

LETTERS

Doctor Provonsha's "An Ethic of Responsibility" [Spring 1969] leaves me wishing we could be more positive and practical in our approach to the problem of how a Christian ought to behave in a modern world.

It seems to me that he has done only what other Adventist writers and speakers are wont to do when discussing the subject of ethics: they take a stand and tilt at the other side. Now it may be that this is the only thing we can do in the circumstances. It may be that Situationism is so right, and legalism is so wrong, that we must defend the one and attack the other.

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But what about the Christian who wants to walk down the "middle of the right road?" the one who appreciates the fact that circumstances alter cases, but does not want to be lost in the fog of relativism? the one who, although he rejects legalism as invalid, is anxious not to lose sight of law lest in doing so he forget an aspect of God and his universe that is as vital as the principle of love? Is there nothing we can contribute to the enlightenment of such an individual?

What tantalizes me about Doctor Provonsha's article is that there is a recognition of the importance of premises. He says on page 7: "The conclusions of this method, as in all matters involving logic, are *only as valid as their premises*" (the italics are my own). On page 8 he says: "What should be criticized is the *premises upon which many in our time are basing their moral decisions*" (again, my own italics). Yet Doctor Provonsha only hints at some possible premises, such as a revelation from God.

I agree wholeheartedly that premises shape one's ethic, even a "responsible ethic." It was Fletcher's plainly stated premises that turned me away from some of his conclusions. No doubt Doctor Provonsha has his basic premises on which he is prepared to build his ethic of responsibility. Could he outline these for us in an article? Perhaps the article or series of articles could be called: Bases for a Viable Christian Ethic. Perhaps others like Joseph Barnes and William Loveless could contribute to the series.

Was the phrase *with exception* [p. 9] a misprint for *without exception*?

G. ARTHUR KEOUGH
Washington, D. C.

EDITOR: Yes.

Godfrey Anderson [Letters, Spring 1969] raises the question, "Might we not be better advised to speak out as a church and as individual Christians more forthrightly than we have against the horrors and futility of war?" This temptation is doubly strong in a war which has been prosecuted from the start on the basis of a policy of seeming no-winmanship.

Nevertheless this is to express the hope that we will continue to reject the counsel to "speak out." For one thing, we never have declared or inveighed against war. It is to be fervently hoped that we will continue to measure up to the tallness of our historical posture on war and also keep faith with the trailblazing heroism of Desmond Doss, who proclaimed to the world that we are really "conscientious cooperators."

This is not to say that war is ever a desirable end in itself. But it is to say that when the only other alternative is tyranny, war is infinitely to be desired above submitting in craven supinity, and [it is] to deny the pseudo doctrine that war is sin. It is never for the church to pass this judgment.

It is for us to remember that neither the state nor the church is mandated by God to an anti-war position. Defense is one of the very first responsibilities of the state as [declared] in our Constitution, and the church will do well to refrain from any and every attempt to tell the state how, if for no other reason than that defense is none of the church's business.

The Christian patriot's individual support of the "selective war" strategy, if he must, is strictly his own business. Anderson disposed of this curious notion with consummate finality, and he is to be congratulated for his customary incisive succinctness.

There is a further perplexity at the close of Anderson's letter. It resides in his statement that it is the "chief objective of the church to mediate the love of God to all men everywhere." If he is paraphrasing Jesus' commission to go into all the world to teach and bear witness, fine. This is crystal clear. But if he is suggesting that Christ has or needs assistant mediators, this is something else. And it must be asked, "Where is such instruction to be found in the Holy Book?"

DONALD F. HAYNES
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I have read with interest the trilogy on "The Christian and War" [Winter 1969]. Of particular interest was Chuck Scriven's "The Case For Selective Nonpacifism."

No more just war can be found than one in which the Christian is fighting under Christ's personal command. Yet under just such a circumstance Christ declared: "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world then would my servants [Christians] fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). No, Christians are not justified in fighting (bearing arms for the purpose of killing) — much less killing — even in "just" wars.

