

Solidarity with Victims
 Toward a Theology
 of Social Transformation
 By Matthew L. Lamb
 The Crossroad Publishing Co.
 158 pp. \$12.95

Famine
 Edited by Kevin M. Cahill
 Orbis Books
 163 pp. \$15.95

Genocide
 Its Political Use
 in the Twentieth Century
 By Leo Kuper
 Yale University Press
 256 pp. \$15.00

By Willis Elliott

BE WISELY WORLDLY, be not worldly wise," cautioned Francis Quarles almost four centuries ago. In their own way, each of these three books exhibits the wisdom in this old bromide.

Famine is wisely worldly as it asks whether the earth can endure us. *Genocide* asks if we can endure each other. And *Solidarity with Victims* wonders if we can transform society and become good news both to each other and to the enviroing biosphere.

All three warn us against either withdrawing from the world into privatism or romanticizing the world into one or another form of accommodationism. And all three admonish us to follow the biblical-prophetic tradition: hang in there, find out how you are to participate in the victims' suffering, and act without arrogance or despair.

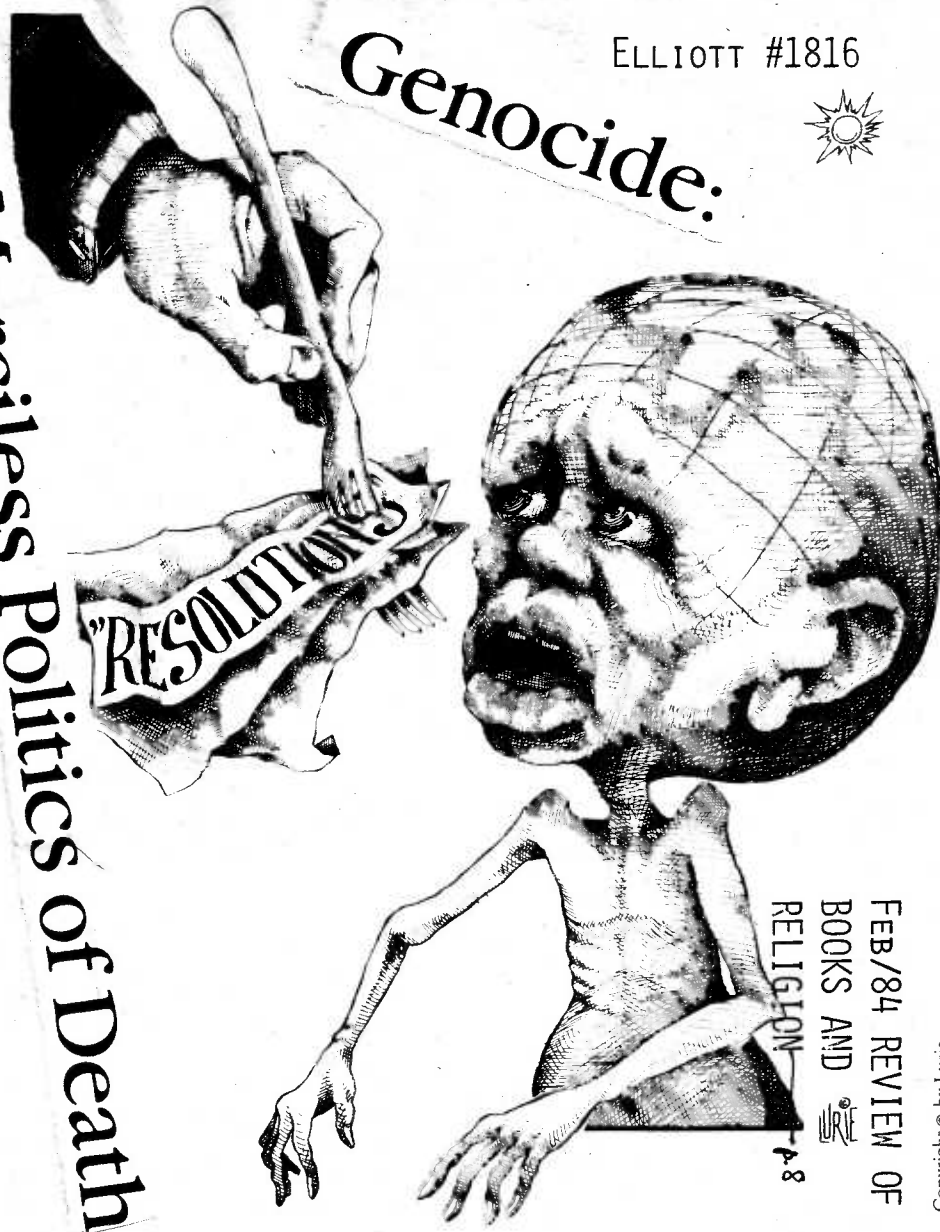
Note that this community of concern transcends occupation, representing as it does three primary professions of antiquity—religion (Lamb), law (Kuper), medicine (Cahill).

