

mocracy, by its very nature, is peaceful and disinclined to aggressiveness and expansionism is "so much nonsense." Democracy needs to be monitored and to have its flaws scrutinized. *The New Jacobinism* is not a mere listing of dangers. It diagnoses problems and shows which trends must be reversed if civilized life is to survive. One of the book's chief purposes is to revive the classical spirit in which the great constitutions of liberty were written in the West. Ryn places far greater stress on the moral and cultural preconditions of liberty than has been common among proponents of liberal democracy in the last century.

Some readers would undoubtedly have liked Ryn to offer a longer list of prescriptions, a comprehensive "program." After all, offering "plans" for improving society is customary. But for Ryn this habit is itself symptomatic of what is wrong. The problems of Western society have become too serious and deep-seated to be addressed in the typical political manner. Problems must first of all be adequately diagnosed. Ryn's recommendations are mostly implicit. They follow from his diagnosis of the heart of the problem and from his analyses of the trends that need to be reversed. Above all, Western society must recover a sense of the importance of individual character. People in the West have become too willing to shirk responsibility. They need to break out of the morally evasive and vicarious "virtue" of sentimental humanitarianism which is enacted somewhere at a distance by a continually growing government. One of the dangers of Jacobin abstract "universal values" is that they aggravate the flight from individual self-improvement to utopian schemes for reforming others and the world.

Claes Ryn seeks here to expose illusions and practices that are destroying constitutional rule, as well as to foster ethical realism. This noble purpose is

admirably served by this sobering and invigorating volume. Some of Ryn's judgments may seem severe, but his book is strongly argued and full of ideas with which those who disagree will have to contend. One hopes that *The New Jacobinism* will achieve wide circulation, in Europe as well as the United States, and that its plea for ethical, political, and cultural self-scrutiny will be heeded. One hopes so for the sake of us all.

The Faith of a Catholic Intellectual

JAMES W. TUTTLETON

Confessions of an Original Sinner,
by John Lukacs, *New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1990. 328 pp. \$19.95*

IN HIS *Confessions*, an "auto-history" of some of his "thoughts and beliefs," John Lukacs describes what it is like to be a Hungarian refugee, a professional historian, a Roman Catholic, and a believer in original sin—in short, what it is like to be a self-confessed "reactionary." (Insofar as he is a sinner, by the way—at least as he recounts his experience here—there is nothing sensational to report: he appears to have the usual human failings—a penchant, no different from our own, for acting out of pride, vanity, lust, anger, etc.) But this is an incisive, an uncommon book, one well worth reading for several reasons. One must especially commend his account of life in Hungary during the years of World War II, the report of an immigrant's experience in the United States, his historical reflection on human behavior in times of stress, and the acuity of his conservative Catho-

lic meditation on the general human predicament.

Born in 1924 of a Jewish father and Catholic mother, who were later divorced, John Lukacs grew up inclined to the Left and might have remained a socialist had not World War II intervened. But the experience of living in Budapest, first under the Nazis and then under the Soviet "liberators," changed all that: it opened his eyes to the evil that men—of every political persuasion—think, will, and do. During these years Lukacs was dragged out of college, put into a Nazi forced labor battalion, and then drafted into the army. Suspicious of Hungarian nationalists who admired Germany, he saw some of his compatriots rationalize the Nazi rape of Poland, dismiss the Marxists as only vulgarians, condemn the Nazis only when it had become opportune to do so, and deny their own complicity in Hungary's fate. After the war, he also saw a good many Hungarians rationalize the Communist subjugation of their country, equivocate about the brutality of the Soviets, and even deny to themselves the horrors they had seen.

As the war neared its end, Lukacs deserted, went underground, and hid out; he emerged (with forged papers) only after the end of the Soviets' fifty-day siege of the city. Since his English was excellent, he took work as the Secretary of the Hungarian-American Society, but since this brought him to the attention of the Soviet secret police, he decided to escape to America. In due course he married here, had a family, became a professor of history at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, and wrote fourteen books on various historical subjects, of which *Historical Consciousness* (1968), *Outgrowing Democracy* (1984), and *A History of the Cold War* (1961) may be mentioned.

But it was principally the war experience that transformed him into the reactionary that he claims to be. Much more

than a conservative, a *reactionary*, for Lukacs, knows and believes

... in the existence of sin and in the immutable essence of human nature. He does not always oppose change, and he does not altogether deny progress. What he denies is the immutable idea of immutable progress: the idea that we are capable not only of improving our material conditions but our very nature, including our mental and spiritual nature.

The reactionary thus recoils against the "accumulation of accepted ideas and of institutionalized ways of thinking," which now permeate liberal culture in the West.

