

Alternative

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There is no Santa Claus

Wouldn't it be nice if we could hang our stockings up on Christmas Eve and wake up the next morning to find the present for which all men yearn — Peace on Earth, Good Will Among Men.

When we were children our daddies played Santa Claus for us and we got sleds and toys and candy.

But there is no one to play Santa Claus for us now — no one to give us the more difficult presents we seek as adults.

The politicians and the Generals claim to be our Santa Claus. Let us have draftees, atom bombs, and military alliances, they say, and we will bring you Peace on Earth — by frightening the other nations into "peacefulness"; by forcing their leaders to show us "good-will".

Let us have your labor in our factories, say the business men and the labor officials. Work for us, let us be your bosses and we will give you the highest standard of living in the world — oh chesterfeds, ah television, oh Alka Selzer, aspirin, and sleeping tablets.

Poor deluded, power-seeking Santa Clauses, half believing in their own propaganda. **The only way to get peace is to be peaceful.** The only way to have good-will among men is to **live** with good-will.

Jesus, who is running a close second to Santa Claus these days, was not the sentimental son of a virgin that the churches and politicians talk about. But he had a lot of things straight when he said—

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES—not bombs, troops, and Atlantic Pacts against them, but . . . love. If you love them, you can resist their evil by non-violent means only.

DO GOOD TO THEM THAT HATE YOU—not Marshall Plan benefits for our allies and Voice of America broadcasts for those under the wrong dictators, . . . but . . . share our resources equally with all men.

GIVE AND SHALL BE GIVEN UNTO YOU—not "the highest standard of living in the world" . . . but . . . spend our 16 billion dollar arms budget on useful goods for the people of the world. Then we will undermine all dictators everywhere and gain

*Peace on Earth
Good Will Among Men*

Alternative

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Letters

Dear Friends:

This is relative to the review of Blanshard's *AMERICAN FREEDOM AND CATHOLIC POWER* and Manhattan's *THE VATICAN IN WORLD POLITICS*. The underlying theses of both books seems to be that there is a plot on the part of Catholics to take over the world and run it in the worst traditions of the inquisition. Most of the blame for this is laid to the Pope and the higher clergy but it is also asserted that this develops from the very nature of Catholicism. It is true that all Catholics, if they are consistent, hold Catholicism to be the true faith and, of necessity, other faiths to be untrue as a whole. It is not true however that the Church teaches that there is NO truth to be found outside the Church or that non-Catholics are lost. If you followed the case of Father Feeney (who maintained there was no salvation outside the Church) you would know that the Church teaches otherwise. The phrase "no salvation outside the Church" is picked up by men like Blanshard and Manhattan with no understanding of what it means. Acquaintance with an ordinary Catholic catechism would show them the division made between the "body" of the Church and the "soul" of the Church. And that anyone who follows the dictates of his conscience belongs, in Catholic belief, to the soul of the Church. You may not like or agree with this teaching, but it is only fair that it be stated accurately and the impression avoided that Catholics condemn everybody wholesale. I find numerous such indications of lack of knowledge of Catholic teaching in both books, but it would be a long and tedious task to take them all up. Here is one such — the assertion by both authors that the Church teaches that political authority comes directly to the ruler from God. They get this from the fact that the teaching has been condemned that authority comes from the people WITHOUT reference to God. So that truth is determined by majority vote. The prevalent teaching in the Church (that of St. Thomas) is that authority comes from God TO the people who are at liberty to retain it or to delegate it to representatives. I am aware that there have been theologians who taught otherwise — Bossuet, for example — but their views in nowise had much influence and the prevalent view in Catholic theological treatises is that of St. Thomas which I mention.

I wish it were possible for me to assure you that there is nothing to fear should Catholicism become the predominant thing in this country. I simply don't know. I know there are fascist minded Catholics and I know there are some who would oppose fascism whether it was put over by Catholic authorities or anyone else. Incidentally I think Manhattan quite mistaken when he asserts the encyclical *QUADRAGESIMO ANNO* is a fascist document. But it would take another letter to explain why. But whether a plot exists on the part of the Vatican and the hierarchy to "take over" — that I don't know. If taking over means denying liberty of conscience to others I would most certainly oppose it as would many other Catholics. And I would oppose it because it is contrary to Catholic teaching. In that I differ with both Blanshard and Manhattan who feel that Catholicism is totalitarian in its very nature. And I agree with Father J. Aves Correia (who was exiled from Portugal) when he states (in the November 11th *COMMONWEAL*) that "Error is nobody; it is not a person. Now persons, even when in error, really and sincerely, have not only the RIGHT but the DUTY to follow their conscience. This is not an invention of liberals. It is the unanimous teaching of Christian ethicists. Therefore, to persecute or to silence by force sincere dissenters, for the sake of unity, order or inviolability of the faith, is pure Machiavellianism; it is to do evil for the sake of good. . . .

