

of their creator, characters who have a life of their own beyond the ideas they are there to represent or illustrate.

To have written this novel at all was an act of supreme moral

courage, but to have come so very close to realizing the aims of a lifetime of work just at the moment when death was about to strike is an achievement that commands our admiration.

## The Balance of Faiths

WILLIAM LEE MILLER

**CREEDS IN COMPETITION: A CREATIVE FORCE IN AMERICAN CULTURE**, by Leo Pfeffer. Harper. \$3.

When we deal with differences over ultimate matters, it is hard even to find a common language and a shared frame of reference in which to state what those differences are. We all know, more or less, that we do not quite understand faiths that are not our own. Usually when a secular social scientist tries to describe what religious folk believe, or a Christian tries to say what Jews believe, or a Protestant tries to explain Catholicism (and in every case vice versa), the result is something like an unmusical person's attempt by sheer intellect to tell about music or an English novelist's attempt to write American slang: some of the words may be right, but the placing, the meaning, the feel for it is not right. In this little book by the lawyer of the American Jewish Congress, for example, the attempt to describe what Catholics and Protestants believe ("the wickedness of man") is not very useful, despite the author's desire to be fair.

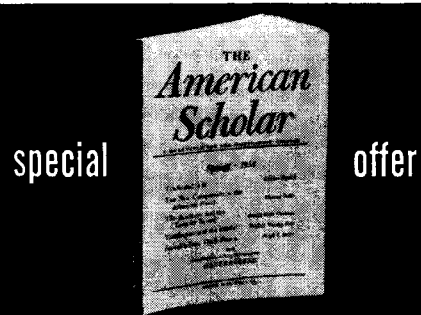
But the difficulty goes well beyond the obvious problem that we all have in understanding another's faith; it extends to the less obvious problem that we all have in interpreting the issues of "church and state" or "religious relations." Here we are more influenced by our particular view than we ordinarily admit. Our bias appears not only in our statement of another's view but also in our statement of the common problem and of proposed solutions. For example, Mr. Pfeffer's main metaphor, of a "marketplace" in which competing creeds sell their "wares," will hardly commend itself to some of the "competitors."

The Protestant may express his bias with an innocent unstated assumption—taken as self-evident—that his views are the American norm. As Father John Courtney Murray often has observed, the Protestant may read the phrases in the First Amendment about not establishing religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or the idea of a "separation of church and state," as a kind of a national enactment of the free-church position. Any group that is authoritarian in church government is disallowed. The solution to all these problems, a Protestant may cheerfully imply, is for Father Murray & Co. either to go back on the boat or to become Baptists.

The nonreligious person may feel that only the man who has escaped the limiting commitments of religion can really look at the whole question with a fresh, clear, unbiased mind. His ideal picture of the religious scene sees religion as just a "private matter," for those who like that kind of thing; something to be left strictly at home or in church, and to be subordinated to a common civic faith in "democracy" or something. Often he too is innocent, unaware that his view contradicts directly what most believers believe.

The Jew and the Catholic, too, have their ways of disallowing an opponent's point from the start. When a Jewish child, caught in public-school renditions of the Christmas carol, has to solve his problem by singing "Christ, your savior, is born," we feel that the unthinking Christian majority has done something it should not have done. Still, the sensitivities of the minority cannot quite have an absolute veto. The problem is not, as the Jewish community for reasons that are under-

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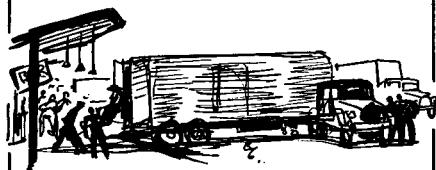
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## THE REPORTER

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standable tends to see it, exclusively a matter of minority rights, requiring a vigorous resistance to every breach in an absolutist interpretation of "separation of church and state." There must be some legitimate place somewhere for the majority's claims too, and the meaning of "separation of church and state" is not settled, clear, and absolute, but is itself at issue.

The Roman Catholic version of this error—of defining the rules so your side necessarily will win—is more noticeable because it includes the formal insistence on the Church's authority and truth. The error appears also, however, in more informal expressions: in the creeping infallibility that extends itself out beyond the necessarily authoritative center to the sometimes unnecessarily self-confident periphery.

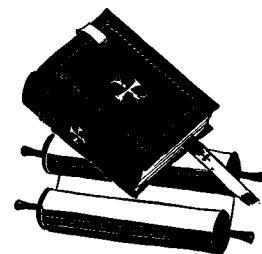
The debate, by all parties, on these matters has a built-in inflationary tendency: it is continually elevated above the level of public policy to the higher realm of Constitutional, moral, and religious principle. There is generally much psychoanalysis of the Founding Fathers, as though if we could find what they *really* meant that would solve the matter. But appeals to James Madison and Thomas Jefferson are not going to solve our current problems. And the decisions of the Supreme Court would seem to indicate that it is at least as confused about church and state as everybody else.

MR. PFEFFER does not lean very hard on Constitutional principle and Founding Fathers; instead, he describes the current problems in detail. But his description does manage to make his own point.

In a way, his book is a sort of *Realpolitik* of the American religious scene. His approach is to the "harmonism" of, say, the National Conference of Christians and Jews roughly as the realistic world politics of Hans Morgenthau or George Kennan is to the idealism of Wilson. The parallel, in fact, is even reflected in his language: Mr. Pfeffer writes continually of the "alliances" that the different religious groups form with and against each other, as blocs, in order to preserve what he does not quite call the balance of power in the American religious

scene. Protestantism seems more or less to fill the role of balancer, like Britain in relation to continental politics in the nineteenth century. Judaism is like a lesser power in a great-power world, occasionally able effectively to throw its weight when the balance is fairly even ("... the weight it adds to the Protestant dissent-secular humanism alliance is by no means inconsiderable..."). Catholicism is what I believe is called, in the Kissinger language, the "revolutionary" power: the aggressive and dynamic one, which tends to upset the prevailing balance. ("Catholicism has passed from the defensive and has become an active and confident protagonist in American cultural competition.") Catholicism is becoming the chief defender of the American "moral culture," which was shaped by the "alliance" of Protestant dissent and Calvinist Puritanism, but also the chief critic of the American "political culture," especially its idea of "separation," that was shaped by the "alliance" of Protestant dissent and secular humanism.

Despite his cheerful references to a not very specific "creativity" that results from America's "competition," Mr. Pfeffer's book—to continue the Kissinger figure—really suggests a sort of "limited war" among the powers, and especially against the revolutionary Catholic power. Sometimes he seems to go beyond that—almost to fall into the demand for unconditional surrender. In its worst part the book dismisses "compromise" and says that "in an all out contest ending with one contestant victorious and the other defeated, at least one party is happy." But in its better parts it sets down sensible rules to limit and moderate the conflict, and it presents a summary of the agitated issues (adoption, Sabbath laws, divorce, birth control, censorship, and above all, religion and education) by one who knows those issues well.



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