

The "60 Minutes" attack on NCC/WCC came the evening before our annual congregational meeting (24Jan83), where it eventuated that many had read the two (Aug/82 & Jan/83) READER'S DIGEST attacks on same. Our chn. were graduated from the highschool right across the street from RD, and we're well acquainted with its anti-revolutionary ideology, which I'll call establishmentarianism. So rigidly ideological is RD that you'd have as much chance of using it as a response-forum as you would PRAVDA. In its refusal to print an NCC or WCC response (which refusal I have on good authority), RD is as unAmerican as PRAVDA, though it parades itself as for God-home-mother-country. On the other hand, in the cynical sense, nothing could be more American than RD in promoting false pride and blindness, with all the attendant evils pertaining to both. Not that there was anything contrary to fact in the RD articles (or "60 Minutes"): really good propaganda does not violate truth; it contents itself with tendentious distortions and innuendos....The good side: I like the sound of fat sizzling in the fire: power unwatched, in state or church or any other organization, is soon power corrupted with abuse. Everybody needs watching, as Calvin said. ACTION? Write RD and request that they print NCC and WCC responses.

1. Is violence bad-naughty-boo-hiss or good-beautiful-wonderful? If you answer either, you're an ideolog and I'll have to watch you: you're an enemy of mine. Either of these assumptions filters and skews facts and increases human woe. In the name of fact and human need and God, I must stand against the pro-violent ("When in doubt, go violent.") and the anti-violent ("Violence is wrong."). In 1776, church \$ which had been used to buy hymnals was recycled: ministers asked members to tear the hymnals up to make gunwads. Good idea, no? In 1860, ministers encouraged members to invade Southern states and crush their liberation effort (their struggle to live their own lives free of Wash., D.C.). Good idea, no? Both mixed religion and violence. So beware of RD when (sub-title of Jan/83 article) it preaches religion "instead of " revolution. If you want to be honest-to-fact and faithful-to-God, you will have to treat each religion/revolution situation case-by-case. You don't have enough time? Then delegate the responsibility to those you can trust--in this case, to denominational and conciliar personnel who do have the time to scrutinize situations in the light of the gospel and make decisions as to how your money-on-the-plate is to be spent politically as well as religiously (for the idea that \$ can be spent religiously *and not* politically is an ignorant and pernicious illusion).

2. PROBLEM: But suppose the ecclesiarchs you trust (UCC/NCC/WCC) are ideological? Such, on the Right, supported the execution of Jesus (cf. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor); "false priests and prophets," the Bible calls them, knee-jerk supporters of the establishment. Such on the Left, at present, are more or less hooked on Marx, whose brilliant though flawed analyses have had insufficient opportunity to illumine "the West," and some church leaders have set themselves to make up the deficiency. The devil is at both ends of the political spectrum, and most church leaders are at neither end; in general, you can trust your \$-on-the-plate to be used for truly human, truly Christian ends. Not perfectly: no money is purely used, any more than it's purely gotten ("untainted"). A comparison: hardly a penny of your church \$ goes for the work of the devil, but most of your tax \$ does. No? (Or at least "goes to the devil.")

3. Why the tendency, Left and Right, to ideology? Because, life being full of confusion and complexity, leaders are tempted to a rhetoric that reduces the buzzing chaos to clarity and simplicity that lets you quickly "see" what a situation "means." Personally, this is self-satisfying and power-confirming; outwardly--as, e.g., Pat Robertson's "700 Club" shows--it's "pulling," crowd-getting--as Lenin's simplistic politicization of Marx, Mussolini's blend of cesarism and fascism, Hitler's pagan "blood and soil" infusion into the lethargic German ecopolitical body, Mao's meld of Confucius and Marx, and Reagan's guns-and-butter reduced-spending hoax concealing the fact that he's history's biggest spender (hypocritically mouthing attacks on "the big spenders"). Beware of ideologs! Think, when reading RD, "I'm subjecting myself to propaganda for Americanism against my Christian Faith (a distinction RD doesn't make)." And thank God that in exposing some Leftist tendencies in church organizations, RD has exposed itself.

4. I've never been ideological about violence: never for or against it on principle. In 1776 and 1860-65, our Congregational churches took the lead in supporting violence for causes we're glad our country achieved. In the 1960s, our UCC was the leading denomination in the Civil Rights Movement, which aimed to disturb law and order sufficiently to destroy all laws discriminatory on the basis of race--and our laws at all levels made an advance in justice. Why should we not now be counted to be in the thick of it abroad where justice is embattled? In the past, our church \$ went to "support revolution": why not now?

