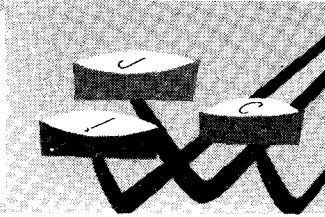


# Manner of Speaking



**RELIGION AND CITIZENSHIP:** I have formed the habit of tossing collections of newspaper clippings into a file for later browsing and second thinking, and so it is that I find myself poring over reports on the Supreme Court's school-prayer decision and on clerical reactions to it. I shall not pretend to disinterest, for certainly the first and the central question to arise from the court's decision and from the clerical response to it involves the right of the nonbeliever to full citizenship, and on that issue I have all of my own confused world to defend.

The Supreme Court has taken the position that it is unconstitutional for an agency of the government to coerce religious expression, and it has held that for a public school to require the reading of a prayer as part of its standard procedure constitutes such coercion even when dissenting pupils are permitted to abstain from the reading.

Churchmen, by and large, have cried out against this decision. A scattering of Protestant ministers and relatively more rabbis have supported it, but what I take to be the essential position of most clergymen was baldly stated by *The Advocate*, a Catholic publication in New Jersey:

In the majority opinion there is the vote that by denying the use of this prayer in the schools of New York, the court is upholding what it claims to be a traditional wall of separation of Church and State. More truly could it be said that it is erecting a wall of separation of God and State. The impact of this decision can have lasting effects on the minds and hearts of every child attending a public school in the United States of America.

That the effect of such a decision will be far-reaching seems certain, but that the results will be bad, as *The Advocate's* editorialist implies, is a conclusion I must oppose, and without intending any attack upon religion. A man's religion is his own business; his own, and that of any clergy whose guidance and discipline he voluntarily accepts. If he is given to prayer, there is nothing to keep him from praying silently at any time. Nor can I recall having read any churchman to the effect that God cannot hear a silent prayer as readily as one spoken aloud.

It is, rather, an essence of every modern religion I know anything about that God need not be shouted at, and that the quiet heart may reach Him as readily as any.

But it is not religion I mean to argue. Reason may hope to speak to reason on many topics, but I have seldom found religion to be one of them. For years I had to forbid my freshman English students to take religion as the topic of their weekly themes. It was my duty, as part of a hoped-for conversation in reason, to demand of them intelligent generalizations (sometimes called topic sentences) and to demand that those generalizations be supported by orderly, thoughtful, and coherent evidence or deduction, or both. But what happens when the instructor must criticize the reasoning process, only to have the student cry, "That's my religion!"? All hope of communication ends right there. Sooner or later the instructor learns to insist that his students avoid any topic that makes dispassionate comment unacceptable. What the instructor so learns, the instructor-turned-columnist is not likely to forget.

**T**HE ISSUE, I repeat, is not religion but my right to make up my own mind—and to let my children make up theirs—on such matters as God, prayer, and the intent, if any, of the Universe. It is the right to reach a personal decision with no least trace of coercion from any branch of government. And it is the right to unimpaired citizenship no matter what final view one comes up with.

It would not be honest to pretend that I have not reached what I take to be a reasonably firm and final view. I do not pray, and I am not aware that a belief in supernatural forces motivates anything I do. I am not moved to be militant about my view. Our local Presbyterian Church has a good choir, my daughter likes to sing, and my wife happens to feel more comfortable when she can edge the kids to Sunday School. The kids seem to enjoy Sunday School there, and there they go. As far as I am concerned, they may stop going whenever they please, or they are free to stay with it all the way through ordination if that is the road they find for themselves. When they ask about my own views, I try to give them as fair an answer as I can form,

but never a directive one. I mean to coerce no man's view of the universe, and certainly not theirs.

If I did not believe my secularism to be as valid as any man's religion, I should, of course, change my view. Why take a second-class seat to mortality? I hold to the best I can see. And I may be wrong. But my tolerance ends at the point at which any man dares to rise to me in my error—if error is what it is—to say that I am required as a citizen to believe, and publically to avow, that the United States exists, as the Eisenhower pledge of allegiance would have it, "under God."

**I** DO NOT so believe, nor will I accept such a belief as a condition of my citizenship. Yet, by insisting on the federal rightness of their own point of view, the sponsors of this religious insertion into a civil declaration have made it impossible for me to be quiet in my own conscience in pretending to pledge allegiance to the flag. For even if I omit the words "under God," I still seem to be endorsing them, and I will not permit such seeming. If there must be such an interpolation, let me suggest substituting for it the words "in this Universe." I am confident that the nation does exist somewhere in the Universe. I can say that much in good conscience. At the same time, any man who believes the Universe to be God-suffused, can read into this substitution his own affirmation of belief, and so, in good democratic principle, may we both be served.

*The Advocate's* editorialist argued that the Court's decision erected a wall between God and State. I, for one, insist upon that wall, for in practice God and State cannot be distinguished from Church and State. If it is entered as a public premise that God will speak to the State, it will certainly be the churchmen who will rise to say the words for Him, and forgive me for suspecting that *The Advocate's* editorialist would be among the first volunteers.

I will insist with the minority of the clergy that the Court's decision is fundamental to the idea of the American democracy. It takes religion away from no man and forces it upon none. It declares again that though a man is free to worship as he sees fit, or not to worship at all, his citizenship is secular and in no way dependent upon his affirmation of religious belief, or upon his refusal to make such an affirmation. For what point can there be in defending the right of the individual conscience, if the individual is not free, in conscience, to come to the less popular conclusion as well as to the more popular one? —JOHN CIARDI.

