

States, are prepared as well to offer Israel meaningful supplementary commitments and "guarantees" to accompany an overall settlement to insure Israeli security.

At least Israel should be seriously considering the alternatives to the status quo, which offers little hope but for continual, more devastating conflict. False historical parallels and self-serving appeals to morality over politics are not reasonable substitutes for historical honesty, creative diplomacy, and a vision of reconciliation.

## New Testament Pacifism

To the Editors: Re: James T. Johnson's "Just War Theory: What's the Use?" (*Worldview*, July-August). Johnson renders a needed service by pleading for an ethical process to examine problematic areas of human experience in order "to inform conceptions of national interest." He also seems right in pointing out our failure "to relate values to political realities today." I agree with Johnson that there are worse things than war, but let that not become a justification for war.

Johnson disposes of the New Testament pacifist a little too easily. The differences are theological rather than "a dispute between realists and utopians." He says: "to put the difference more starkly, pacifists look to God's saving them from this world, while just war theorists look to how they can cooperate with God in redeeming this world through love." I disagree. There are New Testament pacifists who care deeply about the world, identify with the world in its pain and struggle, see God at work in it and joyfully join in God's action. Their position is a far cry from a "laissez faire attitude toward this world because they place their faith utterly in the lordship of God, understood as manifest in condemnation of the sin of this aeon."

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James T. Johnson Responds:

Whenever generalizations are made there are always exceptions. I will not therefore dispute Professor Beechy's claim that New Testament pacifists exist who "care deeply about the world," etc. In fact, it is quite possible that one of the problems preventing meaningful dialogue between pacifists and just war theorists in the past has been misunderstanding of the theological stance of those on the other side. I hope there are such pacifists as Beechy believes exist, because I can see them participating in such dialogue, and I can hope that they and just war theorists might accomplish more than to clarify their differences.

Again, I think such dialogue might focus on the "original question," whether it is ever justified for a Christian to take part in war. It is little remembered that pacifists participated in the fashioning of just war doctrine in the Middle Ages; yet it is arguable that without a significant peace movement there would never have been promulgated the Truce of God, the Peace of God, and the weapons ban of Lateran II. We today might well, therefore, attempt to overcome the division between "utopian" and "realist" positions that has bedeviled constructive political ethics since Niebuhr. I think Beechy will admit that my article presents terms like these as part of the problem, and that both pacifists and just war theorists who take their guidance from Christian faith might best investigate their theological differences instead, as a starting-point for reviving political ethics.

## African Religions

To the Editors: Readers of Dr. John Mbiti's vitriolic review of my book, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community* (Books: *Worldview*, June), must have wondered at the underlying source of his animus, and may well have questioned the judgment of the editors in publishing such a "hack" review. Surely it says more about Dr. Mbiti's personal opinions than it does about the book. Too bad for your readers!

Dr. Mbiti's attack appears to be aimed at the book's methodological consistency and at the author's credentials for writing it. Thus while the book

professes to be an in-depth analysis of religious themes among a limited number of African societies, it is charged with being a haphazard collection of "illustrations," loaded with superficial generalizations. In fact the book is a closely integrated, contextual discussion, organized around a core group of fifteen societies, with a few others added for balance and comparison. The qualitative difference between this kind of treatment and the books written by Dr. Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy* and *Concepts of God in Africa*), each claiming to cover nearly three hundred different societies, will be obvious to anyone.

As for my scholarly credentials, Dr. Mbiti tries to suggest that the book was written on the basis of a brief period of fieldwork in Uganda in 1972. This is patently absurd. Only a fraction of it draws upon this research (which, incidentally, was conducted in a Ugandan language that Dr. Mbiti, a Kenyan now living in Switzerland, does not understand, though he resided in this part of Uganda for several years).

The bulk of the book is based upon authoritative anthropological studies, including several by African scholars, which I am professionally equipped to handle. The situation could hardly be otherwise, for anyone (African or European) writing about more than one or two societies is compelled by linguistic differences and by limitations for fieldwork to rely upon the work of others. In fact Dr. Mbiti chooses many of these same authorities for his own work.

But unlike his own publications, the present book offers a balanced and critical discussion of various interpretations and perspectives on African religions, including Dr. Mbiti's, and stresses the significant role which the study of African religions has played in Western scholarship. All of this Dr. Mbiti dismisses as lacking in "serious academic help," despite the introductory purpose of the book. In a sense Dr. Mbiti is right in saying that the book presents a variety of "readings," for its purpose is to introduce students to the rich and complex texture of African religions. It does not try to force these materials into a Western theological mold, which is what passes for "systematic" study in Dr. Mbiti's mind, nor does it assume, as Dr. Mbiti does, that there exists one underlying African "religion" derived