



Dr. Fred Schwarz

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And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them. Ephesians 5:11

America's Reds

by William A. Rusher

From about 1955 to 1995, the dominant opinion in the United States held that the American Communist Party (CPUSA), founded in 1919 in the wake of the Communist revolution in Russia, was a small collection of admirers of the Soviet Union that never amounted to much. In the 1930s (so the story went) they mobilized a number of "popular fronts" to oppose fascism and promote various leftist causes. In the 1940s, a few Communists—probably Julius Rosenberg and (arguably) Alger Hiss—went so far as to commit acts of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union. But Rosenberg was executed, and Hiss went to prison; so why all the fuss about domestic Communism?

Far worse than such rare cases of misplaced loyalty (in this view) was the damage wrought by opportunistic politicians who seized on the existence and supposed misdeeds of the CPUSA to alarm American public opinion and ruin the reputations of innocent liberals. One of the earliest such persecutors was Congressman Martin Dies, a Texas Democrat who in 1937 persuaded the House of Representatives to create a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, which became a standing committee in 1945 and lasted for 30 years, hounding Hollywood actors and many other victims.

But by far the greatest villain among Red-hunting politicians was, of course, Wisconsin's Republican senator Joseph McCarthy, who raised the issue of Communists in government in February 1950 and rode it triumphantly for four-and-a-half-years, acquiring an immense popular following, until the Senate itself voted to "censure" him in December 1954. He died of liver failure induced by alcoholism in May 1957 at the age of 48. By the 1960s the CPUSA, reduced to a few thousand members, had been almost wholly superseded by the New Left, and barely survived to see the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

That was the story of American Communism and its foes, as successfully propagated by the nation's dominant liberals, and it remained, as we have noted, the conventional wisdom for forty years. Indeed, it is in some ways the conventional wisdom even today, for younger generations (including many conservatives) have never heard any other version of the facts.

But the year 1995 was an epochal one for the study of American Communism. For in that year, thanks to the insistence of the late Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, who had long specialized in intelligence matters, some 2,900 documents collectively known as "the Venona papers" (a deliberately meaningless code phrase) were de-classified and published. These were radio messages from the top KGB agents in Washington and New York to their superiors in Moscow from approximately 1943 to 1948. They had been recorded at the time by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, but they were, of course, in code, and their decoding was an immensely arduous job carried out by a number of heroic government cryptanalysts over the period from 1945 to 1980.

"Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye; forget the past and you'll lose both eyes." Old Russian Proverb

A second new source of information on the American Communist Party was the archives in Moscow of the defunct Soviet Union, which began to be partially accessible to American investigators in the early 1990s, during the Yeltsin years.

The Venona papers, together with these archives, made it absolutely clear that the American Communist Party was from its beginning the willing agent of Soviet intelligence, obedient to its orders, financed by its contributions, and serving not only as a propaganda organ for Soviet policies but as a generous source for the recruitment of agents who would thereupon influence American policy and gladly commit espionage as well. It is now plain that by 1945 every important branch of the American government, from the White House itself to the State Department, the Treasury Department, the Justice Department, the Defense Department, the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor to the CIA), and the Office of War Information, to name only a few, was infested with Communists busily doing the work of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, it is obvious that a penetration so complete would have been impossible if the Communists had not been able to depend on the blindness or indifference of many of the far larger number of ordinary liberals who dominated the Roosevelt Administration. As early as the late 1930s, even known Communists in government were often regarded by their colleagues as merely “liberals in a hurry.” And during the war, of course, they could be excused as simply enthusiasts for America’s doughty ally, “good old Joe.”

Small wonder, then, that liberals after the onset of the Cold War with the Soviet Union in 1946, dreaded so profoundly the disclosure of the appalling degree of governmental penetration that they now began to suspect the Communists had achieved on their watch in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. For the Republicans, of course, the situation was reversed: revelation of the facts was in their highest political interest, and (not incidentally) in the security interest of the nation itself. The fragments of information on the subject that began to surface in the late 1940s—notably through the confessions of two Communist espionage couriers, Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley—shocked public opinion to its core, and set the stage for a genuinely titanic battle over the truth.

