
"The Catholic church in Germany was German to the core, and like the Protestant church upheld the state and its authority. In both churches there was opposition in good measure to certain policies of the totalitarian state; of active political revolutionary resistance there was virtually none, neither in the years of peace, nor, least of all, in the war years when the enemy had to be met on the field of battle."

—The German Churches Under Hitler

sent work will free future historians to address these other *necessarily undocumented* dimensions. Since such studies depend more on private experiences and reminiscences, it may already be too late, but some attempt should be made to recapture as much of the story as possible. Two recently published accounts

of the "other side" of the holocaust tragedy serve as good examples. Phillip Hallie's *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (Harper & Row) and Alexander Rama-ti's *The Assisi Underground: The Priests Who Rescued Jews* (Stein & Day) show how two community-wide operations, one Protestant (in Vichy

France) and the other Catholic (in Italy), saved Jews as a religious action. I have been assured there were similar efforts in Poland, and I know of Germans who operated a kind of "under-ground railroad" in the Freiburg-im-Breisgau area. It took Hallie and Rama-ti more than thirty years to follow through on their long-standing intentions to write their accounts, and one is sobered by the thought that without them these inspiring stories might have been lost altogether.

There are probably other stories of such heroism still to be told, but they are not likely to be uncovered in official archives. It would be an altogether unanticipated but valuable contribution of the Helmreich study if, just because it is so definitive within its carefully maintained limits, it redirected the professional historian's interest in the "church struggle" to the experiences of the men and women who lived it. **[WV]**

The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations by Christopher Lasch

(W.W. Norton; 268 pp.; \$11.95)

John C. Hawley

In this immensely interesting and suggestive book Christopher Lasch, an American historian at the University of Rochester, offers Narcissus as the mythological character approximating today's Americans. Surrounded by a coterie of admiring nymphs and beloved by one who could only echo his sentiments, it may be that Narcissus was irretrievably conditioned to bask in the blinding light of his own reflected glory. According to Lasch, however, the modern Narcissus' obsession with self-reflection is rooted not in love but in boredom and despair.

The author agrees with Freud that narcissism is not self-love but, rather, a defense against aggressive impulses. The young American Narcissus early acquires the savvy to develop beyond the organization man and the market-oriented personality, gaining, with Prufrock, an awareness of the need to "prepare a face to meet the faces." In his

ironic description of a Narcissus who must package himself as a commodity, Lasch laments the passing of the American "culture of competitive individualism," suggesting that seduction, manipulation, and "management" have replaced independence and initiative as American virtues.

Building on the work of Philip Rieff, Russell Jacoby, Richard Sennett, and others, Lasch first offers a description of the narcissistic personality and then turns his attention to those aspects of American culture that manifest the neuroses of "diminishing expectations." The initial chapters are the book's finest, presenting a psychological framework for the "borderline syndrome" of the American Everyman. The author notes that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts are reporting few patients with the classical neuroses Freud described. The typical patient now presents not well-defined symptoms but dif-

fuse dissatisfactions. Maintaining an illusion of limitless options, the modern narcissist has little capacity for personal intimacy and social commitment. On his way to the top he "endlessly examines himself for signs of aging and ill health, for telltale symptoms of psychic stress, for blemishes and flaws that might diminish his attractiveness, or on the other hand for reassuring indications that his life is proceeding according to schedule." But the apparent freedom of limitless options soon becomes its own trap, raising questions of significance and value. Lasch describes the contemporary American as unwilling and finally unable to establish norms for personal meaning, fearing that progress and personal growth may have become sadly synonymous with mere survival.

In quest of this survival the new narcissist turns on the charm, though his personal life may be increasingly devastated and shallow. His poets and novel-

ists, far from glorifying the self, chronicle its disintegration. He jokingly displays a self-deprecating pseudo-awareness of his own condition, while finding it increasingly difficult to make any lasting commitment or to mourn his personal losses. He finds that old age and death are becoming an obsession, and, most basically, he finds that he wishes to be vastly admired, not for his accomplishments, but simply for himself, uncritically and without reservation.

