

from the revelation of the Judeo-Christian God.

Two comments in particular show that Dr. Mbiti has great difficulty in reading the book. One is the accusation that it indulges in "frequent comparison of African religious life with that of the West," whereas there is not one instance of this in the whole work. The other is that it slights African notions of supreme being, to which in fact lengthy and substantial discussion is given.

The real point of Dr. Mbiti's attack and the underlying source of his discontent lies in his statement concerning "foreigners" who write about African religions with an anthropological "bias." These are indeed important points, especially when made in a journal devoted to international affairs and to intellectual dialogue.

Like many of his clerical colleagues, who belong to the colonially derived churches, Dr. Mbiti is engaged in the important and demanding task of indigenizing Christianity in Africa. Unfortunately he sees Western secular scholarship as his chief enemy. But this is hardly the case. The main opposition comes from the large body of conservative African Christians who wish to retain many irrelevant Western liturgical and ecclesiastical forms. A different kind of challenge comes from the growing number of Independent Churches in Africa that have already made new and creative syntheses of Christianity and African tradition. A few of these churches are now members of the World Council of Churches, and they often draw people away from the more conservative European-founded churches.

Instead of pushing ahead with new liturgical and theological innovations, Dr. Mbiti and others have chosen a more gradual and perhaps more productive course. They have sought to develop a new African theology by discovering parallels to Christianity in African traditional religions, thereby gaining theological insight into their own traditional culture. Thus they find African notions of supreme being to be rooted in the monotheistic idea of God, and they see corresponding notions of sin, after-life, and divine judgment.

No one would deny that this is a properly theological endeavor, and one which must be carried out by Africans themselves. The question is not a matter of "foreigners" versus Africans, as Dr. Mbiti would like to think, but of differ-

ent tasks, one secular and humanistic, the other theological and evangelical. This has already been pointed out to Dr. Mbiti by many African scholars. These different concerns have long been engaged in fruitful dialogue, and one would hope that they would continue to do so in relation to African religions. Dr. Mbiti only demeans himself and the wider discussion by resorting to the level of personal diatribe.

Benjamin C. Ray

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John Mbiti Responds:

The editors have kindly invited me to reply to Professor Benjamin Ray's letter concerning my review of his book, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community*. I take note of his personal attack on me simply because I dared criticize certain aspects of the book the author so generously praises. I do not wish to retaliate. If this book is faultless, it will certainly speak for itself, in keeping with a Swahili proverb that says: *Chema chajiuzua, kibaya chajitembeza* ("a good article sells itself, a bad article roams about looking for customers").

Your readers will be impressed, as I am, by Professor Ray's linguistic abilities, which enabled him to conduct research, as he claims, "in a Ugandan language," when he stayed in Uganda for only a few months!

Let me take up only one academic point. Professor Ray denies in this letter that he made comparison of African religious life with that of the West. Some quotations from his own book will remind him of what he seems to have forgotten. Page 5: "No matter how 'value-free' these concepts may be, they still characterize Africa as the opposite of the West and thus reinforce a 'negative perspective.'" Page 14: "Thus they reduce African religions to a set of 'doctrines' analogous in structure to Western faiths...." Page 74: "Like advice columnists in Western newspapers, Ashanti mediums dole out much needed moral and religious counsel...." Page 132: "Until recently, Western scholars have failed to appreciate the extent to which African religions are founded upon a systematic anthropology and ethics.... It never approximates the Western notion of individualism...."

Page 150: "Unlike Western religions, African thought does not conceive the source of evil to be...."

I feel sympathetically amused if and when a scholar denies what he has written and published in his own book. Therefore it becomes difficult to take him or her seriously. If I had the space and the interest, I could certainly produce enough evidence to counteract the other statements made in Dr. Ray's letter.

My dear friend Dr. Ray, if and where I may wrongly have criticized your book, please forgive me and put me right without using the occasion to pile up personal attacks on me. (I also made points of appreciation about it, mind you!) You once welcomed me at your University in 1970; and I was very happy to reciprocate your kindness by arranging for you to spend a few months as visiting professor at Makerere University in 1972. I have no personal quarrels with you. Please use your brilliant mind much more for academic good than for personal attacks on people who are or have been your colleagues. There is enough territory for you and these colleagues to engage in academic pursuits—with sufficient differences of opinion and approach, which add to the value of academic dialogue. Such a dialogue is killed when one person attacks viciously others who dare make a few critical points about that person's publications.