This is the long and fascinating story that Ted Morgan sets out to tell in *Reds*. Morgan is the pen name of the French-born writer Sanche de Gramont (“Ted Morgan” is an acronym of “de Gramont”). In the first 324 pages of *Reds*, he recounts the history of the American Communist Party up to 1950, as illuminated by the Venona papers and the Soviet archives, and in general does it very well. This part of the book is going to come as an ugly surprise to a lot of liberals who comforted themselves until 1995 with the aforementioned

canonical claptrap about the unimportance of domestic Communism and have managed to ignore the Venona papers and the Soviet archives ever since.

In his account of the Communist Party’s early years, Morgan tells us some important but long-unfamiliar truths: “One of the party’s principal activities from the start was to recruit spies and agents for the Communist International, or Comintern.” Again: “We now know, thanks to the Soviet archives, that the American Communist Party, though small in numbers and isolated from the mainstream, was busily establishing a subculture that acted in hidden ways... [This] subculture flourished and gained the self-sufficiency of a state within a state, with its own unions, housing projects, insurance company, legal defense system, and youth organizations.” And again: Roosevelt’s diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union in 1933 “gave the Communist Party a kind of legitimacy that ushered in the Red Decade. With the opening of an embassy and several consulates, the espionage hives were soon buzzing and spy rings in Washington penetrated government agencies.”

The very title of Morgan’s next chapter, “Welcome Soviet Spies!,” sums up the story he then tells about the decade of the ’30s. We learn about the “illegals”—agents inserted into the United States without a legal cover. (They “would have been lost without the American Communist Party, which provided from its ranks assistants who acted as guides, couriers, handlers, and all-around gofers.”) We are told about the Harold Ware cell, Whittaker Chambers’ role as a spy courier, the treachery of Noel Field and Lawrence Duggan, and much else. The following chapter continues the story, describing the “popular front” groups that enabled “the Communist Party... to take advantage of New Deal legislation to become a force in the American labor movement,” and the Party’s prostitution of the Spanish Civil War to Communist propaganda purposes.

On the subject of Martin Dies, Morgan has no use for the man himself (“a Southern racist” with “a crude and blustering manner, a venal nature, and a second-rate mind”), but states flatly that “the Dies Committee uncovered a wealth of important information on front groups and Communists in government, creating a database for its successors. Its systematic vilification by the Left was a backhanded homage to its exposure of party activities.” And he goes on to spell out many of its achievements in detail.

But the climax of the party’s saga still lay ahead. In a chapter entitled “World War II and the Soviet Invasion of America,” Morgan is blunt: “In their scope and effectiveness, the Soviet espionage operations in wartime America were without historical precedent. Never did one country steal so many political, diplomatic, scientific, and military secrets from

another. It was analogous, in espionage terms, to the looting of European artworks by the Nazis. Except that in the friendly, cooperative spirit of the times, we invited them in.”

Morgan is lavish with details. He tells in depth the story of the Communist courier Elizabeth Bentley, including her work with the Perlo and Silvermaster groups. And he notes that “Venona corroborated Bentley’s accusation that Currie was a Soviet spy.” This was Lauchlin Currie, “an administrative aide who worked directly for the President... a powerful Washington insider with access to every top official from FDR on down.” (In 1950 Currie fled to Colombia; he died there in 1993 without ever returning to the United States.)

Then there is Harry Dexter White, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for all foreign matters, who was a member of the spy ring serviced by Chambers. “More classified information came across [White’s] desk than that of any other government official, including the President.” White engineered the Treasury’s fatal delay in providing a promised loan to support the currency of Nationalist China, then in its epochal struggle with the Chinese Communists. As Morgan remarks, “Failure to receive the loan in time was only part of the cause of Chiang Kai-shek’s downfall, but it counted.” (Who lost China?)

