

RULES FOR RELIGION

SOMETHING along the lines of what is called a "return to religion" is no doubt in the making, these days. There is a limit to the time that men can live without some central conviction concerning the meaning of their lives, their hopes for the future, and their relations with others. The need of human beings to bind themselves back to roots which can nourish their highest longings and succor them in defeat is so manifest, and the resources of our time so meager, that zoologists like Julian Huxley and psychologists like A. H. Maslow are crossing the Rubicons which divide the empire of science from the rest of life and are staking out claims to the right and necessity of any man to make for himself new rules of religion.

As the years go by, we shall probably see many such books and articles. Discussion of the rules of religion is not, of course, something new for the world. The medieval doctors began for the West the practice of setting forth what and how a man may believe and think, and with almost no interruption the enterprise of defining "true" religion has continued throughout the centuries since. The rules have greatly changed, along with the temper of men's minds, being profoundly affected by the sense of human betrayal which gave rebellious strength to the several revolutions which have shaped the modern scene; but the changes adopted, while of interest, are of far less importance than the fact of continuous search for meaning. Sometimes the search is thought to be well-guided only when it hearkens to a "revealer" who speaks with divine authority. Sometimes men demand that it be "rational," or that it conform to "the laws of nature." Then there are those who declare that "reason" contributes little more than glamorous provocations to intellectual pride, and that only the voiceless intuition can bring true light. Each age, it seems, attempts to redress the balance left from the mistakes of the

age preceding, so that of the making of religions, like the making of books, there is no end.

In general, it might be said that the rules for religion fall into three great classes. They are either dogmatic, as in traditional orthodoxies; or they are scientific, as in the numerous attempts to reach some naturalistic synthesis between science and religion; or they are ideological—in other words, political. These, at any rate, are the grounds which have been extensively worked over during the past century or so, by men deeply concerned with the problems of life and the welfare of their fellows. It seems unlikely that any "new" fields of investigation will be discovered, and likely that the search for meaning will continue much as before. Nor is there any reason to find fault with this expectation. Religion, science, and politics are, after all, simply the names we give to activities which cannot be repressed: this we easily learn from history, even though history does not seem to instruct us in the "one, true religion," and records only the relative successes and failures of science and politics.

What might be done, however, in the way of "rules for religion," is to note some of the characteristic mistakes which, sooner or later, seem to confine, distort, and often pervert the religious impulse in human beings.

There is the side of religion which may properly be called the theoretical or doctrinal aspect, concerned with large questions of origins and destiny. Here, the guide is or ought to be philosophy, since philosophy endeavors to supply rules for deciding what may be called "knowledge," and to offer suggestions on how it may be obtained. But the most important side of religion, and the side most neglected, is the aspect of the immediate experience of human beings. What does this include? It includes all climactic

experiences of feeling. No one should set himself up to tell us what our "feelings" mean. Our feelings are unique to ourselves, they are not accessible to anyone else. Any dogma concerned with the meaning of feelings should be expurgated from all religious teachings. A man who acquires the habit of learning from someone else what his feelings mean is a man alienated from the primary experiences of life, which are always experiences of feeling. Love in all its phases is primary experience. No man should allow another to "interpret" love for him. The areas of immediate experience are sacred areas. They are all we have, really, to instruct us directly in the meaning of life.

This can hardly mean, however, that no one should write about such experiences. Poetry and song are the record of human feelings, embodied in art-forms which are themselves direct experience. By such means men share their experience of feeling and enrich one another with varying modes of response.

It is true, of course, that every work of art is an interpretation of the experience of feeling, of seeing and hearing. But it is never a limiting interpretation. The infinite diversity of art-forms is a testament to the infinite variety of human feelings and perceptions. When overtaken by conventions, art tends to die. The great artist is a man who bursts the bonds of convention and establishes fresh vision in the record of his experience. There is no final rule for the artist except the rule that he must be faithful to what he feels, accepting no second-hand version of its meaning.

The same rule applies in religion. A convention-bound religion is a dead religion perpetuated by the spiritual dead. In fact, there is less excuse for convention in religion than in any other branch of human activity.

There is plenty of room and need for convention in, say, carpentry and engineering. Convention or "common practice" is concerned with mastery of the materials, which are known and predictable in behavior. You cannot be a

carpenter without an understanding of wood and the tools used to work with wood, and you can learn the properties of wood and acquire skill with tools from a man who is a carpenter. Religion is different. The "material" of religion is the stuff of your life. No one can "feel" or "know" for you, any more than someone else can breathe for you. Conventional religion is like breathing in an iron lung. It represents a failure of nature.

