

# An Unpeaceable Kingdom

by Paul T. Stallsworth

***Uncivil Religion—Interreligious Hostility in America***, edited by Robert N. Bellah and Frederick E. Greenspahn, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company; \$17.95.

It was one of those Saturday nights that spills over into Sunday morning. Invited into the home of a main-line Protestant couple in split-level northern New Jersey, the 40ish group was made up of Jews and Roman Catholics from the neighborhood and of visiting Southern Baptists from Texas. After enjoying much conversation and suffering the consequences of too much Tex-Mex, everyone gathered around for a little guitar sing. Many songs later, the evening finally ended with everybody belting out with feeling the old standby

“Amazing Grace.”

There is something truly amazing about that—about Jews, Protestants (both main-line and evangelical), and Roman Catholics un-self-consciously singing together about the salvation of “a wretch like me.” There is no doubt that this incident demonstrates religious civility, or peace of a sort, or an amorphous unity. At least an American is tempted to respond triumphantly to it with “Only in America!” And it is not that uncommon an event in the United States today: To the unsuspecting observer, the various religious communities in America appear to be as friendly to each other as fraternity rush chairmen are to their “rushees.”

However, despite such nice religious goings on, all is not peaches and cream in religious America today, nor has it ever been. *Uncivil Religion* serves as a strong reminder of that. This book contains 10 essays that describe the religious tensions—between Jews and

Christians, between Protestants and Catholics, between liberals and conservatives, and between mainstream groups and emerging groups—that have existed and now exist in American public life. These essays on hostility are written by various scholars of American religion (four of the 10, interestingly enough, have been active participants in conferences sponsored by The Rockford Institute Center on Religion & Society in New York). Furthermore, they are introduced by a short piece by Frederick E. Greenspahn and concluded by a longer article by Robert (Habits of the Heart) Bellah. It should be noted that the essays of this book include extensive and scholarly footnotes for the sake of further investigation.

The book gets off to a rousing start with Jonathan Sarna’s chronicle of Jewish-Christian hostilities from a Jewish point of view. Sarna’s article itself might even generate a few hostilities

## REVISIONS

### *American Pie*

The loss of economic sovereignty inevitably leads to diminished political freedom. That, at any rate, is the claim made by Martin and Susan Tolchin in *Buying Into America* (New York: Times Books; \$19.95; 400 pages). Using the Japanese as a paradigm, the Tolchins insist that this latest threat to America must be met by outmanaging, outproducing, and outselling the competition.

There is a growing support for this all-American thesis in a variety of quarters. According to Edward Lincoln, “Japanese investment is a challenge for us. If we can’t meet it, we deserve to work for the Japanese.” The Japanese, naturally, agree. In the words of Kiyoshi Suzuki, a Japanese expert busy giving advice to American business, “U.S. must learn from Japan,” which means singing the company anthem every morning and taking part in clenched-fist cheerleading sessions.

American workers are less than enthusiastic. Billy Sellars, a union leader in a Japanese-owned-and-

operated Bridgestone tire plant in Tennessee, complains that, “For the Japanese, their jobs are number one,” while in America, “religion and family come first, at least in my family.” Such total commitment to the firm does not fit very well into the American experience; it has, however, deep roots in the soil of Japan.

When Admiral Perry opened up Japan by gunboat, the country had neither industry nor trade, in the modern sense of the word. The samurai rulers despised merchants, craftsmen, and serfs—anyone unwilling to risk life and limb for honor and merit. By 1905, however, the samurai had gone to military and polytechnic schools in Europe and with the help of Western technology managed to defeat Imperial Russia. In World War I, they held their own against the Germans. But in 1945, after bombing the Empire of the Rising Sun into submission, the Americans came to Japan again. The Japanese gambit at supremacy by war had failed, but true to their heritage, the samurai decided to recoup their military losses in a

different sphere: business. They did so by applying their military codes to the free market.

The comparable model in the West is the command economy. In extolling the Americans to become like the Japanese, the authors of *Buying Into America* are using the threat of foreign economic takeover of the United States to appeal for almost wartime federal control of the economy. In the Tolchins’ New Deal vision, economic warfare demands a corporatist order—an America united spiritually, economically, nationally, and politically by the need to protect the store.