The final chapter in this first half of *Reds* details Harry Truman’s moves to cope with the problem, or at least the public perception of Soviet penetration of the government. The most important was his creation of a program to administer loyalty checks to more than two million federal employees. Only a tiny number—102—were actually dismissed (“there were far more resignations than there were dismissals”), but Truman undercut his own credibility on the subject when he subsequently poo-hooped the entire Congressional investigation into the Chambers and Bentley spy rings as “a red herring.” Very little about the subject was known to the public at the time (1948), but what was known (or reasonably suspected) was by no means trivial, and could certainly not be dismissed as simply “a red herring.”

If Morgan had ended his book at this point, it would have been one of the first on the shelves to incorporate the astonishing information in the Venona Papers in a chronological account of American Communism, and as such a valuable contribution to the literature. But, having forced the liberals who will read it to swallow huge gulps of disagreeable information, Morgan is not about to abandon them. Their chosen villain—their Dr. Moriarty—has always been Joe McCarthy, and Morgan devotes almost the entire second half of the book to arguing that McCarthy was just as villainous as the liberals have always alleged.

How does he accomplish this, in the teeth of the massive evidence he himself adduces to show that American Commu-

nism was everything McCarthy accused it of being, and that the American government had been more thoroughly riddled with Soviet spies than even McCarthy suspected?

Very simply. According to Morgan, the Chambers and Bentley disclosures in the 1940s essentially destroyed Moscow’s espionage apparatus in America; the federal loyalty program cleansed the government of its remaining Communists; and the American Communist Party itself was knocked galley-west by the prosecution of its leaders under the Smith Act in 1949. In short, by the time Joe McCarthy rose to make his famous speech to the Republican Women of Wheeling, West Virginia, in February 1950, America had no “Communist problem” to speak of. The threat had once been real—very real indeed; but it was over! McCarthy put the country through five agonizing years, smearing innocent liberals as Communists, for nothing—or rather, and even worse, for his own political benefit.

But this is nonsense. In 1956-57, when I was serving as associate counsel of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (the committee charged by the Senate with oversight of all matters involving national security; McCarthy’s Government Operations Committee was confined to oversight of the government only), the Communist Party fully deserved the attention it was still receiving. Hearings we conducted in Hawaii established that the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen’s Union, headed by the Communist Harry Bridges, was well positioned to disrupt sea traffic to and from the Hawaiian islands in the event of war with the Soviet Union. (The Speaker of the Hawaiian House of Representatives, Charles Kauhane, had presented a complimentary gavel to Bridges as a token of respect!) And our investigation of a white-collar cell of the Party then active in New Orleans established that its members included such influential pillars of the community as the program director of New Orleans’ largest TV station, WDSU-TV, and the national legislative representative of the Louisiana State Parent-Teachers’ Association. The entire cell was under the leadership of a black busboy at the Holsum Cafeteria in New Orleans named Hunter Pitts (“Jack”) O’Dell, and the federal marshals who called at his room to serve our subpoena on him found there—not O’Dell; he had fled—but enough Party documents to establish that O’Dell was in fact the district organizer of the Communist Party in New Orleans.

O’Dell surfaced again in the early 1960s as Southeastern Director of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and still later as the chief foreign affairs advisor to the Rev. Jesse Jackson, whom he accompanied on trips to the Middle East and South Africa.

Morgan is well aware of the O’Dell story and devotes many pages to the Party’s efforts, through him and others, to

infiltrate and dominate the civil rights movement in the 1960s. He even dutifully acknowledges that Moscow paid the CPUSA its “first million-dollar subsidy” in 1965. But these (and many other) evidences of the Party’s continued activity and influence in later decades fail to shake Morgan’s conviction that the battle had ended by 1950, and that anyone, such as McCarthy, who insisted on waging it thereafter was simply a political opportunist. That is preposterous.

