

gles of silly nuns spouting New Left slogans."

I may add that the infection of the Theology of Liberation—with its Hegelian and Marxist determinations—is being widely fostered in the Catholic Church by such Latin American priests as Gustavo Gutierrez. It has all the utopian absurdities and socialistic dangers of which Wheeler speaks. It is the neo-Modernist plague that seeks to put the teachings of Christianity into "evolution," and is the basic pattern that has been drawn by the "Death of God" theologians. Mr. Wheeler's *Pagans in the Pulpit* has the great advantage of awakening sleeping conservatives, liberals of good will, and the non-committed ones to the late hour for spiritual renewal. I wish this book well, and hope that it unsettles the thought processes of many who sleep.

Reviewed by EDWARD J. BERBUSSE, S. J.

¹Karl Stern: *The Third Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954).

The Imperial Penman

The Imperial Presidency, by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973. 504 pp. \$7.95.*

THE TITLE gives us a fleeting but instructive glimpse at the curious rhetorical operations which flourish in this as in Mr. Schlesinger's other writings. "Imperial," from the pen of a historian and linked with "Presidency," disposes the reader to expect a carefully descriptive comparison of the institutions of past empires with the American Presidency. But nowhere in the book is "imperial" defined, nor is there a single significant reference to any historic empire or emperor. Dressed up as dispassionate, denotative, scholarly, the title is actually a

propaganda epithet for the impassioned moment. In the subrational milieu of *kitsch* where the book will be most commonly received and read, "imperial" has a pejorative connotation akin to "imperious." It is a slogan against the "imperial," i.e., imperious, dictatorial, contrademocratic administration of Mr. Nixon. The term is an ideological sword disguised as a scholarly plowshare, attention being diverted from the demagogic cutting edge by a seemingly objective glance down the centuries.

The text confirms our glimpse of the title. Superficially a historical review of the accretion of presidential power, the book is actually a partisan attack upon the Nixon Presidency. Two uncongenial rhetorical operations, analysis and philippic, are, as usual, carried on simultaneously but with such disarming equability that much vigilance is required to keep each distinctly in view. In the dexterity with which the combination is effected lies the secret of Professor Schlesinger's celebrity.

The occasion for *The Imperial Presidency* is the Liberal Establishment's need to cover its historical flank while it reverses party line on the question of presidential power. The book carries in itself ample evidence that the reversal is temporary and expedient, for it provides for an easy return to the old position when necessary. The Liberals have for more than a generation favored (and exercised) the widest latitude in presidential (and executive generally) initiative and authority. They have portrayed the Presidency as "the central instrument of democracy," and continuing additions to its prerogatives as desirable and inevitable. However, Mr. Nixon has evinced a need to curtail presidential power in non-Establishment hands. In an over-modest apology the author counts himself among the scholars who, "over-generalizing from the prewar [World War II] contrast between a President who was right and a Congress which was wrong," lent themselves to "an uncritical cult of the activist Presidency." But unlike Andrew Jackson's deathbed chagrin that he had not shot

Henry Clay and hanged John C. Calhoun, there is no genuine regret or repentance here. When in his last chapter Schlesinger comes to discuss concrete proposals for shifting the balance of power back toward the Congress, he finds none of them satisfactory, being unwilling to tie the hands of any future Liberal President. And in more than four hundred pages of historical discussion of the growth of executive power in such respects as war-making, treaty-making, spending, and privilege, the only power grabs that arouse his unmitigated indignation were committed either in the remote past or by Mr. Nixon. All this is to say that Professor Schlesinger does not intend to give up the "cult of the activist Presidency," only the "uncritical cult of the activist Presidency."