One of the "accepted ideas" young Lukacs reacted against was the pervasive contempt in Hungary for the middle class. As he observed the ideologues of both the Right and the Left, the intellectuals as well as the *avant garde*, he could not help comparing them with an older generation, rooted in humane and civic values, of which his grandparents were exemplary. It did not escape him that "even more than the Marxists, the Nazis and the extreme nationalists hated everyone and everything that was bourgeois, *bürgerlich*." Bourgeois, then as now, had the connotation of "narrow, petty, selfish, fussy, fusty, stuffy, hopelessly middle-class." Yet his grandparents made him appreciate "certain bourgeois virtues: solidity, reliability, probity, decency, modesty . . . and, most of all, the cult of privacy, of interiority, indeed, of the family." Lukacs later found these values in a circle of friends in the Philadelphia area, and, among other things, the *Confessions* is a celebration of the middle class, the aim of which is to redeem from liberal contempt the American bourgeoisie, whom he calls "the best representatives of Western civilization in the United States."

Who these representatives are is not specified, doubtless out of respect for their privacy; nor is there enough given

fully to grasp how they are to be distinguished from other groups in American society. Certainly they are not intellectuals, for whom Lukacs seems to have unparalleled scorn—especially since, for him, intellectuals always seem to have a false relation to life. These confessions are replete with references to the ways in which intellectuals in America (whom he seems to equate with the Left) have repeatedly misread the actualities of history, class, and contemporary politics.

But any celebration of such traditional values today, such as are ascribed to the middle class—especially in our milieu of drugs, crime, government-sponsored obscenity in the arts, academic relativism, and civic indifference—would be cause enough for admiration of this book. Yet a belief in bourgeois virtues does not necessarily make a better man, which for Lukacs is possible only in a Christian context. In fact, he rightly remarks that “One cannot be deeply bourgeois and deeply Christian at the same time.” So, in accounting for his thought and belief, Lukacs recounts here his gravitation toward Christianity.

The first evidence of Lukacs’ conversion, if that term can be used for so cerebral an event, was a growing respect he began to feel for certain Hungarians who had resisted both the Nazis and the Marxists. “Eventually I began to detect that in most of the cases (though not in all) the principled behavior of these reactionaries rested on religion, in Hungary often on the Catholic religion.” Lukacs hardly makes clear to us who these Catholics were; nor does he discuss at all the many Hungarian Jews who formed a resistance to the Third Reich. And if we ask what this transforming example involved, he can only remark that it had to do with their conviction, the strength of a few beliefs that neither the Nazis nor the Soviets could subvert. In particular, what persuaded him

... was the fact that the Roman Catholic concept—doctrine as well as view—of human nature corresponded with what I was seeing and experiencing, especially during the last years of the war, when its sufferings and horrors struck my native country in a condensed version within a twelvemonth. The teaching of free will—that men and women are responsible for what they do and say and even think, because they are free to do so—and of original sin—that the moral range of a human being is infinitely greater and different from that of any other living being, since being naturally inclined to both evil and good, we are both beasts and angels—made a great deal of sense to me.

Among other things, then, Lukacs’ *Confessions* is a meditation on the disastrous consequences of the West’s abandonment of a belief in original sin in favor of a faith in evolution, progress, and science—nineteenth-century values that he regards as bankrupt now as Marxism. Yet, in the end, he retains some shred of hope:

Man is born imperfect and stays imperfect. But *not* hopelessly so. Hope is one essence of his faith in a loving and forgiving God. This is how a reactionary can believe in progress—of a certain kind.

Thus the Christian’s hope for eventual salvation.

But with respect to others, who are seen as worshipping the false god of science, do any non-Christians seriously believe nowadays that they will be saved by Darwin, Marx, and Freud—the despised trio whom Lukacs curiously seems most to associate with the substitute religion of science? Of course, all aspects of science and technology are susceptible of abuse, precisely because of the human imperfections Lukacs is preoccupied with. But in my view the advances of scientific and technological understanding *have*—however much we concede the perils brought along by them—unarguably improved the quality of hu-

man life and have thereby made possible for us a different relation to our own spiritual and mental lives. Hope, it should be remembered, is a feature of the spiritual life that we give to each other as well as receive from God—inasmuch as our hopes sometimes do materialize through the agency of science—in the improved modes of travel, communication, medicine (and so on) that bring loved ones together, make possible the intimacy of their communion at long distances, and heal them from once-fatal illnesses. Again, the matter of degree strikes me as essential to grasp: one need not be a materialist to take cognizance of profound changes, in the direction of social, political, and cultural improvement, since the origination of Christianity.