In the second place, while it is quite true that the 1930s and (even more) the first half of the 1940s were the Glory Days of the American Communist Party, it should be borne in mind that the American public knew nothing of all this at the time. It was not until 1948 that Whittaker Chambers publicly identified Alger Hiss, at a hearing of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, as having been a member of the Communist Party, and later added that Hiss had committed espionage for the Soviet Union.

Hiss was, at the moment of his exposure, the urbane president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and during the war had served as Director of the State Department’s Office of Special Political Affairs. In 1945 he had accompanied FDR to Yalta, and not long after his return, as a mark of special favor, had been given the honor of carrying America’s copy of the United Nations Charter from the founding conference in San Francisco to Washington.

The impact of such a juxtaposition on American public opinion was immense. Indeed, many people simply refused to believe Chambers, even after Hiss was convicted of perjury and sent to prison. It was not until the publication of the Venona papers in 1995, including a radio dispatch to Moscow describing an agent’s conversation with Hiss in 1945, that his guilt became indisputable.

Presumably Morgan would argue that Hiss’s espionage activities were old news by 1948. But they weren’t old news to the American people, who understandably wondered what other secrets might lie beneath the placid surface of Washington as the 1940s gave way to the 1950s. Chamber’s charges were supplemented by those of his fellow courier, Elizabeth Bentley, and in addition a handful of former Communists came forward to name others they had known. But had the surface only been scratched? The whole subject cried out for a thoroughgoing investigation.

Morgan admits that the publication of the Venona papers in the late 1940s would have lanced the boil and pre-

vented the whole savage battle of the early 1950s that is subsumed under the name of “McCarthyism”: “The release of [the Venona papers] would have nipped McCarthyism in the bud, for the true facts about real spies would have made wild accusations about imaginary [sic] spies irrelevant. Only in the absence of Venona could McCarthy feed on collective fears regarding immense conspiracies and treacherous leaders. Venona would have revealed unstinted spying, abetted by the American [Communist] Party. It would have led to the prosecution of disloyal public servants. It would have stifled the outcry that Communists were the innocent victims of Red-baiting and witch-hunts, and shown that McCarthy was inconsequential to the issue he rode to fame.”

Why, then, was the existence of the Venona papers concealed until 1995? Here we have come upon one of the deepest mysteries in the entire history of American Communism. Morgan accepts without analysis or criticism the story that Harry Truman was never told of the existence of the Venona papers. The explanation for this (which Morgan doesn’t even bother to mention) is supposedly that General Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, took personal responsibility in 1949 for insisting that Truman not be told. But why he would have done such a thing is hard to imagine. In any case, if this version of the facts is true, America has Bradley (who of course, like Truman, is dead) to thank for the whole wrenching era named for McCarthy.

But recently columnist Robert Novak tracked down a retired Army cryptanalyst named Oliver Kirby, who asserts that his superior, Brig. Gen. Carter Clarke, met with President Truman in the Oval Office on June 4, 1945—less than eight weeks after Truman took office—and told him (at the urging of Gen. George Marshall) of the Venona decryptions then under way.

Truman, however, was unimpressed. He didn’t understand the decoding process, and told Clarke the whole thing sounded like “a fairy story.” As late as 1948, when Bradley (according to Kirby) informed Truman of new Venona discoveries, the president told Defense Secretary James Forrestal there were “too many unknowns” in the dispatches, and that “even if part of this is true, it would open up the whole red panic again.” Even in 1950, when Bradley allegedly told Truman that Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White were confirmed by Venona as Soviet spies, Truman kept his eyes firmly shut: “That g———stuff. Every time it bumps into us it gets

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bigger and bigger. It's likely to take us down."