What will you say to the man who claims he is weak, without capacity to make his own religion? Well, you can ask him what he expects of himself in the way of religion. Perhaps he is asking too much. A religion which does not have to take account of your own feelings can promise or claim almost anything. You can't duplicate the promises of false religion in the first, tentative exercises of true religion. You can't go out, tomorrow, and run a mile if you haven't walked more than a block or two in the past couple of years. Religion which is natural, which belongs to each man for himself, must be working and living religion, like everything else in nature.

There are men—naturalists, or nature-lovers, as we say—who go out into the forest or to places high in the mountains to regain their sense of participation in life, their feeling of having natural religion. They walk along a trail in silent devotion and ever-present wonder at the artless beauty of the natural world. The repetition of forms and colors, the slow dance of the leaves, the composition in depth of the clouds—all these living presences participate in the flow of existence which surrounds and reaches into the human being. To see, to comprehend, to encircle with one's mind and feelings all this panorama of natural existence—an infinitely varied portrait of universal life, seen in whatever direction you look, wherever you go—this is to *be* a natural man and to reverence the One and oneself as a conscious expression of the total spectacle. For the spectacle is in some sense the creation of the man. His being is its frame: it all exists in him, and he in

it. Yet he is no captive of the scene, which he can change at will.

Such a man will have a spontaneous ethic of natural relationships, needing no textbook or decalogue to inform him of the infamies in invasion and vulgarization and destruction of the natural world. He, had he a choice, would make man tread lightly in the forest, leaving no more trace than a butterfly, and do no greater burrowing than an ant or a mole. What violates nature, violates man, he would say. And the pain of that violation would haunt him throughout his days.

The man with natural religion would, therefore, understand restraint. All things, he would see, must in some way suffer restraint that other things may be. Every form and every living body exhibit the discipline of restraint. The natural combines the outflowing with the withheld, the one a chalice of the other. So in the matter of love, and in all human relations. Lesser loves give way to greater, high purposes discourage low. Man is a congress of desires and a vault of straining dreams. Who shall harness all this energy and master the falconry of flights of the imagination?

Do we need a catalogue of sins, an anthology of virtues to set us straight? By what stifling of our hearts do we submit to texts of moral philosophy and read ourselves lectures concerning feelings we examine only on dark nights?

It is a question, then, of how to teach men to be natural. Or how to teach them how to love the world. In what dimensions and proportions shall we erect a portal to direct men to a study and love of nature and themselves?

Religious education, however conducted, should move toward one great moment in the lives of the instructed: the time when it is said to them: "Now go on for yourself. What we have taught you must all be replaced. It is none of it true—not *really*."

"What we told you was for your child-mind—while you were helpless, or almost so. Now you are a man. It is time for you to be initiated into mysteries. It is time for you to recognize that no one can tell you anything worth knowing. The things worth knowing are always and exclusively the things you find out for yourself."

This is the doorway to maturity, and no religion which does not conduct its followers to that door, and then, with joyousness, release them to freedom, is anything but a corrupt or ignorant inversion of great religious teachings.

Buddha had to sit for himself under the Bo Tree. Odysseus had to find his own way home. Siegfried had to slay the dragon personally, without an insurance policy to get him into Valhalla in case he slipped in the mud and the dragon bit him in two. For each man, the discovery of religion is an act which makes all things new. For each man, there must be a separate annunciation, a separate agony and crucifixion, and a separate transfiguration. You cannot have the Promethean joy without the Promethean pain. Catharsis is not something in Aristotle, but a polarization of the emotional being of man. No man speaks as man, save he speaks from the depths of his life the words which had no prior sound until he spoke them. Each man carries about in his secret places an unborn eternity which is his and his alone. There hides his religion and his love, his heart and his destiny.

The sufferings of the world only seem to be sufferings of body. The hungers of men only seem to be a famishing for bread. The true sufferings are of the still-born spirits which wait, century after century, to awaken to the true life of man. Crowded and shrouded in churches, temples, mosques and pagodas, the souls come and go without knowing even a hint of the religion of the free.

Men live too much in darkened and blackened places, wearing as though they were jewels the chains of custom and re-echoing belief. Each link is formed in the name of some misshapen truth,

some ancient goodness which was once a portal to self-discovery, but is now a dark alley where the nature of man is denied both day and night.

What can a man ever know if he will not trust himself? Who can help him if he will not help himself? How would he recognize an angel if he has no angelic essence in his soul?

There is this anguished longing for perfection, for some smooth and painless spot in the universe where he can rest and let the tired airs rise from his body, while he becomes extinct in a dream of eternal bliss. What terrible lies we have believed, that some static finality is what we think we should be longing for! All nature declares the endlessness of struggle, creation, re-creation, of balancing and unbalancing, until time devours itself and a new world is born to begin all these wonders anew. We are what we are, and when we know what we are, we shall be as perfect as any man can be.

