

Nobody Here But Us Pluralists

Fr. Francis Canavan's "New Pluralism or Old Monism" (11/9) criticized Daniel Callahan's article "The New Pluralism: From Nostalgia to Reality," in the September 6 *Commonweal*. Mr. Callahan, an associate editor of *Commonweal*, now replies.

TO THE EDITOR: I must confess that I found Fr. Canavan's forceful article "New Pluralism or Old Monism" (11/9) something of a puzzle. Ostensibly, it was a criticism of my *Commonweal* article "The New Pluralism: From Nostalgia to Reality." To my surprise, however, I discovered that he actually paid little attention to the point I was trying to make. In brief, I contended that because of the recent Supreme Court prayer decisions (and the emergence of new minorities and viewpoints in our society, which they reflected), it is now necessary for every group to attempt a creative confrontation with the new pluralistic situation. I deplored in particular the fact that most Catholics seemed to be fighting a rear-guard action rather than facing, in a bold and vigorous way, the necessity of shaping a philosophy of pluralism adequate to a post-prayer-decision America.

Far from suggesting that I have the answer to these new problems, I concluded my article—in a passage Fr. Canavan seems to have overlooked—by explicitly pointing out the difficulty of finding a solution. I wrote:

The central question is: How can we devise a society which is secular without being secularistic, a neutral state which does not favor unbelief, and a free society which does not work to the disadvantage of either religion or non-religion? Here, in essence, we have the great conundrum posed by the newly emergent American pluralism. . . . There will be no painless or simple solution. The needs of the new pluralistic situation will require restraint from every one of the groupings of men who make up our society—from believers and unbelievers, Jews, Protestants and Catholics.

My own minimum attempt in the direction of a solution was to urge Catholics not to regress back into repeating the Catholic clichés of the 19th century:

A secular state is necessarily a "secularistic" state, a neutral state is one necessarily inimical to religion . . . if religion does not have a privileged place in society, then it must necessarily become only a private affair, with no force in the public arena.

Just how Fr. Canavan can conclude, in the light of these passages, that the new pluralism, as I describe it, "looks like an old and tired secular monism" escapes me. The genius of our country has been to avoid the pitfalls of an officially established religion, on the one hand, and a "secular monism" on the other. What we have had to cope with, however, are a good number of Christians (Protestant and Catholic), who have wanted to keep our society Christian in its symbols and institutions at the expense of those minority groups who, in conscience, do not accept Christian values. No less important, we have had to cope with secularists who would like to see the power of religion blunted and its values rejected.

I think both these extremes are harmful: the first because a Christian imperialism amounts to a rejection of pluralism (at most the dissenter is tolerated while made to feel an outsider); the second because that, too, is a rejection of pluralism. Now, I do not know whether Fr. Canavan would accept or reject this analysis. But since he undertook to criticize my article, he should have dealt with it—it just happens to have been what I was talking about.

Yet, as I read Fr. Canavan's article, it struck me that I was not really the target of his attack. Obviously he had other things on his mind; at least that is the only rationale I can devise to explain why he didn't argue the issues I raised. But what was he up to? Nothing else than providing still another argument why there should be Federal aid granted to our religious schools.

As he put it, the case is a very good one and certainly one which I accept. If religious schools serve the public interest, then they should receive public support. Along with Fr. Canavan, I reject the idea of a monistic state educational system. The very idea of pluralism seems to me to require whatever diversity is necessary to take account of the religious convictions of citizens.

Of course, there was nothing in my article which suggested I felt any other way. My crime, apparently, was that I didn't follow the new rules of the game. If I understand the thrust of Fr. Canavan's article, those rules require that, if anyone writes about religion and society, religion and culture, or Church and State, one has got to include in his article what has been called "the Catholic case" for Federal aid to education. Every Catholic author—if he wants to stay on the team—had better do his bit for the Great Crusade.

Still another theme is manifest in Fr. Canavan's article. The essential reason why the team is so upset by the Supreme Court decisions has relatively little to do with the future of the public schools. The great fear is that those decisions could have some unhappy implications for Federal aid to religious schools. Like most intelligent advocates of "the Catholic case," Fr. Canavan displays the usual tuppence of concern for public education. But his heart lies elsewhere. When he writes of "pluralism," he seems to make the word synonymous with "freedom and money for Catholic schools." But to do that is very much like using a microscope when one should be using a telescope: it makes one's own problems mammoth and everybody else's problems simply fade out of the picture.

By all means we should hope, with Fr. Canavan, for a "loosening of the

joins between the state and the social services, among which education is the most important." But to that I add a hope of my own. I hope that we Catholics will stop worrying so much about *our* problems, *our* needs, *our* schools. It is time we started worrying about the freedom of Protestants, of Jews, of unbelievers—they live in this country, too; they have needs, they have problems. I hope, too, that we will begin worrying about

the public schools. Perhaps I hope in vain. Perhaps Catholics cannot be expected to transcend their own difficulties, their own very real problems. But it is worth a try.

Daniel Callahan
New York, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR: I am delighted to learn that Mr. Callahan agrees with my statement of the proper relation-

ship between the state and the social services in a pluralist society. But after reading his article again, I still do not see how I could have guessed it.

Let me correct one misapprehension on his part. I am not afraid that the Supreme Court's prayer decisions will harm the case for Federal aid to religious schools. On the contrary, I think they will help it.

Francis Canavan
New York, N. Y.

Violence in Africa

THOMAS PATRICK MELADY

Developments in Togo, Brazzaville and Dahomey are a cause of world concern

On January 13, 1963, early in the morning, a squad of armed Togo soldiers appeared at President Olympio's residence. Their main grievance was that they were not placed on active military service with full pay and benefits.

Sylvanus Olympio, who was highly respected outside his own country as a prudent administrator, had initiated various economy moves—one being to hold down expenditures on the military. For this decision, he was murdered by these same soldiers, in a most cold-blooded manner, within several hours after they first appeared. Not only this, but the assassins seized effective control of the government, and since then have remained the "power behind the throne."

Fulbert Youlou, of the Congo (Brazzaville), did not have the large international following that Sylvanus Olympio had. There is evidence that his government was rife with nepotism and despotism. Still, he headed the legitimate government. On August 15, after three days of rioting in which at least four people were killed and scores injured, President Youlou resigned and the Army assumed power. The military subsequently turned the power over to a provisional civilian government.

Finally, on October 29, an Army colonel, following the overthrow of President Maga's government in Dahomey by the military forces and trade unionists,

took over the leadership of the Dahomian government.

These have been the three changes of government among the sub-Saharan African states in 1963. One occurred after the assassination of the President; the other two were coups d'état. In addition, there have been in the past year plots to overthrow governments in at least four African states. Fortunately for orderly government, these plots were discovered in time and thwarted by the legitimate authorities.

The mode of change, or proposed mode in the case of the plots, has in each instance been violence. Many African capitals are concerned over this fact, and there is admittedly a certain amount of self-interest in their concern. But most observers of African affairs who have applauded the rise to power of the African peoples are also disturbed, not only about the tendency toward violence, but about the presence of the military in the successful coups and in the plots that have been exposed.

There are several questions, moreover, that are yet to be answered satisfactorily. The murderers of Sylvanus Olympio seem to have been rewarded with places of influence in the present government. Why have they not been brought to trial? Is it to be assumed that the President's assassination will remain unaccounted for? Where is the present government of Togo going? Will the Togo coup set a precedent for assassinations in Africa?

This concern on the part of outsiders does not represent an attempt to force Western standards of good government on the Africans. Most students of inter-

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