So the struggle over domestic Communism blazed into a conflagration, and Harry Truman, who (according to this account) knew the truth and could have ended the battle by telling it, kept the information deeply buried—apparently for purely partisan reasons. A new (and Republican) administration took over in 1953, but how much it was told about the Venona papers is unknown. Presumably the handful of intelligence officials who knew about them assumed that Truman's decision to conceal them was still in effect.

Much of this account depends, of course, on the veracity of Oliver Kirby, whose versions of these various conversations are impossible to check. But White House records confirm that Gen. Clarke did talk with Harry Truman in the Oval Office on June 4, 1945, just as Kirby asserts.

What's more, even Morgan concedes that Truman was "ambivalent about the new security measures" he ordered in 1947. In a private letter, Truman referred dismissively to "the Communist 'bugaboo'." Indeed, Morgan says, Truman "had been planning to recommend the dissolution of the House Un-American Activities Committee after his reelection [in 1948], but he had to abandon his plan after Hiss was indicted for perjury in 1949."

In any case, it is noteworthy that McCarthy's February 1950 speech in Wheeling, which launched his crusade on the subject of Communism in government, took place just three weeks after Alger Hiss's conviction. As Morgan admits, there was "a feeling in the population at large that the government was awash in treachery, which it had been, though it no longer was. This lag in perception made McCarthyism possible."

Morgan's subsequent lengthy account of McCarthy's life and the controversy that ultimately engulfed him is a journalistic disgrace after the frank and comprehensive job he has done on the subject of Communist espionage in the first half of the book. He charges that McCarthy was motivated solely by greed for power and money, though it is a curious fact that McCarthy never even wrote a book about the battle, which would have made him millions. It is true that McCarthy was far from the ablest investigator of domestic Communism, but most people who knew him (and I was one of them) recognized that his detestation of Communism was perfectly sincere, that he never really understood why the liberals were giving him such a hard time, and that his greatest flaw was that he simply lacked the average politician's instinct to drop an issue when it ceased to pay dividends.

So we are dragged yet again through those episodes of the McCarthy saga that liberals have long enjoyed recounting. Morgan plays the usual game with the supposedly conflicting figures McCarthy cited, at Wheeling and later, con-

cerning the number of security risks still in the State Department, and he almost invariably places the most innocent possible interpretation on the actions of the people named by McCarthy, many of whom (like the lifelong Soviet sympathizer Owen Lattimore) had served the Soviet Union valiantly by their deeds and policy recommendations. Yet he does not even mention, let alone refute, *McCarthy and His Enemies*, the book published by William F. Buckley, Jr., and L. Brent Bozell in 1954, which (for example) devotes ten thoroughgoing pages to the post-Wheeling numbers game, and meticulously analyzes the actual records of the people McCarthy named.

Finally, in a strained effort to argue that "McCarthyism" outlived its alleged originator and still afflicts America today, Morgan treats us to wholly gratuitous excursions into the supposed misdeed of J. Edgar Hoover and Richard Nixon in the 1960s and 1970s, and ends with an analysis of George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq so tendentious that it could be copied verbatim into John Kerry's briefing book.

To sum up, then, the first half of *Reds* is a top-notch account of the American Communist Party from its foundation in 1919 to the arrival of Joe McCarthy on the scene in 1950, in the light of the opening of the Soviet archives in the early 1990s and, even more important, the de-classification of the Venona papers in 1995. It will enlighten almost everyone who reads it—both conservatives, who will be amazed to learn that Communist penetration of the American government was even greater than they realized, and liberals, who will find the book's disclosures positively hair-raising.

As for the book's second half, it is simply a foolish attempt to console America's liberals, after the bad news Morgan has given them in the first half, by assuring them that they nonetheless deserved to win their historic battle with Joe McCarthy. It will serve, at least, to remind both groups of the state of play in the early 1950s, when conservatives fought desperately to pursue an investigation of domestic Communism and liberals managed, with ultimate success (and an indispensable assist from Harry Truman), to prevent it. With the help of the media, the whole battle was transformed into an argument over the tactics of one stubborn would-be investigator, whose dominant opinion (in both parties) ultimately isolated, condemned, and destroyed.

