VOLUME 13, NO. 4 APRIL 1970

WORLDVIEW is published monthly [except for a combined July-August issue] by the Council on Religion and International Affairs. Subscription $4.00 for one year; $7.00 for two years; $9.00 for three years.

Address: 170 East 64th Street, New York, New York 10021. TE 8-4120

CONTENTS

Readers are reminded that worldview welcomes correspondence. Letters may be specific comments on articles in recent issues of general discussion, but readers are requested to limit their letters to 500 words.

RELIGION AND POLITICS: 1958-1970

Twelve years after the founding of *worldview* and nine years after my leaving its editorship, I am invited to write a guest editorial for this journal. As one who, over the years, has maintained a continuing concern with those questions of the relationship between religion and politics which are the *raison d'être* of the Council on Religion and International Affairs, I welcome an opportunity to reflect on the evolving state of these questions during the past decade.

The problem of religion and politics and the task faced by such a journal as *worldview* seem to me radically different in 1970 than they were in 1960. During the early years of this journal's history, it seemed an urgent duty to help bring the various religious groups in the United States to a greater degree of political sophistication and involvement. The effort was to educate religious groups to take politics seriously as an area possessing its own necessities, inner logic, and autonomy, an area in which abstract religious and ethical principles could seldom be directly or simply applied. This was a time, for example, when many Roman Catholic groups seemed to approach the problem of America's relations with the Communist nations almost completely from the premise of an abstract, highly moralistic anti-Communist ideology. (It is not morally permissible to seek coexistence with that which is totally evil; but communism is totally evil; therefore it is not morally permissible to seek coexistence with communism.)

Many Protestant and Jewish groups, on the other hand, seemed still to approach political questions from the standpoint of an ethical utopianism inherited from the idealism of a more innocent age, and were still unenchanted by the lesson of Reinhold Niebuhr. The mistakes of many Catholics stood in violent opposition to the mistakes of many Protestants and Jews (the mistakes of the religious Right on the one hand; the mistakes of the religious Left on the other), but both, carrying their own dangers, had a common source: a refusal to take politics as politics sufficiently seriously and to understand the hard, intractable realities of concrete and complex power structures which must condition the political application of all religious principles and idealisms. Through a meeting in its pages of theologians and political scientists, of leaders of Church and State, *worldview* sought to discover how, through beginning with political realities and then making application of religious and ethical insights within their context, the greatest possible good, or, more frequently the least possible evil, might be achieved.

In all of this, the basic attempt was to help educate American religious groups out of temptations to ethical totalitari-

anism—temptations which had sometimes led them to seek politically wrong things for religiously right reasons. Politics is not a species of piety nor is statecraft the application of some gospel; and religious men, if they are to speak wisely within the secular city, must have learned the tragic realities of power. If they are to pursue justice they must first lose their innocence.

These seem to me basic and perennial truths, and I believe *worldview* has done valuable service for the nation's religious-political communities by insisting upon them. But the radical differences between the present situation and the situation ten years ago is this: the old danger was that many religionists did not take politics as polities seriously; the present danger is that they no longer take religion as religion seriously. If the old problem was of a religious totalitarianism into which believers attempted to assimilate politics, the new problem is of a political totalitarianism under which everything, including religion, falls. In his contribution to the new book *Movement and Revolution,* Peter Berger writes of "the several totalitarian features of contemporary pan-politicalism." One of these features surely is the new view of religion as being, at its most "relevant," a sublimated form of political action.

•

In our day, the churches seem finally to have learned that they could no longer exist in a merely monological stance towards the world, that they must learn from secular experience as well as teach, judge, and correct it. But it would be a tragedy both for religion and for politics if the lesson had been learned by the churches naively or only too well. The result would be the passing from one monological psychology—the religious—into another—the political. And this last state would be worse than the first.

In the age of angry and polarized politics upon which we have entered, the insights of religions which refuse to become mere agencies for conformity are desperately needed. As the Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx reminds us, a religion which strives for total relevance and identifies itself completely or uncritically with the ethos and aspirations of a particular age is finally irrelevant. "If the church becomes identical with the 'world' and 'improving the world' and means nothing more than this, she has already ceased to bring a message to the world. She has nothing more to say to the world and can only echo what the world discovered long since."

The dialogue between religion and politics is as important—more important—today than it was when *worldview* was founded. But the changes in our society itself seem to me to reverse the emphasis which must now be made. The call to a total political involvement is shouted on every street-corner, and Berger's "pan-politicalism" threatens to engulf us. Religion's transcending, and frequently detached, word must again be asserted.

William Clancy

DISENGAGEMENT AND EUROPEAN STABILITY

As the East and West German governments begin, however uneasily, a crucial dialogue, it again becomes possible to imagine a change in the divided condition of Europe. At the same time, the American popular mood of foreign political and military retrenchment has produced new talk, within the Administration as well as in Congress, of American troop withdrawals from Europe. The two elements in the situation admirably coincide: they ought, rather, to interact. As matters now stand we may see an American withdrawal during the next few years which spontaneously removes the single most important advantage the West possesses in attempting to influence what the whole of Europe is to become.

The objective of East German diplomacy is to consolidate and legitimize the German Democratic Republic. The Soviet interest, both in the German talks and in the European Security Conference it seeks this year, is to consolidate its bloc: to make formal and permanent the relationship of the East German states to the USSR—including, by implication, the right the Soviets claim to intervention in Eastern Europe when that is necessary to preserve the "conquests of socialism."

•

It is not at all clear that the West European or American governments have anything like so coherent a view of what they want, or might expect, of change in Europe. The mood in the West—which has dominated policy in the absence of clear argument—is for stability and "normalcy," although in this case the norm is a quarter-century