FAMINE

Let's begin with the medic. Dr. Cahill has edited the proceedings of a symposium in collaboration with "Philip Scharper, whose views on philosophy, theology, and the English language have influenced me since student days." The long shadow of a good man and a great editor!

If you have time to read only one book on famine, this should be it. Almost no aspect is left untouched or dealt with superficially—almost. As one would expect of such symposia, theology is more problematic than salvific. Theologians may take this defect too seriously, and miss the deep

The Merciless Politics of Death



ELLIOTT #1816

Genocide:



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 caring and competent wrestling with the moral-biospheric issues this book courageously addresses.

Analysis without risking prescription? No, try the last chapter, by Arthur Simon (*Bread for the World*).

GENOCIDE

Of the three, the most frightening is *Genocide*. Leo Kuper's book is data-packed and relentlessly, unpityingly, logical. Nothing the Psalmist says about us is worse. Yet the book is clearly the work of a gentle soul relentlessly driven by a deep caring for our precarious species.

As an evangelical liberal, I want to think better of humanity than this white South African lets me. It gives me nightmares to read how easily anger becomes murder becomes massacre becomes genocide. I'd

rather not know that "many features of contemporary 'civilized' society encourage the easy resort to genocidal holocausts." I fight against believing that nations fight to maintain their "right to genocide," and so the Organization of African Unity—while condemning South Africa's apartheid—refused to condemn the genocidal action of Burundi (a state similar to most African states) against the Hutus.

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 Definition? The strictest is Holocaust: history's only attempt to eliminate, everywhere, all members of an ethnic (religious) group. But also massive massacres, especially when no guilt-age-sex distinctions are made in the slaughter.

Restraints? Moral values, societal processes, structural arrangements, ideological commitments, international pressures (including peace-keeping forces).

Best of all, the book tests its vision by addressing Northern Ireland, South Africa, Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Kampuchea, Lebanon, and other recent genocidal points in space and time.

SOLIDARITY

The theologian, Matthew Lamb, is far less free of jargon than either the lawyer or the physician, but *Solidarity with Victims* is more worth scowling over and sweating through than any other book attempting to construct a world-paradigm for transformative action out of Western materials.

The clearest thesis the book affords is found in the last sentence:

As Christians, we are called to incarnate our struggles for humanization and personalization in the transformative values of doing the truth in love revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To readers who have been "doing" books on liberation theology and political theology, that sounds ho-hum. Why, then, are first-water theologians of the center and the left ecstatic over it? I'll hazard a few guesses:

(1) Because it is Niebuhrian in joining profundity, balance, reach, grasp, and compaction-with-clarity. If you find you must read it slowly and backtrack almost every sentence, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with it or you.

(2) Because, refreshingly, its diction is precise, the words and phrases moving with the cleanness of chesspieces.