But, as it turned out, that was not the end of the story. In the words of the 19th century British poet Coventry Patmore,

"For want of me the world's course will not fail:
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not."
—*Claremont Review of Books*, Fall 2004, pp. 39ff

To Be As God

by Michael K. Beran

On August 3, 1948, Whitaker Chambers appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He told the Committee that both he and Alger Hiss had been members of the Communist Party in the 1930s. Two days later, on August 5, Hiss, who had recently retired from the State Department to become president of the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, appeared before the Committee. "I am not and never have been a member of the Communist Party," he declared. "To the best of my knowledge, I never heard of Whittaker Chambers until 1947."

On August 17, 1948, the Un-American Activities Committee met in executive session at the Hotel Commodore in New York. Among those present was a young Congressman, Richard M. Nixon of California. Hiss and Chambers were brought together, and after an interval of what Nixon called "comedy"—for it soon became obvious that the two men knew each other—Hiss admitted that he had once known Chambers in a vague sort of way as an impecunious writer named George Crosley. He had, he later said, fallen out of touch with Crosley in the mid-'30s—certainly before 1938. Hiss then challenged Chambers to make his charges "out of the presence of this Committee, without their being privileged for suit for libel."

Ten days later, on August 27, 1948, Chambers declared on "Meet the Press" that "Alger Hiss was a Communist and may be now." Hiss sued Chambers for libel; his lawyers asked Chambers to produce any documents Hiss might have given him. Chambers turned over typed copies of various classified State Department papers, all dated 1938. The papers were made available to the government. In December 1948, the FBI determined that the documents had been typed on a typewriter belonging to the Hiss family.

On December 15, 1948, a federal grand jury in the Southern District of New York put the following questions to Hiss. Had he known Whittaker Chambers after 1936? And had he passed copies of stolen government documents to him? Hiss answered "no" to both questions, and shortly thereafter the grand jurors indicted him for perjury. Hiss stood his trial; Dean Acheson, Adlai Stevenson, and two Supreme Court Justices testified as character witnesses for the defense. The trial resulted in a hung jury. A second trial was ordered, and Hiss was convicted of perjury. On March 22, 1951, he began a five-year jail sentence. He was released in November 1954, having served forty-four months in federal prison.

In his new book, *Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars*, G. Edward White argues that it is time to stop asking whether

Alger Hiss was a Soviet spy. There is no doubt, White says, about Hiss's guilt. He was not framed by J. Edgar Hoover or railroaded by "Tricky Dick" Nixon. Whatever uncertainties might once have lingered around the case have been resolved by books like Allen Weinstein's *Perjury* (1978) and Sam Tanenhaus's *Whittaker Chambers* (1997), as well as by the revelations of Soviet and American intelligence archives. Three important questions nevertheless remain. Why, White asks, did Hiss become a Soviet spy? Why did he so strenuously deny that he had been a spy long after he ceased to have any value as a secret agent? And why did so many intelligent people for so long insist on his innocence?

This last question is not without poignancy for White, a law professor at the University of Virginia and the author, among other books, of an excellent study of Oliver Wendell Holmes. White's late father-in-law, John F. David, acted as Hiss's counsel during several of his appearances before the House Un-American Activities Committee; he remained a member of the Hiss defense until 1950. Many years later he continued to regard Hiss as "an admirable and sympathetic figure." How could a man like John David have been taken in?