REVIEW

BASIC CRITICISM IN NOVELS

IT seems that nearly every work of fiction, if it is worth reading at all, and if set in the contemporary scene, contains searching criticisms of our psychological weaknesses.

Three current novels deal with the dangerous submergence of individuality in the mechanisms of either social or military success. Walt Sheldon's *The Man Who Paid his Way*, for example, though not as challenging as this author's first novel, *Troubling of a Star*, indicates that while automation may be good to look at, it doesn't *feel* very good. The scene of this tale of corruption in a police department is "Pacific City," a self-satisfied California town:

It was plain enough that Pacific City offered not much that was romantic. It was such a . . . such a damned *automatic* city, he thought, with its comfortable little well-equipped homes, its broad streets and shining super-markets. It was easy to live in Pacific City: everything was so beautifully set up for the norm that you could (if you were the norm) survive comfortably on almost any given day in Pacific City without once really having to think for yourself, or being annoyed with the necessity for a decision. The environment gave you a personality and you found soon that this was everybody else's personality, too. O pleasant *automatic* personality. You memorized a kind of litany to get you through the day; the statements and responses were all prepacked from "Good morning" (said in a certain lilted, cheery way) to "See you later" at the end of the day. You knew where you stood, always—that was comforting. There was so little real challenge—that fellow Toynbee might well examine Pacific City as a perfect example of a most pleasant, yet a most destructive environment.

He began to dream now of leaving Pacific City . . . leaving it for the same reason he had come: to seek something. When he had come he had thought he was seeking peace of mind but, now, with a surfeit of peace it occurred to him that it was something else he wanted.

If you care to project yourself into the problematical future by way of an occasional dip into science fiction, you may encounter a passage such as one we found in David Duncan's *Occam's Razor*.

The story builds under the tension of a nuclear rocket war ready to be touched off at any moment by remote control. But as the climax nears we find an important security officer suddenly dejected:

Thorpe sighed and leaned against the wall while he scratched his left shin with the heel of his right foot. He spoke with an air of detachment. "This isn't the way things should be at all, Cameron. I'm too old, too tired, or some damned thing. Here we are about to have a war. That's what we've been waiting for, isn't it? We've been getting ready for it for years. All the launching ramps, the battleships, the Homing Pigeons. Surely no one ever seriously thought we were going to junk all that stuff. It had to be used sometime. But now the time comes and there's no pay-off. No glorious moment. No songs or thrill of destiny. Maybe some of the younger men feel it. At least they're ready to push a few buttons. But somehow it's a case of 'not with a bang but a whimper.' I never really believed it would be this way."

Arthur Steuer's *The Terrible Swift Sword* is a novel of a military academy which starts out by being merely unpleasant but ends impressively, probing the weaknesses of military psychology, showing how we can be led from complacency to blind submission to any sort of status quo. In this story a boy who possesses genuine integrity has been stripped of rank on a technicality. He is honest enough to see that he has no right to take his demotion personally. But, from the new perspective of "the ranks," he begins to realize how much he had unthinkingly become a part of a machine indifferent to spontaneous human response. When a loaded gun is stolen from the armory, ex-Lieutenant Scobey wonders why he is merely amused:

A crime had been committed, a crime against the military establishment which he loved and supported. There was no question as to how he should have reacted. A week ago it would have shocked him, appalled him, and all his energies would already have been employed in the solution of the crime, the apprehension of the criminal, and, in so doing, discipline would be maintained and the pyramidal structure of authority, threatened by the crime, would be reasserted and reinforced. But he could not avoid the realization that his first reaction was near-hysterical laughter and delight. He

pondered whether his devotion to the system was as honest and sincere as he had thought it was, or whether it was, in fact, merely important and loyal only as long as it was personal, and the interests of the establishment ran parallel to his personal interests. It was a disturbing thought.

Scobey took pride in the uniform he wore and the rank he had earned—he really wanted to be a soldier and officer—but he finally realized that a man unable to stand up and be counted on the side of human value *against* authority might just as well be in some "enemy" army. The effective rebellion in the story does not come from Scobey, however, but from a brilliant, underfed, rather obnoxious little cadet who will not knuckle under to the conventional threats.

A notable contribution to race relations is provided in a novel called *The Whipping Boy*, written by a man with the thoroughly unpronounceable name of (S. E.) Pfoutz, who must have been strong-minded to resist the temptation of writing under a pseudonym. The main character in *The Whipping Boy* meets and grows to like and respect a talented Negro, inviting him to become his room-mate. This seems a terrible stigma to his family. The following conversation between the boy and his father reveals fairly common attitudes:

"Now, son," he continued, mistaking my silence for attention, "I'm not saying this nig—this boy you live with isn't a fine, clean, well-brought-up boy, but I am saying that if he is, he's an exception, and you're just inviting trouble from all those who aren't the exceptions who want the things he may very well be entitled to. You don't realize that what you two do could have a far-reaching effect on others who know him."

