

Commonweal

ESCALATION

IMPEACH NIXON NOW

WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW

AN OPEN LETTER TO A BISHOP

PHILIP BERRIGAN

THE WHIMPER IN CONGRESS

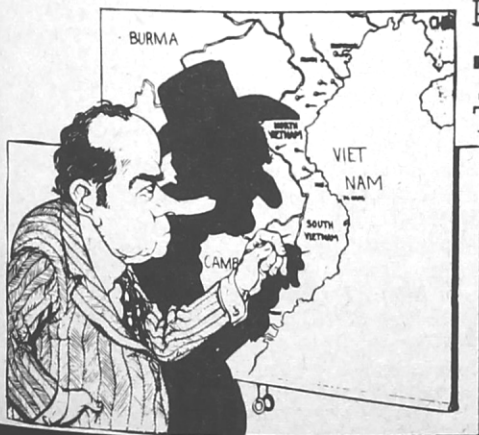
JAMES MADISON

AGAIN INTO THE STREETS

PETER STEINFELS

THE REAL AMERICA

THE EDITORS



Some Religious Books: In Brief

ELLIOTT WRIGHT

Time Invades the Cathedral: Tensions in the School of Hope, Walter H. Capps, Fortress, \$3.75 (paper)

Back in the late 1960s, the "theology of hope" advanced by a small group of Germans—chiefly Jürgen Moltmann and Johannes Metz—was one phenomenon we journalists tried in filling the void left when "death of God" was exhausted. As exciting journalism, hope fizzled. The thought of Moltmann and Metz is too philosophical and abstractly sociological for the press, but it won a place in the pantheon of modern theological alternatives.

Of numerous books attempting to explain the why and how of hope, as well as the differences among exponents, Walter Capps has written one of the best. The opaque title comes from a line from Ernst Bloch, the Marxist revisionist who has influenced the hope school and who stresses the importance of both time, a horizontal moving force, and vertical reality, which he symbolizes with the cathedral, in structuring society.

Capps' language in coming to grips with Moltmann, Metz and Bloch is as lucid as dialectics will allow. The author himself goes beyond the images of horizontal and vertical to speak of what hope means to people in society, and that part of the book is probably more useful to Americans than his explications of German schematics.

Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church, Albert B. Cleage, Jr., William Morrow, \$8.95 (\$3.45, paper)

Albert Cleage holds that God is black; the ancient Israelites and Jesus also black, and only a black Messiah theology can lead to black liberation in America. He claims the church is the only institution blacks have and he presents a plan for ridding the

black church of "slave theology," including the mandate to love everybody, so it can carry on in the steps of Malcolm X. Cleage wants black counter-institutions to white systems, an end to heaven-oriented black religion and vigorous confrontation with the white "enemy."

Pastor of Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna (Protestant), Cleage is justly militant for his people. His books and articles are intriguing, yet I have doubts that Black Christian Nationalism is the route most blacks will take in their struggle for liberation: It is almost too religious in an era where secular pragmatism is handier than myth as the foundation for seeking selfhood and demanding justice.

Christianity in the Twentieth Century, John A. Hardon, S.J., Doubleday, \$9.95

In just over 500 pages, John Hardon accomplishes the admirable feat of capsuling the Christian history of the past seven decades as it relates to political, social and scientific sources. The narrative is necessarily slim in places, especially on Protestant evangelicals in America, and I always marvel when scholars overlook something so obvious and bullish. On the whole, Hardon gives a good account of global Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism; ecumenism, and how science and psychology have affected faith. An underlying awareness is the need for communication across traditional lines, among churches and between religion and culture.

I wish Hardon had omitted his first sentence. Although he wisely did not try, the author says it is "quite possible" to write a history of Christianity in this century without reference to secular events. That is patently untrue. Just attempt it!

Liberating Our White Ghetto, Joseph Barndt, Augsburg, \$2.95 (paper)

Malcolm Boyd once told me that Stokely Carmichael told him that white people who want to help blacks should work to overcome racism in their own communities. Joseph Barndt has taken such advice to heart, mixed it with the admonition that all have sinned and written a "one white racist to another" tract on how individuals and groups can fight overt and systematic prejudice. He succeeds rather well, especially in demolishing the value of guilt-for-guilt's sake, exploding paternalism and exposing racist niches in everyday life.

The book is a study document, presumably for white congregations of the American Lutheran Church. I hope users don't neglect to talk with some live black people.

The Shape of Religious Instruction, James Michael Lee, Pflaum, \$9.95 (paper)

Anyone interested in "catechetics," "Christian education" or just plain "religious education" should have already read James Michael Lee, who teaches at Notre Dame. Defining education as "the broad process whereby a person learns something" and instruction as the "process by and through which learning is caused," Lee uses social science instead of dogmatics (Catholic or Protestant) in discussing the goals of religious instruction. Therefore, he would put theology at the service of social science, not to desacralize but to let *agreg* have a go at empiricism.

Lee does not think a "Christian teaching-learning process" is any more possible than "Christian farming" or "Christian dentistry." The author may not be entirely right in his theory—social science and intense professionalism are not alien to all religious instruction and have caused some problems—still the book should be required of all involved in religious training, from bishops to kindergarten teachers.