The real thesis of *The Imperial Presidency*, nowhere unambivalently stated, is that pre-Nixon accretions of presidential power were essentially natural (and therefore good) developments, while Nixon's exercises of authority have been unnatural (and bad). Not that the rationalization of all non-Nixonian aggrandizements is explicit. Rather it is a matter of tone and weight, of carefully selected and artfully arranged connotations. A close attention to language shows us that in Schlesingerian history accretions of executive authority under Democratic Presidents have occurred with a kind of blameless inevitability. In the case of FDR, for instance, there was "extraordinary power flowing into the Presidency to meet domestic problems." Again, prior to Nixon, "a generation of foreign and domestic turbulence had chaotically delivered [power] to the Presidency." And if Kennedy exercised great initiative in foreign affairs it was chiefly because of "the prevailing atmosphere" when he became President, and because the Cuban missile crisis "really combined all those pressures" which made presidential initiative uniquely necessary (Schlesinger's italics). Before Nixon then, Presidents had not sought power so much as had it thrust upon them! Mr. Nixon, however, is denied the

comfort of rowing with the currents of history. With him there has been a deliberate, unprecedented, malevolent seizure of power, "a scheme of presidential supremacy," "a drastic reorganization of national authority," an attempt to govern in defiance of Congress, people, press, and even of most of the executive branch. Because of peculiar defects, Mr. Nixon has flouted Constitution and consensus to gather powers that were previously only potential into an "imperial Presidency." It is encouraging to be assured, however, that he has had to wrench history out of its channel in this, for if "a more traditional politician" like Humphrey, or a "more conscientious politician" like McGovern had been raised to the presidential seat, they "would doubtless have tempered the tendency to gather everything into the White House."

Again, it must be stressed that in Schlesingerian history these insinuations are not so much directly and consistently made as they are sneaked upon us in the midst of apparently temperate accounts of events. The Schlesinger technique is to have it both ways, to shift from determinist to moral critic and back again as occasion requires, and as the following passage will illustrate:

Nixon's Presidency was not an aberration but a culmination. It carried to reckless extremes a compulsion toward presidential power rising out of deep-running changes in the foundations of society. In a time of the acceleration of history and the decay of traditional institutions and values, a strong Presidency was both a greater necessity than ever before and a greater risk—necessary to hold a spinning [*sic*] and distracted society together, necessary to make the separation of powers work, risky because of the awful temptation held out to override the separation of powers and burst the bonds of the Constitution. The nation required both a strong Presidency for leadership and the separation of powers for liberty.

Examples might be multiplied endlessly,

but by making his own comparison of the treatment of FDR's destroyer deal of 1940 (pp. 106 ff.) with the account of Nixon's "Cambodian incursion" of 1970 (pp. 189 ff.), the reader may obtain a sufficiently detailed understanding of how these maneuvers work, of how carefully constructed portrayals of situations, which on the surface are merely descriptive accounts, can seduce us down the primrose path to unwarranted generalizations. Stripped of its comely rhetorical camouflage, Schlesinger's defense of Roosevelt on this occasion reduces to two incompatible points: 1) Roosevelt did not stretch presidential power, necessity did. 2) When Roosevelt stretched presidential power it was a good thing because he was a good man. To put it another way, presidential aggrandizements which meet Mr. Schlesinger's standards of necessity and virtue are by definition not usurpations. Presidential aggrandizements for purposes or from necessities with which he does not agree are, by definition, usurpations of power. This tells us what Professor Schlesinger (and the Liberal Establishment) likes and dislikes, but it does not lead us to any objective principles, valid for all occasions, by which to identify, either technically or morally, abuses of executive power. One may agree with Schlesinger that Nixon acted with deviousness, historical ignorance, and constitutional insensitivity, and that his conduct would seem foreign and reprehensible to the Founding Fathers. But we still have nothing but Professor Schlesinger's preferences—immaterial evidence—to prove that Nixon's acts differed in kind or degree from those of his predecessors. It depends simply on who is defining necessity and virtue. At best the author's main point is a shallow subjective judgment, at worst an Orwellian stratagem.

There is nothing new about this trick of being at the same time determinist and moral critic—it is a Schlesingerian stock-in-trade, and most convenient in disguising the partisan behind the historian. In his *Partisan Review* article in 1949 on "The Causes of the Civil War: A Note on Histori-

cal Sentimentalism," Schlesinger argued 1) that the antislavery movement did not cause the Civil War, and 2) that the antislavery movement was morally justified in causing the Civil War. This article is still considered by many as the definitive put-down of historians whose views of causation are more complex ("sentimental"?), which only goes to prove that tricks are not too hard to pull off if a large part of your audience yearns to believe in magic. In the celebrated *The Age of Jackson*, Schlesinger began with Jeffersonian democracy, *i.e.*, Southern planter agrarianism, transmogrified it through something which he labelled "Jacksonian democracy" but which more precise students have identified as anti-Jacksonian reformism, and ended up with Lincolnian Republicanism. All these incongruous elements were tied together with a golden ribbon of rhetoric and the package bequeathed as the exclusive inheritance of the New Deal. *All* the angels are on Professor Schlesinger's side, *all* the time.