One of Manhattan's charges which I can answer with knowledge of the facts when he lists (p. 371) the Catholic Worker among those Catholic groups trying to fasten the fascist pattern on the United States. Unless one has been blinded by a "plot" complex (and I know Catholics who hate Jews because they believe there is a Jewish plot to take over) a mere perusal of the back issues of the *Worker* should prove otherwise. But to one who is convinced that all Catholics are implicated in this "plot" (Sandy Katz certainly does not) then we of the Catholic Worker are merely hiding behind pacifism and Christian anarchism to conceal the fascism we really believe in. To such there can be no answer.

Fraternally,

—ROBERT LUDLOW,

I think official Catholicism presently tolerates *THE CATHOLIC WORKER* and its group because they regard these as an instrument to wean workers and intellectuals from Communist and other secular radicalism and as a safety-valve for the small minority of Catholic radicals. I do not believe Manhattan says more than this (p. 371-2).

For Dorothy Day and Bob Ludlow, two of the most dedicated radical pacifists and social humanists to be found anywhere, I have only that deep admiration and compassion reserved for the valiant few in that no man's land of unacceptableness to either camp; they call to mind the unsung independent Basque priests (Mendicute, Lecuona, Arbrizui, Ariu, Marquiegui, Gudi, Penagaricano, Onaindia and numerous others) eventually executed by Franco's legions.—S. K.

On Irving Ravin's Radical

We have rarely printed an article that caused as much furor as Irving Ravin's "How to Identify a Radical." We are able to print only excerpts from a few of the letters received.

1. It seems significant that many of the comments skipped over all the other areas covered by the article (good clothing, housing and recreation) to react in horror to Ravin's discussion of sex and bathrooms. Although we may disagree with some of Ravin's specific examples — and think all of them are open to reasoned analysis — we cannot help thinking that the violence of the reactions indicates the presence of the very sexual fetish which Ravin rightly attacks. For instance, many of the writers get very excited over the importance of preserving privacy in the bathroom (mostly set up to hide the body of the other sex) and forget that such privacy could be urged almost as logically for sleeping, eating, and entertainment.

2. Perhaps because of their fear of the ideas on sex and elimination, most of the writers badly

misread the article, attacking Ravin for having advocated doing things in new ways just for the sake of being unconventional. Actually the article stated the opposite — that radicals should turn our attention to the practices of day to day living in order to be "creative individuals doing things in strikingly sensible ways." However, the editors probably encouraged this particular misinterpretation by entitling the article "How to Identify a Radical". It would have been better to call it "How to Live More Sensibly". The purpose of the article was not to create a dogma that must be followed by all radicals, but to direct thought into a much-neglected area — daily living.

3. Every time anyone departs from "normalcy" he is accused by someone of being an exhibitionist — even if he walks on a picket line to secure a living wage. But our "normal" society is badly in need of persons who free themselves from the chains by which the conventional man is confined.

The dashing young radical delineated in such vivid detail by Mr. Ravin in the last issue of *ALTERNATIVE* has failed to arouse my doubtless reactionary enthusiasm, and in fact has got my dander up. I have seldom encountered a more superficial interpretation of the word which means to reach to the roots. In an article so preponderantly given over to the wearing of backless blouses and the washing of hands, a fine stress should have been put upon the notion that ultimate decisions and basic attitudes are the things that really count in the coming crisis, if, indeed, such a nation was present in the author's mind. Certainly not even Mr. Ravin could deny that his description falls very short of defining the complete radical. Or do clothes, after all, make the man?

I fail to see the connection between a genuine radical and the invention of new recipes. I have known several people whom I have considered fighters in an authentic vanguard, who were far too busy fighting to wax excited over frying corned beef hash in peanut butter. Is there any legitimate reason this side of utter and childish exaggeration why a perfectly sound radical might not be so totally devoid of palatal imagination as to eat all his meals in the Automat? (Such questions as whether or not the Automat follows fair employment practices come under a different, and somewhat more realistic, heading.)

On the subject of sex and marriage, any stand consistent with the contrariness and just plain anti-convention displayed in "How to Identify a Radical" would have to come down hard on divorce, which is certainly the current convention. And instead of being rather wistfully disappointed that the naughty Kinsey report has stolen the radical's thunder, why not be really a swimmer against the tide, and advocate that revolutionary thing, strict marital fidelity?

A careful perusal of the section of the article advocating new usage of the bathroom has failed to convince me that a culture where both

sexes would partake of its porcelainized conveniences simultaneously would be in any way superior to our own. To the sentence, "Outside of the odor of defecation . . . there should be no rational objection to such use of the bathroom," I would like to pose the question, what rational advantage is there? The saving of time, and companionship, are the probable answers. The first strikes me as a signpost to one of the real roots that we (if I may be included) radicals should be digging toward: the terrifyingly breakneck speed with which the conventional world bids us move, the "competitive, cutthroat nature of modern capitalism" which Mr. Ravin abhors in another paragraph. If one MUST brush one's teeth or take a shower, why not relax for a minute first? The result might be a more enjoyable laving. The second answer I consider another ill sign of the times: we must be poor creatures indeed if we are overcome with loneliness while undergoing ablutions. Man really sees far too much of his fellows anyway. The bathroom is a fine, private place, the only really private place we have left in this wideopen, probed and probing century. A little quiet, a little relaxation, a little self-communion, short enough at best, won't hurt us.