Lebanon

To its Editors: My own position is that it is outrageous and pejorative to label—perhaps label—the Christian Lebanese as "right wing," and the Moslem Lebanese as "left wing" (see Barry Rubin's discussion of the issue in an *Excursus*, "Misunderstanding Lebanon," in the June issue of *Worldview*). In terms of Western European democratic values, the Christian Lebanese are certainly more "liberal" than the Moslem Lebanese.

It would be correct to characterize the Christian Lebanese as more economically privileged than the Moslem Lebanese. That assessment, however, should not permit the designation of these parties as right and left wing. In fact, the Moslems have what must be

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viewed as a feudal social system.

The reason these terms are so important is that in the United States, or at least for those reading the *New York Times*, there is immediate sympathy for the group on the "left" fighting the group on the "right."

...You may be interested to know that I am attempting to initiate an effort to accept a number of refugees from the war in Lebanon into the United States.

Edward I. Koch
House of Representatives
Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C.

Of Solzhenitsyn and Cloistering

To the Editors: Professor Molnar, who wrote on Solzhenitsyn (Books: "Solzhenitsyn: A Man Possessed," *Worldview*, May), certainly knows more about him than I do. However, I will dare to classify myself with Joseph Kraft, who, according to Molnar, "opines grotesquely" that "Solzhenitsyn hails from a culture considered backward by American standards and knows nothing of the relations between nations."

It is possible that Professor Molnar has led a more cloistered life than I. I experienced World War II in the Philippines, have been especially observant of our foreign policy ever since my liberation from the Japanese in 1945, and have traveled observantly and untouristically in eighty-three countries and colonies. I claim to be the only traveler to have interviewed all three of the following heads of state: Pandit Nehru of India, Nikita Khrushchev of the USSR, and the first syndic of tiny Andorra!

I also interviewed four former slave laborers of the Russians: a young German I met in West Berlin in 1951 who had worked for them five years; the Japanese secretary of the Hiroshima YMCA, in which city I met him in 1954; a Latvian Baptist minister I met in Riga in 1970 who had labored ten years in Siberia; and another Baptist pastor I met in Seattle in 1975 when he was visiting his brother here. They all told stories of great hardship. But not one of them was bitter. And the Japanese YMCA man said: "Well, Mrs. Bryant, a lot of those Communists are very sincere people."

When I traveled in Communist coun-

tries I could claim kinship in Baptist churches. My Baptist brethren were not being persecuted as they had been under the Czars. One pastor told me: "Yes, it is all right for our young people to join the Young Pioneers and the Comsomols. There and in school they learn honesty and brotherhood. In fact, the Communists are doing so much for the people that I would become a Party member if it were not for their atheism."

And Metropolitan Nikolai, the second highest official of the Russian Orthodox Church, told me: "Formerly everyone, even atheists, had to belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. Now the atheists are free of the Church and the Church is free of the atheists, and it is a better situation." He estimated that, judging from the numbers of people taking communion, 50 per cent of the people still had ties with the Church.

Professor Molnar writes: "For Solzhenitsyn had pierced the great secret: the substance of Marxism is not the master's conceptual edifice, it is the hatred of God. Marxist atheism... is a declaration of total war on man, God's only accessible image."

In my view it is a disservice to mankind and his Creator to glorify Solzhenitsyn, who has done so much to increase hostility toward the USSR.

Alice Franklin Bryant
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Thomas Molnar Responds:
Miss Bryant's letter suggests that there must still be people around who side with Anytos against Socrates and with Judas against Jesus. It is difficult to argue with such people, and I shall not attempt it. I only note that it does not occur to Miss Bryant that the Baptist pastor and Metropolitan Nikolai are agents, although involuntary, of the Communist Party and as such are full of praise for the regime.

But even more dangerous a person than a Communist aparatchik clad in priestly robes is an innocent blue-eyed American who travels to hell and reports back that the gardens are well-tended.

P.S. My "cloistered life" includes two years in concentration camps and visits to all continents: seventy-eight countries, admittedly five fewer than the eighty-three of which Miss Bryant boasts.