Mr. Nixon's real offense was not that he soiled the splendid mantle of his predecessors; rather, with a pathetic lack of fashion sense and aplomb, he has clung to the rags and tatters of his Liberal predecessors' garments long after they have seen their best days. But it may be that Schlesinger too has made a fashion blunder, which will explain why this latest book has not been very cordially received, even among ideological confrères. Many of those who share his tastes and distastes no longer care to argue by artful historical plausibilities. They prefer more direct and violent rhetoric. While he still pines for Augustus, they are ready for Caligula and Nero. Certainly there is nothing here that would cause us to doubt that when the usurper is laid low and the true imperators return to claim their throne, Mr. Schlesinger's pen will be once more at their service. Meanwhile, we must look elsewhere to be enlightened and armed against them.

Reviewed by CLYDE WILSON

Imperial but Volatile

The Imperial Republic, by Raymond Aron, translated by Frank Jellinek, *Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974. xxxviii + 339 pp. \$10.00.*

IN THE JUNGLE of academic nomenclature no title—unless it be Master of Arts—is more risible than that of Political Scientist. Few who receive the M.A. degree can claim to have mastered any art, let alone more than one. And even fewer practitioners of what is called political science seem able to teach or write with the detached objectivity that science inexorably demands.

It is not unusual, however, to find a scientific approach to political phenomena, though more frequently in historical rather than in contemporary analysis. In such clarifying and unemotional examination the French have been outstanding, as the names of Montesquieu, Tocqueville and Siegfried attest. To these may be added the name of Raymond Aron, famous columnist of *Figaro* and author of a dozen studies that rise above the pitfalls of journalism without entering the smog of textbooks. In *The Imperial Republic* M. Aron has now written what he calls “a critical essay on the foreign policy of the United States.” *La République Impériale*, as it first appeared in France two years ago, is rather more than that.

The author’s logical cut-off date is the American military withdrawal from Vietnam and President Nixon’s coincident moves towards détente with Russia and recognition of Red China. With these, says M. Aron, “the entire postwar era came to an end.” The containment of Communism was shelved in favor of the effort to find a *modus vivendi* with ideologically hostile powers. But: “Two major uncertainties loom over the evolving new system.” One is the possible American reversion towards isolationism. The other is a resumption of the revolutionary intent of Communism.

“What tradition teaches”—to both sides—is “Aristotelian prudence.”

Professor Aron (he is academician as well as commentator) points out that the American Republic has always shown expansionist tendencies. He has no doubt that it has become “imperial” and that strong forces operate to keep it on that road. But he does not regard the United States as an empire, certainly not in the nineteenth century sense of direct domination over alien and subject peoples. “The President has the vast and almost terrifying power to commit the nation to ventures which he does not believe he can then abandon without losing face.” Nevertheless, “freedom to dissent” and “the most inquisitive press in the world” are very effective checks to imperial rule. “There is no more an *imperator* internally than an empire externally. Only a *quasi-imperator of a quasi-empire*.”

If strict classification is wanted Professor Aron should be placed in the old-fashioned category of political economist, where equal weight is given to adjective and noun. He is well aware of the constant interaction of politics and economics and of the way in which each line of thinking, in a democracy, can adversely affect the other. Therefore *The Imperial Republic* is divided into two approximately equal parts. The first, examining the paramount place so rapidly achieved by the United States among other sovereign powers, is essentially political. The second part, considering the uneasy dominance of enfeebled dollars in the world market, is primarily economic. It is the weaving together of these two factors which give this book much of its originality and value. One of the author’s interesting conclusions is that our “military-industrial complex,” against which President Eisenhower warned, is directed not by the Pentagon so much as by big business and financial thinking. “The armaments race . . . is, I believe, determined by the interrelation of technology and politics, in which the armed forces have in no way had the initiative.”

This provocative thought makes it the