"I'm hoping it has a far-reaching effect on others who know me," I said, finding some composure the same place I found my voice.

"I don't see what you're trying to prove," he said, leaning back satisfied with the unshakable logic he had displayed.

"Listen to me," I said, "I didn't start out to 'prove' anything. I just like the guy—believe me, it's possible. But as long as I've gone this far, I may as well make a campaign of it. I'm trying to prove to you that the color of a man's skin has nothing to do

with the kind of a friend he can be. That you shouldn't shut yourself off from a friend because he's a little different from you. That you can learn and he can learn and maybe teach others that people can be friends who are not of the same race. It's important that we learn to know and respect each other, that we stop fighting and hurting each other!"

"That all sounds very fine and it's no slur on your eloquence for me to say I've heard it before," he said, waxing eloquent himself. "But let me ask you one thing—would you want a sister of yours to marry a nigger? This Paul, even?"

"Oh, for God's sake!" I choked. "I don't have a sister!"

"Well, say you had."

"Say I had? All right. No, I wouldn't, but not because Paul wouldn't make a good husband or a considerate lover, or because their children wouldn't be handsome and intelligent, because they would—but because people like you would ostracize them and hound them and their children after them, and stare, and shame them, and probably even stone them some places! And niggers as blind as you would do the same!"

My father came to his feet. "I never thought I'd hear such rot from my own son!" he thundered.

"Well, what's your answer!" I shouted, up too. "Believe me, it's coming, it happens every day! Contrary to your illusion, ninety-nine out of a hundred Negroes wouldn't even be interested in marrying my goddamn unborn sister, but the ones who are thrown together should have that choice if they want it. And someday they will!"

"You talk like a goddamn Red!" Dad bellowed:

"Well, if more people talked like that the Communists you're all so scared of wouldn't spend their money trying to needle the Negroes in this country!"

"Edward! Peter!" cried my mother, running in with her wet hands in her apron. "Not on Christmas Day! What's wrong? I was running the mixer, and when I turned it off I could hear you shouting at each other!"

"It's nothing, really," I said. "We just got to arguing over politics. I'm sorry, Mother."

The Whipping Boy will be appreciated by all who look to the coming generation for better sense than the present one has shown in regard to race relations.

COMMENTARY

THE DEFECT OF THE SECTARIAN

THE similarities between sectarian politics and sectarian religion are often noted, the most frequent comparison being between Roman Catholicism and Communism. David McReynolds, in this week's *Frontiers*, is apt in saying: "The Party is, in a sense, the intermediary between History and mankind, just as the Catholic Church is the intermediary between God and mankind."

This need for an "intermediary" and for the emotional certainty that one has the *right* intermediary seems to account for the essential character of sectarianism. Fear and fury are the typical responses of sectarians when you question the authority of their intermediary.

In the first (November, 1957) issue of a new magazine, *Prospectus*, published in New York, Howard Fast has an article in which he discusses why he left the Communist Party. The article is long and intensely interesting, but the thing that makes the greatest impression on the reader is his description of the behavior of certain "sympathizers" of the Communists during the struggle between John Gates of the *Daily Worker*, and the Stalinists. Fast writes:

I heard the wealthy owner of a chain of restaurants, a former saloonkeeper not fit to wipe John Gates' feet, call Gates a "traitor, opportunist, and renegade." A millionaire factor-banker referred to Joseph Clark of the *Daily Worker*, screaming as he did so, as a "lousy agent of the F.B.I." Another woman slipped off her five-thousand-dollar mink coat as she said: "It has to be one way, the only way. You're going to have civil war, barricades, and the workers are going to have to fight and die until blood runs like water in the streets!" She panted with appetite as the workers' blood ran like water. . . . A businessman at this same gathering whose doll-like wife carried a price tag of ten thousand dollars in gown and jewels on the hoof as she stood, raged at me:

"So what if twenty-five thousand people died in Hungary! You pay a price for this kind of thing." . . .

"Yellow," this man continued to rage. "You, Gates, Max—the whole crew of you—yellow—yellow!"

And all over the nation, then, mental revolutionaries, the parlor pinks, the living-room warriors, the mink-coated allies of the working class wept that people like myself had betrayed the holy cause of communism.