What is more astounding is the author's attempt — for that is all it turns out to be, an attempt — to justify killing by Christians in "just" wars on the basis of "agape, or Christian love." O *agape!* how many crimes are committed in thy name!

DONALD E. MANSELL
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Some modern theologians say God is dead. It appears that Ronald L. Numbers ["In Defense of Secular History," Spring 1969] thinks that the devil is dead too. At all events he finds little "available" evidence of "the influence of the divine and satanic forces" worthy of "inclusion" by "scholarly histories."

If George Edgar Shankel's *God and Man in History* overemphasizes divine and satanic influences in history, Numbers may be a wee bit inclined to underestimate such influences. Secularists and rationalists have always had their devotees. They are not absent today.

Although today's historians generally do not accept the Bible as history per se, they do recognize that it deals with causes and effects of events, "whether they be of a social, political, economic, or psychological nature."

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible reveals that both God and Satan have been and still are influencing history. According to Numbers this is "divine revelation," and as such it "throws light on relatively few historical events." While it is true that Christian historians may differ as to the degree which this or that particular event unequivocally shows "providential action," it is going a bit far to infer that all bona fide historians will "refrain from [such] unsupported speculations."

The article by Numbers comes "dangerously close" (a phrase used by Numbers in describing one of Shankel's alleged aberrations) to being an exercise in the sort of intellectual agility which Paul described in 1 Corinthians 2. To Numbers' credit be it noted that he does "recognize the possible value of having an overall interpretation of history based on Christian beliefs." Overlooking non sequiturs and semantics often found in polemics, one may find that Numbers and Shankel are not so far apart after all. To Numbers "God's hand is invisible." To Shankel God's hand is both visible and invisible.

H. E. WESTERMEYER
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In terms of the Social Gospel Movement, which was in its heyday at the turn of this century, placing Doctor Kellogg and Adventism under this rubric gives a distorted impression [Richard W. Schwarz, "Adventism's Social Gospel Advocate, John Harvey Kellogg," Spring 1969]. This religious-historical phenomenon was promoted chiefly by liberal clerical leaders. These were social reformers in the broad sense, and some of their proposals border on out-and-out socialism. Doctor Kellogg and Adventism would make strange bedfellows with this group, at least from one important standpoint.

Social service or social welfare, which Doctor Kellogg practiced and which Adventists engage in on many fronts, is not the same as social action. Social action was an integral part of the social gospel. Social service seeks to lighten the burdens of the afflicted, whereas social action works to correct the causes of their suffering. Social service provides handouts and soup kitchens for the hungry and dispossessed. Social action attacks directly the evils of the society which make soup kitchens necessary.

Doctor Kellogg in his day, and our church then and now, have eschewed social action. The unswerving conviction that the overriding mission of the church is the proclamation of the everlasting gospel, distrust of big government, and the far right position of the church on the political/economic spectrum explain to a large degree its rejection of social action down to the present time.

In the final sentence of his well-researched study Doctor Schwarz introduces a corrective to the title of the article when he characterizes the Battle Creek health leader as "a practitioner of his interpretation of the social gospel." Doctor Kellogg apparently did not feel a concern or a compulsion for social action, as his remarks at Evanston in 1896 and on other occasions would indicate.

GODFREY T. ANDERSON
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If SPECTRUM is what I think it is to be, it will fill a very important place. I wouldn't spend money on a magazine that is mainly negative. But if it will study Adventist teachings and policies in depth, if it will be constructive, I am all for it. I feel that the Adventist Church should be not only the pilgrim church, or the teaching church; it should also be the learning church.

I would like to see us study some doctrines we Adventists haven't studied very much. I would mention for one, Luther's great doctrine, universal priesthood of believers. I would like to see a study on conscience. What is its relation to Christian living? And how does one come by a good, reliable conscience?

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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