As a result of his experience, in any case, Lukacs recounts his growing perception, in contradiction to Marx and Adam Smith, that “the essential matter, whether in the history of persons or in that of nations, is what they think and believe, while the material organization of society and of their lives is the superstructure of *that*.” Lukacs’ belief in “the inevitable intrusion of mind in the structure of events, indeed, of matter itself,” has guided his practice as an historian. Much of the autobiography circles about a theory of history, according to which history is itself a form of thought—a mode of thinking, self-consciously evolving since the seventeenth century, which is as important as the concurrent rise of the scientific method. Lukacs’ aim, as an historian, has been to demonstrate how history “must include what and how many people thought and acted and hoped for in their everyday lives: in short, the design, the limning and the coloring of the sensitivities of a certain place and period.” This approach governs his *Philadelphia: Patricians and Philistines, 1900-1950* (1981) and *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (1988).

An interesting aspect of Lukacs’ his-

torical philosophy is his pessimistic belief that, as the Cartesian-Newtonian world view comes to an end, we are witnessing “the decline of the West.” This nearly eschatological angle will be an eye-opener to many who—whatever their view of Newton and Descartes—accord greater cultural significance than Lukacs does to the West’s political triumphs over totalitarianism, its soaring economic rise, and its richest cultural achievements. This nineteenth-century Spenglerian idea seems, on the basis of undeniable historical evidence, as defunct as the Marxism that Lukacs dismisses. (But then Christians have an even longer history of announcing the end of the world as we know it.) Perhaps Lukacs is a shade apocalyptic because, as he concedes, the Christian churches “are in deep trouble”: observance and knowledge of the faith have declined. He himself continues to observe and to believe in God—because, he says, he wants to. Why he wants to is not explicitly answered here.

What seems to bother Lukacs more than the public decline of Christianity or even the West is “the public abandonment of the recognition of the existence of the soul,” and he quotes Georges Bernanos to the effect that “For men it is certainly more grave, or at least much more dangerous, to deny original sin than to deny God.” I am in substantial agreement with this observation, though, if pressed to its *reductio ad absurdum*, it has the effect of producing the secular cynic. Even for the believer, it seems to me, an excessive preoccupation with human sinfulness produces a joyless frame of mind—a defect that mars this absorbing confession. God’s spiritual economy somehow makes possible in us the valid sentiment of the *Gloria*, the *Jubilate*.

I have said that Lukacs takes aim at European and American liberals, but it should not be thought that he has noth-

ing but admiration for conservatives. Lukacs is skeptical about democratic politics because of "their tendency to corruption." During the McCarthy era he became—rather perversely to my mind—an anti-anti-Communist because he disagreed with the sweeping demonization of Communist subversives. (I say perversely because in my view some men are more corrupt than others, and, in light of the stupefying evils committed in the name of communism in this century, a passionate wish to eliminate their covert influence on our government was wholly justified.) Lukacs is also no great admirer of Ronald Reagan, Henry Kissinger, or even some conservative journals. He remarks that "immediately after Ronald Reagan's election the probity, taste, judgement and standards of the American conservative publications began to melt away in the hot summer of their success." Lukacs is especially acerbic about the juvenility of the *American Spectator* and about William Buckley's *National Review*, which he faults for eulogizing Oswald Mosely (the British Fascist) and Roy Cohn ("the unsavory gangster"), but not Dorothy Day ("the founder and saintly heroine of the Catholic Worker movement"). As he remarks of recent conservative successes in *Outgrowing Democracy* (1984) "their intellectual—and moral—substance was not sufficient to fill the post-liberal vacuum."

Readers of *Confessions of an Original Sinner* may find Lukacs, like any honest man, a continual irritant—everywhere a square peg in a round hole. Particularly nettlesome is his keen eye for our self-deceptions, easy mendacities, and wishful thinking. He reminds us of what we would like to forget or ignore. But he is hardest, it seems to me, on himself—the pride, vanity, and other faults that produced this loner, this displaced person in the intellectual life of America, this independent and prickly thinker. Yet his sharp intelligence, historical understand-

ing, and manifest faith make him well worth reading at a time when the best seem to lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.

The Living Philosophy of Carl Schmitt

LEE CONGDON

Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory, by Paul Edward Gottfried, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990. ix + 152 pp. \$39.95.

UNTIL RECENTLY Americans knew Carl Schmitt, if they knew him at all, as Hitler's "crown jurist," a legal and political philosopher who prostituted his talent in order to gain favor with a tyrannical regime. Although in the end he failed to ingratiate himself with the Nazi élite, not least because his ideas clashed so conspicuously with the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, his reputation remained an odious one. Few dared even to read his work for fear of contagion. It was only in 1970, twenty-three years after American authorities concluded that they possessed insufficient evidence to indict Schmitt for war crimes, that an American scholar, George Schwab, produced a respectful introduction to the philosopher's early writings—and he had to go to Berlin to find a publisher.

Six years later Schwab followed up his book with a translation of one of Schmitt's pivotal works, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, without causing much of a stir. But by 1983, when Princeton University Press published Joseph W. Bendersky's *Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich*, a Schmitt renaissance was in full swing on the European continent, and in a belated effort to keep pace, Thomas McCarthy, General Editor of the MIT Press's Studies in Con-