While Fast says he never heard a real Communist talk like that, the "real" Communists who ordered the rape of Hungary must have been as hideously indifferent to human values as these parlor pinks who so disgusted him. The point, however, is that, for fanatics of sectarianism, no crime will be avoided if the authority of their chosen "intermediary" is at stake.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN REVOLT

A LENGTHY and thoughtful communication from a Chicago high-school teacher raises issues which have occasioned heated debate in educational circles during the past few years. This teacher revolts against the tendency of school administrators to identify a "good" teacher as one who subscribes unquestioningly to current educational philosophy. While in printing portions of this letter MANAS may seem to line up with the author of *Why Johnny Can't Read* and other sometimes virulent critics of Progressivism, this is not our intent. So many modern parents expect the school to solve all the child's social and psychological problems (religion doesn't seem to work any more), that excessive emphasis on counseling and personality improvement is bound to result. On the other hand, one who seeks balance between attention to the psychological responses of children and pursuing necessary instruction in use of the basic tools of language and mathematics, deserves to be heard. Our correspondent writes:

The problem of teaching has become over-complicated and theoretically top heavy, burdened with many formulae which are useful to know but not the essence of teaching. The art of teaching is being replaced with a scientific dogma of teaching, at least in the teacher training institutions.

The problem in education is a reflection of all problems found in society, but most specifically the one that has risen with the adoption of "mass techniques" of control or manipulation. The psychologist and sociologist are sometimes at the service of the ad man and usually are more like social engineers than dedicated men. With the assembly line replacing craftsmanship, with politics becoming more important than ethics, with the well-adjusted citizen more desirable than the well-informed, with the pursuit of leisure more important than the pursuit of knowledge and with the administrator replacing the educator, should we complain if the product of education turns out to be what the customer wants,

either actively, consciously, or through default and ignorance?

The strange thing about the two opposing schools of education is that they both believe their opponents to be "dogmatic." The teacher-training institutions, so far as we can tell, are convinced that they are helping future educators of the young to encourage creative thought. The question seems to be whether all necessary learning can be approached as a sort of picnic. Sometimes, and for some children, the answer is probably yes. But just plain "discipline" is also something that most children need, just as they need to be able to spell and figure correctly.

Our correspondent continues:

The problem in education is one of values, not administrative and technical problems nor general social and psychological problems. Where the values are mechanistic, impersonal, scientific, sociological and a-moral, they lead to dogmatic formulae which prevent genuine teaching and learning because these very same principles are used to rationalize poor achievement and poor behavior and can be used to cover up an unconcern over values.

One of the tenets of modern educational psychology is that the child must be active, participate in the learning situation actively. But the socially active child is not necessarily mentally active. To get classroom participation may be getting participation in something which is foreign to the real thought-process of the child. To take a child through the steps of a geometric proof in a socially active manner, where the class is "live" and a large number respond is not necessarily to teach. There is no necessary isomorphism between the subject-matter object and the mental structure created in the child as a result of active, wholehearted participation.

One absorbs the student *not* through lively presentation or social presentation, but through the active mental reaching out of the student to solve a problem which makes sense to him. No matter how lively the presentation, the student is absorbed only if the presentation is along lines which absorb the mind and not just his senses of sight, sound or his sense of surprise or desire for the new and entertaining. Set the student going along mental lines of inquiry which are real to him and you do not need "live" techniques, *nor* do you have to disguise the subject-matter.

Approach the problem with questions, not with showmanship or as a social psychologist.

Another misconception often centers around that of understanding. I state that a good deal of understanding is dependent on the mastery of rote matter, drill and actual doing. Habits, skills, attitudes are the basis on which all future understanding rests. This approach to a subject-matter will not make it entertaining. Therefore education must not be approached as a pleasant social experience, but it must be seen by society and students as a necessity. There is no psychological magic through which a teacher can inspire a student into learning the tables, whether the periodic or times. The basic reason why a child fails to understand arithmetic is that he cannot read, he cannot add, he cannot subtract, nor can he apply himself or sustain his attention. How can a child understand a paragraph when he cannot read the words contained in it or spell most of its content? Independent reading habits are impossible unless you can read. Interest is quickly killed unless the child has the powers necessary for sustained development along those lines of interest. Superficial accomplishment gives little or no satisfaction. Understanding comes only to those who have a desire to understand. For those who do not, the only solution is to provide them with at least a good rote understanding of subject-matter as a matter of *necessity*. For when the child does have the desire to understand, to learn at a more advanced level, this desire will not collapse in the face of inability to sustain effort or perform elementary operations.

In summary, the policy or ends of containment, satisfying the public, and philosophical vacuum have led to a lowering of standards, a dearth of objective standards, a policy of group passing, rating teachers on basis of social ability rather than the achievement of a class, a subconscious "double standard" in which the teachers are in conflict with the officially stated dogma and their own common sense, and a failure of the administrative to aid teachers in the classroom to meet high standards.