It is true that America is beleaguered—in many more ways than economic—but bottom-line exhortations can hardly inspire the country’s best and brightest. Until the true nature of the outside economic threat is realized, the Japanese—among many other nations—will continue to conduct their trade with the U.S. as war by other means. The worst anyone can do (as the Japanese had found out, by 1945) is to join battle on the adversaries’ turf and terms.

among Christian readers, for he cites many sources that attempt to uncover attacks on the Jewish community everywhere, even in the benevolent and the benign—in all Christian goodwill expressed toward Jews and Judaism, and in Christian translations of the Hebrew Bible. John Murray Cuddihy follows with a fascinating argument: too often, he contends, Jews are depicted as “morally blameless.” Too often the question is posed, “How do bad things [read: anti-Semitic] happen to this good people?” Cuddihy’s sources run from *New York Times* editorials to Woody Allen to Elie Wiesel. It might be said that this chapter exhibits a degree of courage in an always difficult, complex, and sensitive area.

In chapters by Barbara Welter and Jay P. Dolan, both Protestants and Roman Catholics are found blameworthy for the tensions that have existed between their communities. Some Protestants, it seems, were into spreading nasty lies about what happens behind the locked doors of convents, while Tridentine Catholics were often content to look on members of the “Protestant Revolt” as misguided folk outside the true salvation of The, or Their, Church. Mark A. Noll’s chapter announces the good news of the Protestant-Catholic rapprochement of our day and the not-so-good news of the three presently contending parties (the new party, the old party, and the Americanist party) within the two large communities.

George Marsden addresses the liberal-conservative wars by focusing on the evolutionist-creationist controversy; there he spots antisupernaturalist fundamentalists and supernaturalist fundamentalists fighting it out in such a way that reason and diplomacy become impossible. Marsden’s connections between the South, the Civil War, religion, and creationism are especially interesting. Chapters on liberal-conservative tensions also examine the Jewish and Roman Catholic communities.

The book’s last example of uncivil religion involves emerging or new religions. Mormonism and the Unification Church are seen as movements that offer a blatant challenge to their host society. When these movements did not accommodate their belief and

practice so that they might “fit in,” their host proceeded to label them “cults,” exclude them socially, and then persecute them. Persecution ranged and ranges from legislation to “deprogramming” to the jabs from *Saturday Night Live*.

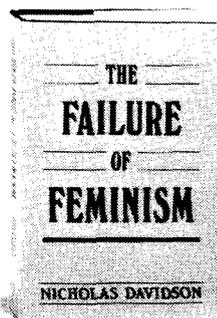
These essays are convincing. It is hard not to agree that American religion has had a very uncivil side. Even today Jews, Protestants, Roman Catholics, and non-name-brand types (i.e., “secular humanists” and others) often do not get along famously inside or outside their communities. But the most fundamental tension in American religion today, according to Robert Bellah (and when Bellah speaks, he should be listened to—though not necessarily agreed with), is between those who seek community without significant boundaries (in terms of belief and practice) and those who seek community with significant boundaries. Some of the former might desire a Club Methodist, for example, in which freedom of choice reigns; some of the latter strive for a Methodist church complete with definite commit-

ment and a clear-cut identity. The danger Bellah fears most is that the Club will prove to be more attractive than the Church. If it is, Bellah worries, indeed if it triumphs, it “would destroy both the moral norms that provide the terms for our democratic conversation and the communities that carry those moral norms and ethical concerns, including the religious communities.” It would destroy both Church and society.

Unfortunately, pinpointing and worrying about the demise of religious community with boundaries does not actually create religious community with boundaries (though some might say that a pseudoreligious community has formed around Bellah’s *Habits*). But still, it is a beginning. And it will certainly contribute to some truly creative and constructive hostilities in American religion, which will, it is hoped, differ greatly from those that have gone before.