5. Personal Note: Our most uproarious decade since 1860-1870 was 1960-1970, during which I served on the national UCC staff and on many NCC and WCC committees and commissions. Blacks moved from centuries of nonresistance ("taking it") to nonviolent resistance (supremely, M.L.King,Jr.) and violent resistance (e.g., "Black Power" and urban riots). King's strategy was to occasion enough violence to exhibit our national need for just legislation, especially the striking of unjust-unconstitutional laws from the books at all governmental levels. In the legislative and judicial decisions of '64-'69, he and we murdered Jim Crow. Did King use violence? He certainly did: (1) By boycott, he almost destroyed the Montgomery Bus Corp. (in corporate eyes, the ultimate violence!);

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(2) His great "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" shows how he used the violence directed against him to give Jesus-and-Ghandi interpretations to what was happening in America and thus to lever the USA toward legal equality for all citizens; (3) He used actual and potential black violence to threaten the country with me-or-worse rhetoric. Social change came partly from this deliberate orchestration of violence as negative sanction interwoven with love as positive sanction. UCC in this? Bob Spike full time; and Andy Young (now mayor of Atlanta) full time as Martin's chief aid; and...and...and... A lot of your on-the-plate \$ went to support this violence/love package, and a little of it is now being used abroad in the same way. No change of Congregational policy, here, since 1776. Does anybody imagine we'd have made legislative progress by Martin's preaching only love? The darkies used to say, "We tried that, and it was good only for Massa." Marx rightly said that religion, by quieting the people, tends to prevent social progress. Love alone is counterrevolutionary politically, even though love in itself is the greatest and only abiding revolution....In retrospect, all the above seems obvious. But for saying it all *then*, by the end of the decade I was fired because I was "costing the denomination millions of dollars in lost revenue." MORAL: It's extremely difficult for good church folk to be honest-to-violence, and extremely easy to arouse them against violence and the violence-prone and the honest-to-violence. No change here, either!

6. Fortress America, represented by RD's identification of religion and Americanism, is the world's most hated and feared political reality. As High Priest of the civil religion of Fortress America, Reagan sacrifices our present and future on the Pentagon altar. Because of this perverse vision and expenditure, since World War II we have provided military aid against the people to their oppressive rulers in almost every struggle for justice: we are neck to neck with the USSR for the use of resources against human rights. Washington and RD try to keep us blind to these ugly realities as Hitler tried to keep his people blind to the Holocaust, and church leaders faithful to the gospel try to open our eyes to what the rest of the world (UN, WCC, RCC, USSR, etc.) knows. Christianity is unAmerican(istic), and the true Christian will prove to have been the better citizen. For true love of country, real patriotism, includes love of truth and honor of truth and the truth-bearer. (Jesus: "You kill the prophets, then build memorials to them." The true patriot skips the killing and honors the live prophet.)

7. Ideologies of all sorts are guilty of inordinate, immodest expectations. When an ideological analysis incorporates a religious or antireligious utopianism (e.g., The American Dream or The Classless Society), rigidity and its attendant violence will obtain. Some church leaders (as RD and "60 Minutes" rightly reported) have let themselves be beguiled by the Left paradigm of justice and peace; they have become anti-capitalist and pro-communist (or at least "neo-Marxist"), as much of "liberation theology" shows (e.g., a brilliant book I just reviewed for RBR: Matt.Lamb, SOLIDARITY WITH VICTIMS). I believe Marxian analysis should be used to throw whatever light it can, as should other analyses; but no paradigm is pan-illuminary (a fact equally true, and for the same reasons, in theology and economics and politics). RD and "60 Minutes" is healthy backlash, warning against church-bureaucratic drift Leftward and inciting Christians to take more thought about appropriate Christian action at home and abroad. But credit these church leaders with trying to take seriously the Bible's message that God stands with the poor, the powerless, the outcast; and meditate on the Bible's condemnation of the false priests and false prophets, who can be counted on (as can most church leaders in America) to stand with the rich, the powerful, the establishment. And what of the masses who opt out and zonk themselves on video-football? Remember this old maxim of church history: To lose the people tomorrow, side with power today.

8. By immodest expectations, I mean of our own ability to effect what we envision. In contrast, Jesus' expectation was modest about what we could do (viz., "Repent, and believe the Good News!"), but immodest of what God would do. That's a better model than energetic utopianism and perfectionisms (which my father, when I used to expound them, would puncture with "In comparison with what?"). Under the limitations of history and human nature (the ironies of the former and the ambiguities of the latter), no ideology can lead to the just-peaceful-ideal-society. We are called to act *toward* justice and peace, but to do so intelligently as well as compassionately. Such intelligence will ask ten questions for every one proposal it offers. A few examples. HUMAN RIGHTS: Who am I to say that equal rights, which I believe the best policy for the USA, are best everywhere and at all times (e.g., now in S.Africa, including for S.African blacks)? VIOLENCE: Who am I, who would resist the violent overthrow of my government today, to say that somebody else in some other country should support the violent overthrow of that government? LAND CLAIMS: Who am I, who am thankful that the Cape Cod Indians who claim the land on which I built my home cannot effectuate their claim, to say that Israel should let the Palestinians return? EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY: Who am I, whose forebears struggled to advantage me so that I now have not only all I need but everything I want, to preach equality of opportunity, knowing that my manner of life never has been and never can be available to more than a small fraction of humanity?

9. Types of biblical literature: "Ain't it awful?" and "Ain't it wonderful?" I must not be a specialist in one of the two, should I? Or should I? And who is to say? Even if it is busted, who's to fix it? Or is it to be fixed now, or even later? Is it worth fixing, in comparison with using the resources for fresh starts? Or is it even fixable? (E.g., the Mideast these 8,000 years has had some quiet but no peace: is it practicable to seek peace in the Mideast if you're not a politician--granted that politicians must at least seem to be doing something about it? And how do I decide when doing nothing is better than doing something?) And how do we adjudicate the anti-thetical human claims-demands for bread and freedom? And what's with triage, and coercive conception control?