We are a bit puzzled by the above reference to working "along mental lines of inquiry which are real" to the student. For this is precisely what the new educationists feel they are doing—and sometimes *are* doing. One also realizes that, in addition, there are differing definitions of what "superficial" means. It could be argued that learning by rote is always somewhat superficial.

Another correspondent—a parent who plans to defy authority in order to teach her children herself—has supplied one of the reasons for her decision in a follow-up letter. She feels that she herself had to learn far too much "by rote" and could not, until her school years were over, really *enjoy* learning. She writes:

I didn't explain to you why I desire to teach my child at home so I will try to do that now.

I didn't like school. I didn't like the long hours, I was bored, I was not interested. I never had an inspired teacher. I didn't enjoy sitting all day in a room with forty others. However, learning has always been a joy and perhaps one of the greatest joys life has to offer. I simply didn't enjoy the way in which it was dished out. Now, I can criticize; then I accepted my "sentence."

This is surely the sort of education that "Progressive" and "New" educationists are trying to supplant, but our rebellious correspondent's contact with the present school system leads to another criticism, very much the same as that of correspondent number one:

Perhaps my main reason is cultural. Education, it seems to me, should develop the individual to his greatest uniqueness, encouraging always independent thought, sensitivity and tenderness toward all of life. This I believe is the contrary of the Public School system. The main objective of modern Education is to "fit the individual into Society." To this I object. In fact, I am a very "conscientious objector."

I don't know the social set-ups of other countries. Perhaps we in America are better off. However, my observation is that the system here in America has almost entirely "alienated" the individual from life—so that the thoughtful person has to fight to keep from being caught into the current.

We can hardly "synthesize" all this, but we do feel that the people who are bothered enough about their roles as teachers or as parents should speak their pieces as often as possible. And we are most impressed by criticism of "New Education" when it comes from a hard-working teacher.

FRONTIERS

End of an Era

[In this article, David McReynolds, an active Socialist, throws some light on the significance of recent events in the Communist world. Actually, such uncomplicated discussions of the meaning of the internal struggle for power among the Communists are hard to find. They never appear in the commercial press, while the serious political journals are often partisan and usually require more of a background of facts and specialized interest than the ordinary reader possesses. We are glad to print this article.—Eds.]

THE Communist Party of the United States may never be buried officially but it died sometime during 1957. I am not saying the CPUSA will now resolve itself as a dew and melt away—not at all. The corpse of the Communist movement will litter the American scene along with other political corpses from the past—such as the Socialist Labor Party or the Prohibition Party. And it will be kept in good, almost life-like, condition by the usual handful of devoted embalmers that one finds clustering faithfully about such corpses, chanting various sectarian liturgies.

But as a political force with real influence on the American scene the CPUSA is absolutely finished.

In this respect I must note at the beginning that J. Edgar Hoover has somewhat differing views on the subject. He has announced the Communist Party is "coming out in the open" and is now more dangerous than ever. J. Edgar is a trifle late, since Rep. Walters has already told us that every death rattle given out by the CP is really a hoarse attempt at a lullaby to lull Americans into complacency. However, I am afraid that, like Humpty Dumpty, the CPUSA is quite smashed and not all J. Edgar's men can put it together again—not even if their jobs depend on it.

In any case, J. Edgar notwithstanding, the CPUSA is dead. Its real death came with the mass exodus of members. Included in this exodus were men like Starobin, Clark, Fast, Wilkerson, and others well known to the political public. But the exodus also embraced literally thousands of rank and file

members. The best current estimates of CP membership put it at less than 5,000—and that includes FBI agents. Five thousand is pretty small—not enough for even a small revolution.

The reality of death may soon be formalized by a split in what is left of the CP. The Party is divided into three groups—those supporting William Z. Foster, hard-line Stalinist (now assumed out of the picture because of a serious stroke—but others, perhaps Ben Davis, will take his place); then a group of centrists around Eugene Dennis, the Party's National Secretary. And, finally, the group of liberals around John Gates, editor of the *Daily Worker*.

It is this last group which is on the way out. A year ago Gates had very great support in the Party and Foster was on the defensive. It seemed possible some sweeping changes would be made. However, as 1957 passed without any dramatic or effective changes, more and more of Gates' supporters left, until now he is in a very weak position. On Sept. 10 of last year, Gates wrote in the *Daily Worker*, ". . . we have not yet succeeded in creating the kind of atmosphere in the Communist movement where new ideas can freely be advanced . . . a struggle is now going on in the Party . . . *This is a real struggle and has not yet come to a definitive conclusion . . .*"

I think that it is now clear the struggle *has* come to a definitive conclusion. The Party's National Executive Committee has voted to end publication of the *Daily Worker*. Financial reasons were given but the real problem was the hostility much of the Party leadership felt toward Gates as editor of the *Daily Worker*. During 1957 Gates lost most of his supporters. He just lost his paper. It is, I think, quite clear he has lost the fight (though in politics nothing is ever "quite clear"). It is possible that Gates will give way now in abject surrender. But it is much more likely he will resign or be expelled, along with his few remaining supporters, sometime in the coming weeks or months. The split may never be formalized. On the other hand, it may be formalized before what I am writing can be printed.

