

Christ's unique saviorship, Martin Luther would surely have vigorously opposed it, and no living Christian can be happy to see it gaining adherents among young Americans. So long, however, as

those who claim authority from the Christian Messiah are so ineffectual and superficial in exercising it, the new messiahs from the Far East will find *their* fields white already to harvest. (BC) □

Faltering Christian Soldiers

***Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America;* Edited by Mark A. Noll et al.; William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.**

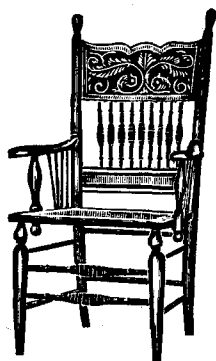
***A Documentary History of Religion in America;* Edited by Edwin S. Gaustad; William B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids.**

Eerdmans justly enjoys a reputation as one of America's leading Christian publishers; however, as modern Christianity itself becomes increasingly fragmented and secularized, publishing books that try to represent the whole of it, as these two volumes do, becomes increasingly problematic. Though the United States has never been united by a single communion or creed, until quite recently it did enjoy near unanimity on such fundamental doctrines as the Fatherhood of God and on the universal applicability of the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments. "We are a Christian people," affirmed the Supreme Court in 1931. As these two works show, that spiritual consensus is crumbling. Now mention of God the Father brings anathemas from feminist theologians, while leading ministers refuse to "impose" any values—even those from the top of Sinai—on anyone.

A few of the contributors to *Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America* are disturbed by the spiritual disintegration of the nation: one writer laments that in the 60's the churches "took up the chorus of selfism"; another perceives that modern "rights" activists have typically had "no

theology at all." But many of them laud the new "liberation" movements, "the new pluralism" with its "moving away from an emphasis on the differences between Christianity and the alternative faiths," and the leftist polemics of the National and World Councils of Churches. They thus evince as much concern about the decline of Christianity as Nero showed for the burning of Rome.

In the second volume of *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, Edwin S. Gaustad seeks "to offer enough balance . . . for virtually every taste." He does, fortunately, include the bracingly conservative theological protest against "captivity to the prevailing thought structures" formulated in 1975 at Hartford under the leadership of the Rev. Richard Neuhaus and sociologist Peter Berger. He also anthologizes this



perceptive observation by George Santayana:

As to modernism, it is suicide. It is the last of the concessions to the spirit of the world which half-believers and double-minded prophets

have always been found making; but it is a mortal concession. It concedes everything; for it concedes that everything in Christianity, as Christians hold it, is an illusion.

Although he can quote Santayana, Gaustad does not seem able to learn from him: in his overall selection of documents and in his commentary on the Moral Majority, on feminism, and on the no-nukes movement, he reveals a decidedly modern liberal bias. The introduction to a pastoral letter from a Catholic bishop "withholding 50 percent of my income tax as a means of protesting our nation's continuing involvement in the race for nuclear arms supremacy" (the last document in the collection) is almost adulatory. Half-believers of the sort Eerdmans now seems willing to let edit and write their books may share the fashionable illusion that denying Caesar half of his due is a valid act of contemporary worship. True Christians who know that this concedes to Soviet atheists the right to abolish every Western congregation will recognize that, like other forms of modernism, it is suicide. (BC) □

At the Abyss

Sidney D. Drell: *Facing the Threat of Nuclear Weapons*; University of Washington Press; Seattle.

Although a world safe from nuclear destruction is an ideal that all civilized people should pray for, as a practical matter, it is an impossibility. Nuclear weapons exist and will continue to do so until the time that (a) they have been used and so only rubble remains or (b) they have been replaced by more potent forces. This is not the City of God—at least, yet. Of late, there has been a great deal of attention focused upon the proliferation of these

weapons. This attention, as it inevitably happens, has consolidated itself into a movement: the nuclear-freeze movement. Whether the participants in that campaign are well-meaning individuals or dupes is essentially of little concern. There is a more fundamental consideration: the question of freedom. Freedom is a fundamental of civilized existence. In the U.S. people are able to organize themselves, march, shout, publish articles, etc. That's obvious; everyone in the U.S. takes it for granted. But the other power doesn't believe in values like freedom. It concerns itself with coercion, brutality, violence, and other topics that even the animal kingdom has evolved beyond. Every day, it seems, there are reports that severe prison overcrowding exists in the U.S. No such reports come from the Soviet Union: the gulag knows no bounds.

Sidney D. Drell is a theoretical physicist and he has been an adviser to the U.S. government on matters of national security and arms control for more than two decades. He is clearly a knowledgeable man. In *Facing the Threat of Nuclear War* he sets forth a number of proposals that he believes and thinks will reduce the possibility of a nuclear war. The items are sensible—or would be if all things were equal. But they are not. Can thugs be reasoned with? Can free people openly trust those beings which viciously annihilated the lives of 269 persons who happened to be aboard an unarmed, lumbering passenger plane that erred into the wrong geography? Metaphors of inhumane being fail before the reality of the foe.

