

MORTON SMITH, **Hope and History, An Exploration.** World Perspectives, Volume 54, Founded, Planned and Edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980. Pp. xxi + 232. Cloth. \$12.95.

The avowed purpose of the *World Perspectives* series is «to reveal basic new trends in modern civilizations, to interpret the creative forces at work today, in the East as well as in the West, and to point to the new consciousness which can contribute to a deeper understanding of the interrelation of man and the university, the individual and society, and of the values shared by all people. *World Perspectives* represents and presents the world community of ideas. This Series emphasizes the principles of unity in mankind and of permanence within change, nature's ingenious balance». It is remarkable that Morton Smith's book hardly comes close to meeting these published goals. His *Hope and History, An Exploration* (what a strange way to punctuate a subtitle!) is a strongly critical assessment of Western civilization as we now know it from a very conservative point of view that uses the theme of hope as a unifying theme because the history of human hopes «has been almost completely neglected» (p. 30); «the history of human hopes is not attempted» (p. 34). He uses the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of hope as «expectation of something desired; desire combined with expectation», though he also likes Dante's more expressive «Hope is the confident expectation of future glory» (*Paradiso* XXV, 64ff), and realistically stresses that «Hope is a function of finite life, the interval between inert matter and divine omnipotence» (p. 217). Smith sees a problem in that «since hope is the expectation of something desired, our problems are to know what we may expect and to admit what we do desire» (p. 37). There are hopes of the young and hopes of the old—all of them shaped by experience. Hope is related to and grows with knowledge, Smith observes, but nowhere in his entire book—one filled with learned citations of all kinds from ancient to modern—does he ever cite *The Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus who so clearly reminds us that it was the god Prometheus who placed «blind hopes» in mortal men to stop them from foreseeing doom—a great gift to humankind that made life endurable by limiting the range of human knowledge (or foreknowledge). Smith classifies hopes as (1) personal, (2) social, and (3) utopian.

Dr. Smith, for many years professor of ancient history at Columbia University, began his career as an Episcopal priest and teacher of Biblical literature and the history of religion. His Trilling Award winning book *Jesus the Magician* (New York, 1978) and *Hope and History, An Exploration*, in which he associates the origins of Christianity with criminality and the followers of religion as maintaining «infantile adhesion to theological illusions» (p. 201), showe us something of the long road of change he himself has so arduously and painfully traveled.

Juvenal, the Roman satirist of the First Century A. D., had said, «*Difficile est non saturam scribere*» («It is difficult not to write satire»), when he looked about the decadent Rome of his day. Morton Smith is a brilliant, modern-day satirist who cannot resist focusing his stinging criticism on the inconsistencies, failures, and absurdities of Western capitalism and on an equally absurd but more authoritarian and inhuman communism. Most of the commentary in this

book is a commentary on Western, particularly American, life and its ever constant straining of physical and human resources by promising its people more and more of those material things that raise hopes but do not assure happiness but rather the rapid depletion of those resources.

Professor Smith points out that the ancient Greeks provided us with a «new art, above all a new plastic art formed by a new hope—to communicate the four—dimensional reality of the body, to present it not as a flat picture, but as a solid and moving object» (p. 90), but it was Alexander the Great who made the legendary figure of the World Conquerer a living figure in Greek thought and a hope for subsequent political leaders, which was followed by a variety of hopes : (1) eschatological hope for the end of the present world order or of the world itself, and the beginning of a new age ; (2) hope for life after death ; (8) and the hope for mastery of the world by supernatural powers. Later there is also the hope for perpetual revolution. Smith believes that «The fundamental problem of hope today is to decide what we hope to be» (p. 145). Hope can destroy and produce physical as well as psychological poverty, so the pattern of hopes as developed by the West must (1) be changed ; (2) be limited to certain peoples or social classes ; (3) new energy and material sources and new techniques must be discovered. It is possible, according to Smith, that (1) new sources of power may be developed that could radically change the political and economic situation ; (2) the triumph of some new political party in the West or if some new group in Russia or China could direct one or more of the great powers into certain social, economic or even biological changes so extensive as to produce practically a new culture—but unlikely.

Hope and History, An Exploration will provide several hours of stimulating reading. It has no ready-made solution for today's problem, nor does it contain a masterplan for the future. It does take issue with practices and trends on the American and Western social, political, economic, and ecological scenes. It severely criticizes just about every aspect of Western society (Soviet society included). There is some criticism of Asian deficiencies (China, India) but this is limited. No single society is really held up as a good example of directions that might be positively pursued. Dr. Morton Smith is an excellent diagnostician but as a therapist he offers us little hope. Other historians would probably have given an analysis of past and current problems in terms of continuity and change. Older historians might have written a history that attempts to synthesize an entire period or people. Morton Smith cauterizes and makes us see what most enlightened people already know but are unable to do much of anything about.

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KEVIN ANDREWS, *Athens Alive or The Practical Tourist's Companion to the Fall of Man*. Athens: Hermes Publications, 1979. Pp. 354. Paperbound. 400 drachmas.

The author of *Castles of the Morea* (Princeton, 1953), *The Flight of Ikaros* (London, 1959), Athens: Cities of the