Now this is all very interesting—for those who like to follow sectarian politics—but the big question

for us is *why* the Communist Party should suddenly fall to pieces in the course of a year.

Why? That is the real question. What happened?

There are several reasons. First is the general prosperity of our times, which has eaten away at all the radical movements. Once the monolithic form of the CPUSA was cracked by the de-Stalinization campaign, the Party was subjected to open discussion. Inevitably one of the questions that arose was whether, in a time of prosperity and virtually full employment, it is really necessary to have a "revolutionary party" and whether such a party serves any purpose in this period. The charge of the hard-core Stalinists that many of the "liberals" are really "rightwing deviationists" has some merit, however small.

This, however, was the least important factor. The real body blow was the twentieth Congress of the Soviet CP and the revelations about Stalin—a dramatic event with implications few of us saw at the time. After all, Communists had accepted the Purge Trials. They had accepted the Stalin-Hitler Pact. They had accepted so very much over the years that surely they could accept this. Minds that have walked the narrow paths of authoritarianism would, we thought, accept whatever new path was laid before them.

We read with interest the first reactions in the Communist press, the breast-beating over uncritical support of Stalin, etc. But we took it all with a grain of salt. We had seen this before. People who have surrendered the right to think for themselves are uneasy in a free discussion and are only too glad for a new line to be given. But the discussion never ended. The new line never came. For the first time in recent CP history the direct intervention of Moscow did not stop either the discussion or the inner-Party fighting. (Gates, for example, has twice been vigorously attacked in *Kommunist*—official theoretical organ of the Soviet Communist Party.) What, we began to ask ourselves, has happened to the good old conformist spirit of the CPUSA, in which a mere whisper from Moscow could settle all disputes?

The thing which was unique in this situation was a public confession by the Communist Party of Russia—homeland of the Revolution—that it had been *lying* for twenty years. Always in the past when the line changed it simply meant the Party stopped saying what it had said yesterday and began saying something new. It never admitted to past error. It never confessed to lying. Changes in the Party line were explained as "reflecting changes in the objective situation." The ease with which individual Communists could and did accept the fantastic shifts in the Party line has often puzzled non-Communists. Not only did the international communist movement speak with a single voice but—what is infinitely more important and more difficult to grasp—the vast majority of members of this movement *believed what they were saying*, even if what they were saying today was a complete contradiction of what they had been saying yesterday.

The reason for this seeming mass delusion lies in the role of the "Party" in Communist thinking. Marxism-Leninism is an absolute science to Communists, permeating every field of human endeavor. The Party is the literal physical embodiment of this "science." The Party is, in a sense, the intermediary between History and mankind, just as the Catholic Church is the intermediary between God and mankind. Seen thus, the Party cannot make mistakes. It is a workers' movement and thus above corruption. It is the collective application of the science of Marxism and thus above error.

All of us know individuals will make mistakes. They will either fail to grasp the nature of reality because of psychological problems or they will have the wrong responses to reality because of a middle-class sentimentality, etc., etc. Standing alone, we often stand in error. But the Party cannot be in error, for it is a collective instrument of the working class, applying a rigid science. The world is complex, huge, vast beyond all comprehension. You or I, brother, we can misunderstand the nature of reality, seeing it only from our tiny angle. But the Party—the Party sees the whole of reality and cannot be wrong.

In this situation, if the Party announces a new line, the Communist accepts it. Of course the individual member doesn't "understand" the reasons for the sudden changes of policy, any more than you or I "understand" electricity. The problem for the individual is *not* that of understanding, but of *accepting*, and *believing*. This is perhaps the basic reason for the strange ability of CP members to shift and change overnight.

But at the Twentieth Congress Mr. Khrushchev did more than change the Party line—he got up and said that for twenty long years the Communist Party *had been lying*. More than that—he admitted that under Stalin there had been brutality, terror and corruption. This was no agent of the West firing a propaganda blast. This was no Trotskyist seeking to split the workers. This was no mere social-democrat repeating slander against the workers' state. *This was the Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR*. As such, he had to be believed. And yet, paradoxically, if one believed him, then how could one believe him? If the Party could lie, then who could tell when it spoke the truth?

