

Correspondence

Buddhism and Politics

To the Editors: Unlike Professor Donald E. Smith ("The Politics of Buddhism," *Worldview*, January), I cannot claim any expertise about Eastern religions. I do wonder, however, about a certain bias that seems to be evident in his writing. He suggests that we should not place undue hope in the sporadic Buddhist uprisings of the past decade against the abuses of the Saigon regime. Buddhism, we are told, has little sustaining power to effect significant social change. While this may well be the case, Smith hardly mentions the possibilities of world religious alliances through which the social activist dimensions of Western religion may be able to make a lasting impact upon Eastern religions. Certainly we have heard a great deal in recent years about what we Westerners have to learn from the East. Is it unthinkable that we may also have something to offer?

Sustained contact between Eastern and Western religions is already provided, at least to some extent, through such ecumenical bodies as the World Council of Churches. Add to this the fact that the dynamics of modernization and industrialization are inescapably Western in origin and shape (whether we like the fact or not). The result would seem to be that, unless the "secular mentality" is once again going to relegate religion to the sidelines, we should be more hopefully exploring the possible syntheses between Eastern and Western religious insights. *Worldview* has carried a number of articles on the ethics and politics of Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, etc. Most of them tend to deal with these religious traditions on their own terms, that is, quite apart from the growing impact of Westernization. May I suggest that a more

promising kind of article would deal with these religious traditions in terms of *what they are becoming* as a result of Westernizing influences.

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Ethnic: The Economic Connection

To the Editors: Sensible angels would fear to tread into the battle area occupied by Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus (cf. "Exchange," January). Their lively debate, however, does raise questions with which they do not deal explicitly. One wonders, for example, whether the stress upon ethnicity might not be one more in a long series of tactics resulting, perhaps inadvertently, in the division of the working class. The great struggle of more than 60 per cent of the American population that earns less than \$10,000 per year is to achieve some degree of economic equality. (It is estimated that less than 2 per cent of the population receives more than 20 per cent of the national annual income.) Religion (one thinks of the old "nativist" controversies) and race have in the past been divisive factors hindering the working man's struggle. Now Novak et al. would seem to be introducing ethnicity, to much the same effect. I am surprised that Neuhaus did not, in his exchange with Novak, pursue this line of argument.

At the same time, we have learned in recent years that there are positive values involved in a group's celebrating its distinctive identity "beyond the melting pot." Most notably this has happened with blacks, and it would seem that the ethnic renaissance is in many ways little more than an imitation of the "Black Is Beautiful" festivity. Whether the economic struggle of working people will be enhanced by a union of disparate self-affirming identities or should try to build a common economic identity as "working class" is a question not developed by either Neuhaus or No-

vak. On a tactical level the question might be answered either way. But surely the universalist thrust of Christian ethics would suggest the more inclusive, working class definition of group identity.

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Key 73

To the Editors: After reading Richard J. Coleman's article on "Key 73" (*Worldview*, January), I have come to the conclusion that Key 73 will unlock the door to a new wave of religious reaction and "patriotic" flag-waving Christianity that I thought this country had outgrown. To call it a new ecumenism is an absurdity, for the ecumenical movement sought (and still seeks) to knock down the walls of religious bigotry, not only among different Christian denominations but among non-Christians as well (particularly Jews, always victimized by such "evangelical" drives). On the other hand, Key 73, by emphasizing fundamentalism, will further alienate those Christians who rightly see their faith as a means of liberating the oppressed rather than further oppressing them by complacency.

One need only read the list of Key 73's supporters: Campus Crusade, American Bible Society, Billy Graham's organization, etc. Not one of these groups has spoken out against our barbaric war in Indochina, against the racism that pits white against nonwhite, against the daily exploitation of the poor. Instead they wish us all to be pious churchgoers on Sunday; complacent "citizens" the rest of the week, oblivious to the crises around us. Once more the realization of Marx's dictum "Religion is the opiate of the people" in America.