The value of the text comes from an appended open letter written by Andrei Sakharov, wherein he states that his and Drell's points of view coincide in believing that a large nuclear war is nothing more than "collective suicide." The difference be-

tween the approaches of the two men is that Dr. Drell posits a gentlemanly enemy while Dr. Sakharov works with the actual given. He not only knows and understands it, but he has intimately experienced some of its cruelty. While fully acknowledging the desire for peace, Dr. Sakharov warns against easy solutions: "Objective reality is much more complicated and far from anything so simple." He sensibly maintains that in order for the U.S. to deal with the U.S.S.R. it must do so from a point of strength. This means that if the Soviets build missiles and the U.S. doesn't, then there is no reason why the Soviets would pay any attention to the U.S. And while Dr. Sakharov does want a reduction in nuclear arms, he also understands that conventional weapons and soldiers must be there to replace them. Do any placards in nuclear-freeze marches speak of this necessity?

In the near-term, the U.S. must bolster its conventional forces and stay current with regard to nuclear weaponry. But it won't be a simple thing to do. A long passage from Dr. Sakharov must be quoted here:

The restoration of strategic parity is only possible by investing large resources and by an essential change in the psychological atmosphere in the West. There must be a readiness to make certain limited economic sacrifices and, most important, an understanding of the seriousness of the situation and of the necessity for some restructuring. In the final analysis, this is necessary to prevent nuclear war, and war in general.

The question is, of course, whether or not we will do it. The possible—perhaps probable—consequences of not making those changes include not only the deaths of hundreds of millions, but also a reduction of oxygen in the at-

mosphere, various epidemics of known and unknown diseases, and a general collapse of all that is taken for granted. Dr. Sakharov says, "even if mankind were able to preserve itself as a social body, which seems highly unlikely, the most important social institutions—the foundation of civilization—would be destroyed." Should we desire to preserve that foundation—as it doesn't seem that our enemy is too concerned with matters related to civilization—then we must be both pacific and strong. □

Conservative Imagination

Sarah Bradford: *Disraeli*; Stein & Day; New York.

Benjamin Disraeli and John Henry Cardinal Newman are credited with bringing intriguing imponderables into the syndrome of conservative philosophies. Theirs was, in Russell Kirk's phrase, "conservatism of imagination," a rather vague category of cognition and judgment. In fact,



Disraeli's historical image is deceptively coherent, definable, even simple: he's perceived as an astute statesman, dedicated to achieving goals of a political and practical nature. Yet, it has slowly begun to dawn on many that he was not just a master politician, parliamentarian, foreign-policy strategist, and tactician of sociopolitical movements. It is now clear that he was, first and foremost, a seminal thinker, an ideological conceptualist whose world view

and philosophy—which are often not attributed to him—are today the sources of many modern conservative theories and principles. A direct lifeline of ideas seems to connect Disraeli, Churchill, and Margaret Thatcher—that is, leaders whose main concern was (is) to make truths that appeared paramount and undeniable to them palatable to the masses of voters. In other words, their common trait seems to be an ability to connect the lasting historical validity of post-Burkean conservatism with the democratic legitimacy of the political process. Whether Ms. Bradford's book adequately addresses Disraeli's ideological and intellectual legacy is debatable. But her work proves that interest in Lord Beaconsfield's persona and influence is flourishing. □

Westward Directions

***Our Country and Our Culture*;** Edited by Steven C. Munson; The Orwell Press; New York.

The westward expansion from Europe in the 15th century culminated, obviously, in the creation of America. Regardless of their motives—profit, escape, freedom—the people who built this country had to struggle. Nowadays, struggles are defined as merging onto an expressway at rush hour and as opening stubborn pickle jars. Moral fiber is out; granola fiber is in. Things have become so easy that the artists, writers, teachers, and others who help shape and maintain our cultural environment are showing themselves to be increasingly inept at performing those sacred (an "out" adjective, we know) tasks. "Anything goes," they intone, ignoring the consequences. Calling them to task for their negligence and sloppiness was one of the functions performed

in an illuminating Committee for the Free World symposium, the proceedings of which are collected here. □

Perceptibles

Marion Montgomery: *Why Poe Drank Liquor*; Volume II of *The Prophetic Poet and the Spirit of the Age*; Sherwood Sugden; La Salle, IL.

In one of Edgar Allen Poe's better-known stories, "The Pit and the Pendulum," a victim of the Spanish Inquisition narrowly escapes death when strapped to a board while a pendulum swings a knife across his body. Poe himself is strapped down in Marion Montgomery's *Why Poe Drank Liquor*, while scholarly knives slice into him and his work. Dissecting Poe's life and writings, Dr. Montgomery discovers the reasons for a dismal life and a morbid art in the bankrupt spirituality of modern gnosticism. That Poe is guilty of such heresy, Dr. Montgomery proves beyond question by drawing upon his deep philosophical erudition in Aquinas, Heidegger, Bergson, Maritain, Voegelin, and Kierkegaard and upon his intimate literary appreciation of Eliot, Dante, Faulkner, and O'Connor. Nonetheless, since to some it may be hard to resist Yvor Winters's conclusion that Poe belongs merely in the second rank of writers, the reader may wonder if he deserves such a long time on the board beneath such ponderous blades. □