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## Letter From a State of Mind

by Jacob Neusner

### *The Religion of Neoconservatism*

Did you ever wonder why Jewish neo-conservative thinkers never argue "from" Judaism, in the way in which Michael Novak argues from Roman Catholicism, and Richard Neuhaus argues from Lutheran Christianity? That is to say, Judaism never forms a point of departure and never defines a court of appeal. For the Jewish neoconservatives Judaism simply does not exist. They do not despise the Judaic religious tradition and its intellectual heritage. They simply ignore it. For them, religion may serve valid purposes; it may even be beautiful; but it forms no intellectual reality from which, or even against which, to mount sustained thought.

I cannot explain why, because I am not a neoconservative, although I am Jewish. On the contrary, I was a conservative before I knew it, stayed a Democrat long after voting for Republicans (but made the move in 1968 anyhow). When I was a Henry Fellow at Oxford University, 35 years ago, I discovered that I was a conservative, not a liberal, certainly not a socialist. As a Jew, the discovery surprised me. What I found was that the British left in the early 50's was anti-American, the right was pro-American, and I was an American. We were just emerging from the Korean War, which, I firmly believed, had saved South Korea from Communist aggression. But the left in Oxford told me that we were the aggressors and should pay retributions to North Korea. These same folk had just come back from an international Youth Festival in Bucharest and brought with them other wonders and marvels to behold.

Shortly after arrival in September 1953, I located the Oxford University Blue Ribbon Society, the elite (so they

told me) of the conservatives, and for their magazine wrote up "Youth Festival in Bucharest: A Study in Fatuity." For my efforts I was roundly abused by the Socialists, and happily joined the fray. I defended not what was then called McCarthyism but the view that Communist espionage presented a serious problem to Western security. I pointed to the Soviet domination of eastern Europe and the threat to Germany. In these and other ways I found a comfortable position in the conservative side of Oxford politics in that interesting year. When I came home, it was, of course, as a Democrat, but a conservative one. I began voting for Republicans, and by the mid-1960's, the identification with the Republican Party was complete. I began reading, then writing for *National Review* long before Vietnam got rough, and identified with the politics outlined by William F. Buckley Jr., long, long before Norman Podhoretz had broken ranks.

I tell this brief story to indicate that although I am a Jew and a conservative, I am not a neoconservative. Since people generally think that neoconservatives are Jewish intellectuals who have given up on the left, it is important to set forth one's own credentials, especially since one trait of the Jewish neocons strikes me as profoundly hostile to conservatism in culture. That is their utterly tone-deaf audience to the religion, Judaism. While paying respect to religion as instrumentally useful, the Jewish neocons maintain a vigorous apathy toward Judaism. We see this, every month, in *Commentary*, which while describing itself as somehow connected to the Jewish world represents the Judaic life of intellect by disdain and silence. That is not a new policy to be sure. Even in the late 1940's, the great rabbi-intellectual Milton Steinberg dismissed *Commentary* as utterly hostile to the rich intellectual life of Judaism. It was true, then, when *Commentary* belonged to

the left, and it is equally true now, with *Commentary* a bulwark of conservatism in international and social policy.

Just now I asked myself why it should be the case that while the Jewish conservatives (not neoconservatives) of an earlier generation, represented by Will Herberg and Seymour Siegel, should have lived out a rich affirmation of the Judaic religious tradition and themselves helped enrich the Judaic intellectual tradition, the Jewish neoconservatives want nothing to do with either religion or religious intellectual life, when these are framed by Judaism. The occasion of this question was a letter from Sidney Hook, whom I have admired my whole life.

He had sent me a brilliant article on the conflict between Communist Party membership and the possibility of participating in universities as they flourish in the West. I read it, sent it on to the *Providence Journal* in the hope that they would understand from it why Brown University should not cooperate with the KGB's Institute of the USA and Canada, with Rostock University in East Germany, and with various other Communist centers of higher learning and research—and then say so. Then I thanked Professor Hook and, by way of reply, sent him a small monograph of mine, *The Making of the Mind of Judaism*.

The choice of the book was not without consideration. It is a work addressed to a problem of philosophy, signaled, to be sure, by my theft of the title of the great work by Randall. I wanted to know the relationship between the logic of intelligible discourse in the rabbinic texts of late antiquity and the conceptual limitations imposed by the dominant logic upon the minds shaped by that logic. Now the book may not accomplish its goals, and it certainly will not teach logic to any second year philosophy student. But it does address a question a great philosophical mind like Hook should appre-