criticize Miss Krentz's photography. She is a wonderful photographer. In fact, she is a bit dangerous—a sort of "seat perilous" among photographers. Even in a format as lowly as the publicity photo she reveals souls. A writer who is not of the purest of heart

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and allows her to do his book jacket runs a terrible risk.

It was only after I had read Richard Yates's collection of stories, *Liars in Love*, that I noticed his picture on the back of the book, taken by Miss Krentz, of course. It is a head shot in every sense of the word. Yates's head looks *huge* in the picture, and fills most of it. The head sort of hangs down from his shoulders as if it is just too huge to be supported, even by a body which looks in itself to be pretty substantial. The hugeness of the head is augmented by a whiskery white beard, groomed just carefully enough to go with a tweed jacket or an old blazer, which is what Yates is wearing. His mustache is cut so as to frame his mouth into an expression of restrained yet deep regret, as a clown's makeup *around* the mouth often seems to give the mouth itself a sad expression. But in this case Yates's mouth is very slightly upturned so that without the mustache he would be wearing a slight smile. As it is he appears simultaneously happy and sad as, we must imagine, all wise men are.

But Yates's eyes are the important