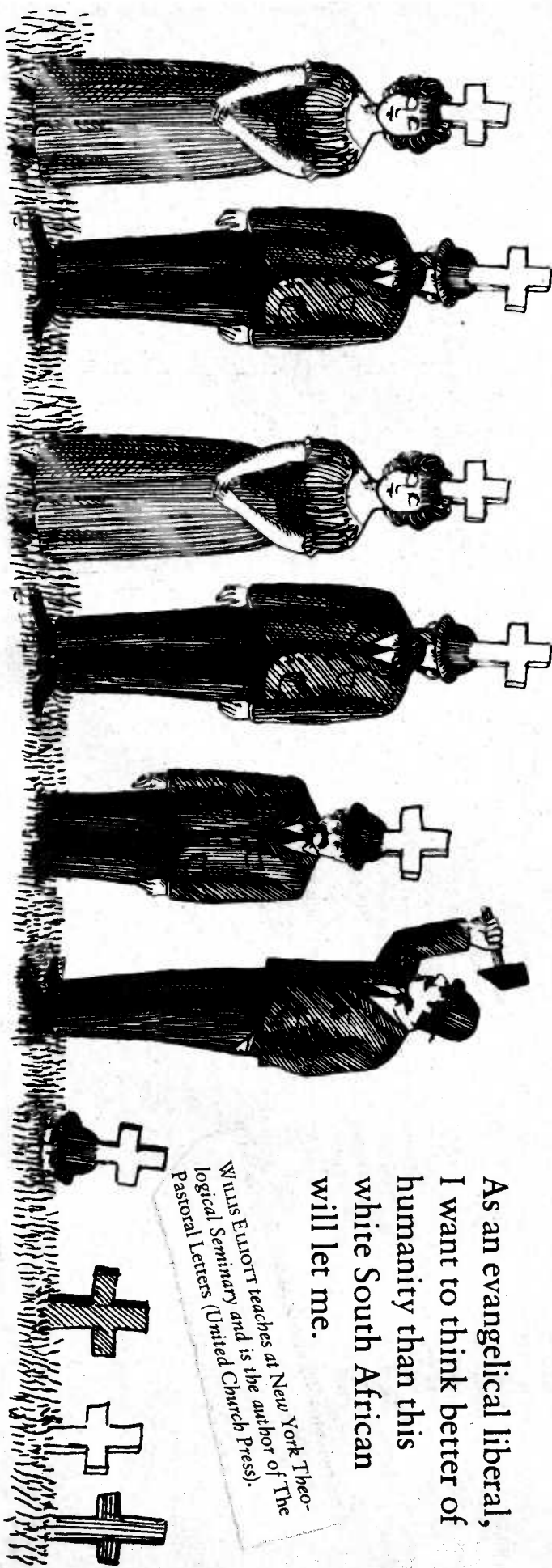
(3) Because it is deeply biblical in its call to repentance from uncritical "innocence" (identifications of reason-structures with reality)—here especially in late capitalism and state socialism, both of which are violence-prone. Though Lamb is doing socio-theology rather than psycho-theology, his analysis is conformable to Rollo May's *Power and Innocence*: "There is no such thing as pure good. . . . Life consists of achieving good not apart from evil but in spite of it."

(4) Because it constellates Rahner and Lonergan (with both of whom Lamb studied) with "critical theory" (the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School) sharply focused on what Bonhoeffer called "the view from below," i.e., what is happening to "the victims"—and so makes these resources available to many who have been doing their liberation theologies and their political theologies without benefit of fresh Catholic and Marxist thinking.

Its Achilles heel, if there is one, is in Lamb's twin convictions that God is on the side of the victims and that, accordingly, *Vox victimarum vox Dei*—We are to listen for God's voice from the mouths of the poor, the victimized.

: THE SOURCES OF VIOLENCE (W.W. Norton/72, p. 260)

#1818 is a commentary on this paragraph.



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