Besides, why is it so necessary for Key 73 "to reach every unchurched family in North America"? First, this approach . . . will attempt to deny people of the Jewish faith
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has formed alliances with groups of poor people, alliances which have simultaneously removed hostility from Jews and prevented the power structure from attempting to blame Jews for the disasters of the poor. . . .

"When the prophet Nathan stood before David, he marked the beginning of a long tradition which sought to identify Judaism and the God of Israel with those who had no advocate in the courts of the powerful. This tradition is desperately needed now at a time when the disparity between rich and poor is growing greater. It is needed not only because it is the best way to avoid the tragic entrapments of our past, but also because it is right."

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"Was the meeting between Pope Paul VI and Israeli Premier Golda Meir a diplomatic achievement or a disaster? That question has arisen in the minds of millions of people, who are naturally bewildered by the confused reports that have appeared in the mass media. . . ." The American Jewish Committee has sought to clarify the situation in a memorandum prepared to accompany the full text of the joint communiqué issued following the meeting of Pope and Premier.

What has confused the reports? What actually did transpire? According to the AJC memo, "prior to the papal audience, and while it was going on, several ambassadors from Arab governments who are accredited to the Holy See registered strong formal protests against the meeting. . . ."

"Literally before the audience had ended, Dr. Frederico Alessandrini, a press secretary in the Vatican Secretariat on Communications and an editor of *L'Osservatore Romano*, hastily called a press conference at which he made a fervent verbal declaration of 'Vatican policy.' His statements, which were an obvious response to demands by the Arab ambassadors that the Pope-Premier Meir meeting be completely discounted, fundamentally misrepresented and distorted everything that had taken place during the audience, both in spirit and in substance. . . ."

States the memo: "the meeting between the Pope

and the Israeli Premier was cordial, and characterized by mutual respect and reciprocal understanding. When Mrs. Meir and her party arrived at Vatican City, they were received with the same high order of protocol and diplomatic ceremony as was accorded to President Nixon on his last meeting with the Pope. When Mrs. Meir entered the Pope's library, the Pontiff greeted her by saying that he blessed her personally, and blessed the State of Israel. . . ."

"When they started the conversation, Pope Paul spoke feelingly about the history of the Jewish people, and particularly about their sufferings and persecutions. He deplored hatred and anti-Semitism, reaffirming the Church's views as expressed in the Vatican Council Declaration on Non-Christian Religions.

"The Pope then presented the humanitarian concerns of the Holy See regarding the refugee problems affecting all peoples in the Middle East, but with specific emphasis on the need for ending the plight of the Palestinian refugees. He also indicated interest in the welfare of Christian and Muslim communities in the Holy Land. In his discussion of the importance of the holy places to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, he expressed strong appreciation of the constructive way in which Israeli authorities have cared for the sacred sites and their assurance of free access for all visitors and pilgrims.

"The Pope then discussed the 'sacred and universal character' of the City of Jerusalem, and its religious importance to the monotheistic faiths. *But contrary to press reports, he did not mention in any way the political proposal for the internationalization of the city of Jerusalem* [italics the memo writer's]."

As the full text of the communiqué reveals, "Prime Minister Meir presented the views of the State of Israel on a variety of issues: the importance of direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states to the achievement of lasting peace; the international problem of terrorism (which the Pope had condemned in a Sunday homily the week before); and the human rights issues raised by the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union and the Arab countries. The Pope's response on each of these questions was sympathetic. . . ."

PAMPHILUS

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their beliefs because conservative evangelicals feel they are less than "saved" for "denying Christ." Secondly, this writer has met many a person who is not a churchgoer and finds them to be more "Christian" in their charity and their belief in

human liberation than most people who go to church regularly. Ergo, churchgoing is not *the* criterion for humanity.

As far as I am concerned, we need fewer evangelists and more prophets; for our society will always

have room for the platitudes of evangelists yet will always ignore the truths of its prophets, as it did in the days of the biblical prophets and in Jesus' own time.

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