

By MALCOLM BOYD

NEW HAVEN—At the annual National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D. C., the other day, Richard M. Nixon urged the nation to pray that he will be on "God's side" during his trips to Peking and Moscow. This is the most recent indication that the cult of the Potomac is a thriving religion.

Salvation of the "soul" is given priority by the cult over the bodily condition of men, women and children—including refugees created by the Nixon Doctrine in Cambodia and America's indigenous refugees in urban ghettos. The Second Coming of a white Christ is a more pressing reference point than Jesus in the streets, on battlefields, or inside prisons.

Lately the cult of the Potomac has been busy propagating its views. For example, the cult's philosopher, Bob Hope, and its chaplain-at-large, Billy Graham, acted as co-chairmen of "Honor America Day" in Washington on July 4, 1970. On that occasion, Mr. Graham said: "Jesus said, 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' The Apostle Paul proudly boasted that he was a Roman citizen. The Bible says, 'Honor the nation.'"

Indeed, one wishes to be able to follow this admonition. Yet a sober humanist, Jew or Christian, must also confront his own conscience and the demands of social responsibility. Albert Camus spoke to this need when he wrote: "I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice." Criticism of the state is a high form of honoring it. To turn one's back on Mylai, Attica, Kent State, Jackson State and other aberrations is to dishonor the nation.

The cult has subjected to harsh criticism men and women who sought to honor America by maintaining freedom to dissent in an effort to exorcise national wrongs. Spiro T. Agnew attacked "the glib, activist element who would tell us our values are lies." The Vice President proposed "to separate them from our society with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel."

The cult of the Potomac attacks "Godless Communism" but equates America's role with God's will. Blasphemously it seeks to relate American righteousness to God's righteousness. One finds sobering manifestations of a spiritual vacuum in the cult prayer-book, *The Reader's Digest*, which offers a comfortable litany to the nation's power as a flagrant substitution for the profound cry after justice.

The prophetic impulse of the Judeo-Christian tradition is denied by the cult. I am reminded of the Selma, Ala., freedom march with Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1965, when a rabbi and I were together. His participation was directly related to the teaching of the Torah that any suffering, anywhere in the world, was therefore his suffering and concern. Neither was my participation based on "social action," but rather on a deep belief that love of Christ must be expressed in the action of sharing love with human brothers and sisters.

Hand-picked clergymen who preside over isolated home worship inside the White House seem to honor the Judeo-Christian tradition, its sacrifices, and its impolite prophets from whose throats the voice of anger rises in a call for truth. One wishes for an Eartha Kitt, in black robes and a starched white clerical collar, to disrupt the neat decorum of caesaro-papist apostasy with a human reminder of the Word of God.

On a Sunday afternoon in May, 1970, a small number of Jews, Catholics and Protestants gathered quietly in Lafayette Park across from the White House in order to pray for peace. We were arrested for disturbing it. Climbing into a police paddy wagon that would drive us to jail, I glanced over my shoulder. In my full view was the front of the White House. I was angered that we could not even disagree with the Administration across the street from the President's home, but clerics whose views coincided with those of the Administration were in-

vited to speak inside the White House without fear of arrest.

An ominous and disturbing question forces itself into my thought: Does the cult of the Potomac desire an establishment religion to be linked to the intentions and power of the American state? If so, how can it piously call for the separation of church and state?

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