

Clichés and Shibboleths

Where Is the Western Spirit?

A Declaration of Faith. By Herbert Agar. Houghton Mifflin. 237 pp. \$3.00.

THE TASK Mr. Agar sets for himself is a worthy one, the restatement of the principles of the faith of Western man. The West is certainly in its foundations Christian, not to say Catholic, and many Christians may ask what restatement is needed. Are not those principles what they have always been? Mr. Agar, himself a believer, would seem to say no. They must be restated for our age — for “atheists and agnostics and anticlericals” as well as for the religious.

There is something to this. But in Mr. Agar's book it results in one of the most deplorably confused amalgams of good intentions, chowdered history, and false logic to appear in many a long year. For he cannot see that the ancient and honorable principles which he espouses are utterly inconsistent with the attitudes of contemporary liberalism. He has breathed an atmosphere, as president of Freedom House and a scion of the liberal

press, that is saturated with the accumulated clichés of the accepted enlightenment.

In generalities he indicates the central truth of politics, that total power in one set of hands inevitably kills the individual soul and ruins a civilization. When Arnold Toynbee shows him the way, he can see that the subservience of church to state in Byzantium led to just such a totalitarianism. When Lord Acton points the moral, he can even see the virtues of divided powers in the federation of peoples under the Hapsburg monarchy.

When he deals with his own time, however, two shibboleths of the modern liberal cant dominate his thinking. According to the first of these shibboleths, private property and capitalism are inherently evil; whereas common property and socialization are inherently good. According to the second, nationalism and war are the worst evils conceivable (this part is always stated); so that war is worse than the loss of freedom (this part is never stated). Mr. Agar is utterly blind to the contemporary truth that every step

toward socialization weakens the bulwarks which separate economic from political power. Capitalism in the West built those bulwarks which for the first time in any civilization made possible governments of radically limited powers. "Capitalism" to Mr. Agar is an "economic witchword." He is against the all-powerful state, but he seems not at all terrified by the galloping strides of state power, as bastion after bastion of private property is destroyed.

Since, according to his second shibboleth, war is the ultimate evil, and since Mr. Agar would not propose surrender to the Soviet Union in order to prevent it, he must minimize the Soviet threat. He must magnify the mote in our eye a thousand times till it balances the great beam in Russia's. ". . . We, not the Russians, have contrived a masterpiece of slaughter . . . ours is the leadership in the decline of civilization. . . . We must examine our own minds, not our neighbors', to learn what has come into the world to make us feel that wars of annihilation may again be necessary."

Let us grant that Marxism and the ideas of modern socialism arose in the West; but it is in Russia that Leninism and Stalinism were developed. And Russia is neither a province of the West, nor (*pace* Messrs. Agar and Toynbee) a part of Byzantine civilization. It is a new barbarism, armed with half-

digested ideas and a technology borrowed from the West, combined with a statecraft borrowed from Byzantium.

Great men's errors are dangerous to little minds. Arnold Toynbee is a philosopher of history whose major insights compare with those of Augustine and Vico, Hegel and Spengler. But he, too, has his contemporary axes to grind, and he is at his weakest when he rides the hobbyhorse of world government and the overriding evil of war. What is worse, he allows it to affect his judgment of history, and develops the idea of Russia as an Eastern Christian Civilization in order that he, too, may minimize the beam and maximize the mote. The worst of Toynbee appears in half-digested chunks in Mr. Agar's book, so that he sees the struggle of the West against barbarism as, astonishingly enough, a continuation of the Fourth Crusade, when the West diverted its attack from the Turk to Byzantium. "Today . . . Russia and the West once more confront each other with the incomprehension of a Greek scholar and a Roman business man in the days of Plutarch, of a bureaucrat at Constantinople and a Frankish baron in the days of Charlemagne." Is Russia then an effete civilization and we the new rising barbarism? Is Stalin a scholarly framer of the Roman law and Churchill the amalgam of a get-rich-quick campfol-

lower of the Roman legions with a Germanic plunderer from the hinterland of the Rhine?

The pages of *A Declaration of Faith* are crowded with false historical analogies like this, and with such exercises in false logic as his maintaining that the difference between Russian and Western attitudes toward human rights "is only accidentally allied to Communism."

When it comes to current politics, the principles that Mr. Agar claims to uphold fall like tenpins before the shibboleths of his milieu. In the whole world the United States Senate is the only deliberative body left with full and unlimited debate and final protection for the minority, even if that minority be only one or two men. In this book there are by casual count eight separate direct and indirect attacks upon that body — and all because of its committees' exposure of the Communist conspiracy. To Mr. Agar it would seem there is no conspiracy to extirpate the values of the West. The Communist leaders were convicted under the Smith Act simply

for "preaching their creed." We "risk a new cycle of religious wars if we revive the doctrine that rulers may tell the citizens what to think."

His authorities are the finest — Lord Acton and Sir Frederick Pollock, Georges Bernanos and Arnold Toynbee; his sentiments are estimable — natural law, natural piety, and the objective sanctions of a real truth and a real God; but their spirit, which is the spirit of the West, is missing.

The essence of that spirit is the value of the individual man. Whether for the Christian to whom the relationship is between himself and God (no matter what ecclesiastical forms he may utilize to mediate the awesome reality), or for an unbeliever like Christopher Marlowe, celebrating the heaven-storming drive of a Faustus, the meaning of reality is: "this man" and the universe. For Mr. Agar it is always "we" — uncounted millions in whose cozy manyness the responsibility to be a lonely carrier of the Western spirit is lost.

FRANK MEYER

Ways of Treason

Diagnosis and Judgment

The Traitors. By Alan Moorehead. Scribner's. 222 pp. \$3.50.

Spies, Dupes, and Diplomats. By Ralph de Toledano. Duell, Sloan and Pearce. 244 pp. \$3.50.

ALAN MOOREHEAD'S *The Traitors* is a restrained, highly competent, and interesting account of three British scientists who betrayed atomic secrets to Russia. It is also a study of the motivations of traitors, of the process of confession, and of the strangely intimate relationship between criminal and policeman. Moorehead is a wonderfully accurate reporter who is also gifted with the qualities of human understanding and compassion.

The questions the book attempts to answer are: "Why these men in particular should have turned traitor when the vast majority of their colleagues did not . . ." and "whether the security services in Britain and North America blundered over these men. . . ." Writing as an English subject, Moorehead goes out of his way to exonerate Anglo-American political leadership of sloth and incompetence.

But the facts that he reports contradict this interpretation and constitute a formidable indictment of that leadership.

The Soviet spy ring documents were turned over to Canadian authorities in September, 1945. Prime Minister King immediately conferred with both Truman and Attlee on the matter, who advised him to "keep silent." For four months the spy case was shrouded in official secrecy. It was not until February 15, 1946, that arrests were made and a Canadian Royal Commission of Inquiry was authorized. This belated action was forced on officialdom because Drew Pearson was about to expose the spy ring in his February 16th syndicated column.

The British security record on Klaus Fuchs is equally interesting. In 1934, the Nazi consul at Bristol denounced him as a Communist and this charge was naturally regarded as of little weight. It is more significant that there seems to have been no investigation of Fuchs' close association with the German Communist GPU agent, Hans Kahle, in Canada in 1940. Although Fuchs'