Let us consider ourselves for a moment. We have a great faith in our computing machines. We submit to these vast electronic brains some problems which it would take us years to solve or where we doubt our own ability to work out the solutions accurately. We trust these machines because they are incorruptible and without error. What would happen if one day our largest electronic brain sent out a giggle on its tape (in the proper IBM code, of course) and confessed it had been giving us wrong answers for twenty years? Of one thing I am certain—our faith in science would be badly shaken.

This, then, was the greatest single factor in the break-up of the CP here—the loss of a reliable and trustworthy center of authority. There is a third factor in the break-up—the Hungarian Revolution. Just as the Soviet leaders were assuring the forces of world communism that Stalinism was a thing of the past, that its abuses had been corrected and could not recur—just at that moment we saw Soviet tanks clanking through the streets of Budapest. This was the last straw for tens of thousands of Communists. It was so obviously, so clearly, an attack against the

working class. There could be no idealism invoked to cover this act of terror. The only justification had to be in terms of the rawest possible form of power politics. Coming on the heels of the revelations about Stalin, it emphasized the fact, for thousands of Communists, that hope did not lie in continuing a blind faith in false Gods, but in the painful task of thinking out—individually—the truth about Communism, Socialism, and Democracy.

There are still two points to be dealt with. The first is the question of whether the CPUSA can stage a comeback from its present low point. The answer is no. American history has usually had some group which spoke for the people. At one time it was the Populist Party. Under Debs it was the Socialist Party. For the past twenty years—tragically enough—the Communist Party has been able to pose as the champion of the downtrodden and oppressed here. That is finished now because the CPUSA is shattered. The Party itself may rebuild but it cannot reconstruct its old mass base, for the times have changed. We have seen the end of an era. Furthermore, there is no longer a single external authority which can give guidance. Who is the CPUSA to follow? Khrushchev? Mao? Tito? Gomulka? The rise of Red China and the breakaway from complete Soviet domination of Yugoslavia and Poland have meant an end to the old monolithic unity of the world communist movement. We are entering a new period. Certainly the whole Soviet Bloc remains tremendously strong—perhaps stronger now than before—but the American Communist movement has been destroyed and cannot be rebuilt in the form we have known.

The other final question is the one asked by those who want to know why the Communists waited so long to leave the Party. "Can we ever trust people," they ask, "who were so long involved in so terrible a pattern of actions?" I am always impatient with this question for it is so filled with self-righteousness. It is based on the assumption the Communists are evil and we are not. This is nonsense. In our present world all men share the burden of guilt for any man's crime. I can, if you want, trace the brutality of Stalinism directly from the intervention of Western Powers following the

October Revolution. In that case, you see, history might judge *us* as ultimate criminals. (except, of course, that you can never stop in a situation like this—and our actions must be seen historically as a reaction to those of someone else who in turn, etc.)

But let me try to answer this question. Everyone exists in a certain framework of events, friends, physical and psychic influences. Such a framework shapes our course of action and of living. You do not (or should not) blame a man for doing that which, considering his existential situation, he *must* do. Only some tremendous explosion *within* this individual framework makes possible change. That "explosion" may be physical or it may be spiritual. A Christian might call this "explosion" the gift of God's grace, lifting one out of the situation.

Let me illustrate it this way. Many a white Southerner really in his heart believes the Negro *wants* segregation. He believes this because he has lived out his whole life in a situation (or "framework") where segregation of the races was accepted by *both* black and white. How can he be expected to consider the Negro his equal when the Negro himself silently accepts a subordinate position? You and I, damnyankees that we are, can talk till doomsday and not change the mind of such a man. For we are not central to his framework. But let some tremendous event like Montgomery literally blow things to bits and the white Southerner *must* change his mind because his environment, his framework or situation, has changed. He may become violent in an attempt to hold on to the past, or he may break suddenly and completely reverse his position. But he must make some basic changes.

In the case of the Communist, that "explosion" was a combination of events the most important of which was the de-Stalinization campaign which shattered the faith in the Party which was central to many members.

Let us be patient. Men and women who have given all they have to give, who have invested tremendous amounts of money, of time, of raw energy and primal ego, in the Party, whose friends and comrades have shared hardship and pain with

them for the sake of a better tomorrow—such men and women cannot break suddenly.

I would to God every sinner came back to the flock of Democratic Socialism this very day. But I know people do not work that way. Human logic is a slow and faltering thing, like a candle flame caught and torn at by the sudden gusts of emotion. Though I am a bitter anti-Communist on a political level, on the personal level I think I know what the American Communist is going through today. I wish him luck—for his sake and for the sake of the Democratic Socialist movement, which needs his contribution when he is ready to make it.

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