—MARGARET ROCKWELL

How To Identify Ravin

Newtonville, Mass.

While I realize the dangerous implications and shortcomings involved in any psychological interpretation of an individual's ideas . . . this sweeping rebelliousness, this blatant exhibitionism and morbid masochism is quite obviously a prolongation of the childhood emotional conflicts . . .

HAROLD BARCLAY

Oxford, N. J.

I heartily agree with I. Ravin that there is too much discussion and not enough action in the matter of radicalism. I should be glad to hear more of those free souls who have questioned

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and taken a stand on some of the more obviously stupid conventions. Most people don't know the historical background of neckties — or high heels. Once the history is brought to light, the folly of aping these harmful, expensive, or merely silly practices becomes apparent. How many women are guilty of demanding houses with windows, and then covering them up with "glass curtains" and "drapes". How many go through the trouble of ironing "puffed" sleeves on daughter's dresses? How many wear hats which are really a protection from the elements — or none at all?

If a mother does her job (so commonly passed on to the state's hirelings) of educating her children in their early years, along with the other arduous tasks she has great need to, simplify the mechanics of living.

Thomas Star King's lines are pertinent.

"Be sure of the foundation of your life, know why you live as you do. Be ready to give a reason for it. Do not, in such a matter as life, build on opinion or custom, or what you guess is true. Make it a matter of certainty and science."

(MRS.) VIOLET THOMAS SEIGFRIED

Julius Eichel Comments

Brooklyn 1, New York

Irving Ravin's "How to Identify a Radical" is so provocatively naive, amusing, and revealing, that I am willing to accept the challenge it presents and discuss the fantastic world he pictures.

One cannot tell whether he is giving his advice to the poor or the rich, the morbid or the healthy-minded person. We must assume he is writing for the average normal individual. They suffer much from the very changes he advocates. Take any crowded, poor section of the world. Individuals must tolerate body smells and decay, promiscuity, rudeness, and lack of room, and suffer while they do so. So herding and infringing on an individual's privacy is not a virtue, for many individuals yearn for privacy. That still remains a luxury reserved for the rich. As for washing, except for religious individuals and children who may wash by injunction, normal people wash when they think they should, and it is the only the morbid, ridden by fear, who will wash excessively.

Most intelligent people would agree that the world is in great need of sexual knowledge, and that we may be kept in ignorance by false modesty and religious groups which consider sex discussions a sacrilege. Irving recognizes that most people do not discuss sexual problems openly, and, though Irving indicates that he means to

do so, he ignores the main problem and turns to hygiene as its essence. Hygiene has a good deal to do with the reasonable enjoyment of sex life, but it is not the essence of sex.

As for hygiene itself, he ignores the accumulated experience of the ages. Unfortunately, animals have to contend with the end-products of their digestion. All the mucous membranes and the skin aid in the process of throwing off waste materials. These give rise to putrid odors, which are not always pleasant. They are as real as the garbage one sees with the eyes. To minimize the necessity for privacy in the ordinary practice of ablution is to be ignorant of the fact that even animals seldom pollute the air they must breathe, the dens they inhabit, and some animals even attempt to hide their own excrement. The process of birth is a very messy affair. Normal individuals clean up the mess as fast and thoroughly as they can, and do not permit morbid thoughts of the birth process to diminish their love for children nor their mates.

My conclusion is that the radical must be a normal human being if he wishes to influence others. Changing habits and customs just to become conspicuous may be confused with snobbishness, rudeness, and contemptuousness. Changes that affront others can only be justified where a way of life or principles are at stake. One is much more likely to be influential when he observes the common decencies and acts reasonably. It is by the spirit and action and not by clothes or lack of them that we are most likely to make headway against a world geared to regimentation, exploitation, imperialism, and war.

In conclusion, I would like to give my own definition of a radical, . . . "What distinguishes a radical is his resistance to compulsion, and his instance that his way of life must be based on reason and experience and a decent respect for the feelings of others, be these reasons God inspired or otherwise."

JULIUS EICHEL

New York 14, N. Y.

I should like very much to be considered a radical, yet I fear that two important points are now against me:

- (1) I feel constrained to wash my hands *after* as well as *before*; and
- (2) the bathroom of our one-room apartment is so small that it is physically very difficult for two people to squeeze into it and use it at the same time.

Please, dear editors, tell me whether there is any hope for me under these circumstances.

Yours anxiously,

ALBON MAN

ALTERNATIVE

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