# Europe looks outwards



This is Europa at the foot of the Albert Memorial (1872), staring out at the strange world of nine decades later. In August THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT published an important number on the vast extension overseas of the English language and its literature which this century has seen. The issue dated September 21 fills out the picture with a further special number dealing both with the part played by other world languages, such as French and Spanish, and with the wider question of Europe's cultural influence in the world. The Commonwealth? Europe? Politically these may at the moment be rival conceptions, but so far as literature and ideas are concerned both are parts of a larger whole.

A dozen problems spring to mind. Is there a revival of Portuguese writing in BRAZIL to match the extraordinary achievements of modern Brazilian architecture? What is the relationship between Spanish literature and the countries of LATIN AMERICA? Can the French literary tradition survive in NORTH AFRICA and the MIDDLE EAST; and what is happening to French-language writing in CANADA, and to French negro writing in BLACK AFRICA and MADAGASCAR? How persistent is the European tradition in ISRAEL? What kind of picture of European literature is available in CHINA? What is the impact of European culture in AUSTRALIA today? Are European influences on the novel in the UNITED STATES as strong now as they were in the time of Melville and James; and is American English the *lingua franca* of the mid-twentieth century?

These are some of the questions which are analysed—and in some degree answered—in 'Europe Looks Outwards', a special number of

## THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

To readers of 'Saturday Review' we are making a special introductory offer of a **FREE** copy of 'Europe Looks Outwards' with each new subscription to THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT; it will be mailed to you from our New York Office, and your subscription (52 issues a year) will be sent direct from London each week. Please use the coupon below.

<p>TO: THE TIMES, LONDON, INC., 25 EAST 54th STREET, NEW YORK, 22, N.Y.</p>	<p><b>ORDER FORM</b></p>
<p>Please enter a year's subscription to THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT, on my behalf, commencing with a free bonus copy of 'Europe Looks Outwards'.</p>	
<p>NAME..... (BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE)</p>	
<p>ADDRESS.....</p>	
<p>.....</p>	
<p>I enclose my check for \$.....</p>	
<p>One annual subscription (52 issues): \$7.50 (or 8.00 Canadian dollars). Two subscriptions \$14.00 (or 15.00 Canadian dollars). Three subscriptions \$20.00 (or 21.50 Canadian dollars). More than three pro rata.</p>	
<p>O.S.</p>	

# IS A NEW LITERATURE POSSIBLE?



By STEPHEN SPENDER, *English poet and critic, and, since 1953, co-editor of the magazine Encounter.*

LITERATURE is easily one of the most limited of the arts. It is limited because it has as its material words, which have meaning apart from their use in literature. And this meaning—even if stretched—must be maintained within a literary work. In painting and music, the cards with which the game is played can be replaced by a new pack. In literature, the pack can only be reshuffled.

It follows that literature can never become new in the way the other arts can. For if the literary artist could revolutionize his medium for the purposes of his art as a painter or sculptor can his material, or even a composer the instruments for which he writes, then literature would become not merely divorced from "life," but from language.

There have, of course, been attempts to invent a special literary language of images, symbols, or sounds separated as far as possible within a literary work from outside associations and from prose meanings. In the nineteenth century, for example, there were the Symbolists, led by Mallarmé, and, more recently, the movement known as the Imagists.

Imagist poets such as H.D. attempt-

ed (perhaps without fully realizing they were doing so) to write an unanalyzable kind of poetry, close to painting, by concentrating on the creation of an image rather than a statement. They advocated a kind of poetry which could not be completely paraphrased, the kernel of which was an unanalyzable word-picture. They wanted to release poetry from the burden of past conventions and traditional ways of thinking by reproducing the image which springs naked into the mind from the impact of some aspect of modern life. Yet, ironically, their influence developed critical consciousness far more than it did poetical creativeness. Every poet-critic produced ten critic-poets.

Moreover, the most intelligent of the Imagists soon realized that a poetic medium which was entirely special would cease to have meaning. An art made from such a medium would be calligraphic or onomatopoeic, approaching painting or music. Attempts, like those by the Dadaists and Kurt Schwitters, to produce a poetry of typography or of sounds, totally devoid of prose meanings, point up the fact that such attempts could only succeed if they produced a completely new art, which of course would not be literature.

Thus a "revolution of the word," in the sense of the words changing completely their meaning and becoming something else, is one kind of revolution

that is impossible. It may be theoretically possible to discover an entirely new form in which a poem might be written, but form is only one aspect of a poem, and its being unprecedented would only make a superficial break with the unavoidable continuities of grammar and usage.

But the fact that language of its own nature repudiates a complete break between past and present leads to the opposite and, as it were, complementary error to that of those who think a literary work should be new in the way painting, sculpture, and music can be. This is the error of those who think that modern creativity must be tied down to the values of certain established masterpieces. The exponents of the Great Tradition and like theories argue that modern conditions are unprecedented (by which they mean in the line of no continuous tradition); therefore, work of value cannot be created from these conditions. The only hope—the argument runs—is for writers to study the works of the Great Tradition, works which were written in a time when literature was the crystallization of the organic life of the community.

If this attitude is applied not just to modern conditions, but to the language and idiom which arises from them, it follows that writers should confine themselves to writing within the context of the literary language hallowed