A large share of the horror Lasch depicts he blames on the self-deception practiced by many in positions of cultural power. The author, an historian, holds such intellectuals responsible for trivializing the past, rendering it banal or camp, and eviscerating protest by transforming cultural criticism into something chic and escapist: "strategies of narcissistic survival present themselves as emancipation from the repressive conditions of the past." Genuine soul-searching notwithstanding, Lasch is skeptical of middle-aged hippies dropping out from Exxon, "getting in touch with their feelings," and taking up weaving. It is the superficial and temporary nature of these "conversions" that Lasch finds narcissistic. In the world of letters, he notes, authors are relying on "anti-confession," pretending to work courageously through their memories but, in reality, merely titillating the reader with tidbits from the lives of celebrities. The interior world is thereby rendered slightly droll. Less obviously, contemporary novelists on the apparent verge of an insight "often draw back into self-parody, seeking to disarm criticism by anticipating it. They try to charm the reader instead of claiming significance for their narrative."

Lasch's book is arresting and provocative, synthesizing the work of such men as Otto Kernberg, Heinz Kohut, Jan Huizinga, Joseph Heller, Donald Barthelme, and others from an extremely wide range of American culture. Despite the obvious utility of Narcissus as the book's controlling symbol, however, there is a real lack of unity and direction. Many of the chapters are too obviously recycled magazine articles, forced to confront Procrustes before they meet Narcissus.

This impression is strengthened by the absence of a clear rationale for those subjects discussed at length vs. those

"In the seventies, it appears that the prostitute, not the salesman, best exemplifies the qualities indispensable to success in American society. She too sells herself for a living, but her seductiveness hardly signifies a wish to be well liked. She craves admiration but scorns those who provide it and thus derives little gratification from her social successes....She remains a loner, dependent on others only as a hawk depends on chickens. She exploits the ethic of pleasure that has replaced the ethic of achievement, but her career more than any other reminds us that contemporary hedonism, of which she is the supreme symbol, originates not in the pursuit of pleasure but in a war of all against all, in which even the most intimate encounters become a form of mutual exploitation."

—The Culture of Narcissism

lightly touched upon. An obvious gap in Lasch's discussion, for example, is any meaningful treatment of American religion. He notes that "the ideology of personal growth, superficially optimistic, radiates a profound despair and resignation," and he calls it "the faith of those without faith." One senses that he might have worthwhile things to say about the effects of "the therapeutic mentality" on religion, but they are left unsaid. Many readers, perhaps most, will find themselves agreeing with Lasch's jeremiad, but he is disappointing in his hints of solutions to the vast array of societal problems. The book is weighted by the accumulation of detail, and occasionally seems lost in the miasma it describes. Lasch begins by noting that Americans are preoccupied with the "sense of an ending" in society, adding to the irony that his book ends quite abruptly, even arbitrarily.

"In a dying culture," Lasch writes, "narcissism appears to embody...the highest attainment of spiritual enlightenment. The custodians of culture hope, at bottom, merely to survive its collapse. The will to build a better society, however, survives, along with traditions of localism, self-help, and community action that only need the vision of a new society, a decent society, to give them new vigor." Coming after the devastating account of America's narcissism, this hint of an almost mystical light of truth residing in the common man and woman seems to lack conviction. Yet moral conviction, Lasch says, is the one quality most needed in today's society. The reader must wonder, therefore, whether Lasch's book suggests an enabling vision or simply another set of self-perpetuating qualities that the new narcissist must add to his already extensive list. **WW**

The U.S. Crusade in China, 1938-1945 by Michael Schaller

(Columbia University Press; xiii + 364 pp.; \$14.95)

David McLellan

We have had many books on America's wartime relations with China, but none as readable, revealing, and free of tendentious argument as this one. Schaller has made magnificent use of his archival research to rest his narrative as much as

possible upon the actual words and recommendations of the actors themselves. And what a cast of characters comes tumbling forth! The follies, deceits, and chicaneries of Chinese and American officials are recorded in their own