White's answers to the questions he poses in *Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars* boil down to this: Hiss was a liar—an unusually good liar. He was by nature and vocation a con man. He was habitually crafty. Hiran Haydn, a Random House editor, described a meeting with Hiss in the 1950s in which "[m]ask succeeded mask, role role, personality personality." The poet Delmore Schwartz said that Hiss "charmed everyone because he was so corrupt that he could tell anyone a lie and he could brazen out any lie." At Harvard Law School Hiss charmed Felix Frankfurter with a manufactured air of a patrician grace that disguised his plebian birth. Lee Pressman, Hiss's Harvard classmate and fellow Communist, said that if Hiss were "standing at the bar with the British ambassador and you were told to give a package to the ambassador's valet, you would give it to the ambassador before you gave it to Alger. He gave you a sense of absolute command and absolute grace." Frankfurter arranged for Hiss to clerk for Mr. Justice Holmes; Hiss accepted the appointment; and the facile young man was not ashamed to play fast and loose with the venerable jurist. Hiss knew that Holmes required his clerks, as a condition of their employment, to remain unmarried during their tenure; but he feigned ignorance of the rule in order to marry Priscilla Fansler Hobson early in his clerkship. Tricky Alger.

White finds the incident revealing: "Hiss, at 25, was a person with a strong belief in his ability to manipulate others, and perhaps with an underdeveloped appreciation of the risks of being exposed." He "believed that he could fool Holmes and get away with it..." Yet such was the young man's aura—

his good looks, his elegant manner, his high intelligence—that he did get away with it. White believes that Hiss came to find the act of deception to be itself pleasurable—the ecstasy of the con, the intricate artistry of contriving a false front. It was not surprising, White writes, that the lover of duplicity should have been attracted “to the secret life of an underground espionage agent.”

The world is full of crafty and intelligent people; many of them become politicians. Comparatively few become traitors. The puzzle of Hiss’s treason becomes all the more perplexing when we learn that the private man was, in his transactions with other human beings, remarkably kind—a man, Whittaker Chambers said, “of great gentleness and sweetness of character.” After graduating from Johns Hopkins in 1926, Hiss set aside his own ambitious plans in order to nurse his bedridden brother, Bosley, who was dying of Bright’s disease. He possessed what White calls an “instinctive desire to help persons in distress,” and when he came to wed, he married a woman who, as a divorcée with a young child, was herself “a person in distress.” The Soviet Union, White argues, was one more charity case for Hiss, “yet another altruistic activity—in this case nothing less than the eventual betterment of human kind in some classless, international future utopia. . .”

This is too simple. Why Bolshevism? Surely American public life offered a duplicitous young man with a yearning to save the world opportunities enough to display his virtuosity. Hiss might have satisfied, in a conventional public career, both his urge to do good and his urge to deceive: the price would have come well short of treason. For all its virtues, *Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars* never quite makes the reader see how Hiss leapt from dissimulation and philanthropy to Soviet espionage; and as a study of character the book falls short of Chamber’s own account of the Hiss Case, *Witness*. Communism offered, Chambers wrote, “what nothing else in the dying world had power to offer at the same intensity—faith and a vision, something for which to live and something for which to die.” The Bolshevik faith demanded “those things which have always stirred what is best in men—courage, poverty, self-sacrifice, discipline, intelligence. . .” The Communist Party was a “modern secular secret order” that required of its proselytes a fanatic purity; and it offered both Chambers and Hiss an heroic escape from the desperation of their middle-class boyhoods.

Nor was it garden-variety desperation the two men sought to escape. Hiss was two-and-a-half when his father, Charles Alger Hiss, committed suicide; Chambers’s father abandoned his family when Chambers was seven or eight. Chambers’s brother, Richard, killed himself in 1926; Chambers saw him the next morning “lying with his head in the gas oven.” In 1929 Hiss’s sister, Mary Ann, killed herself by swallowing Lysol. In order to escape such domestic disorder, Hiss might in another age have become one of those Jesuits who, in one of their many costumes, toiled for their Church in the Protestant North. Or he might have become one of those Old Testament Puritans who went to the stake joyfully chanting the Psalms. But in the 1920s the old faiths were no longer in fashion; the leading intellectuals of the day regarded religious conversions with skepticism. Edmund Wilson, though he found the Bolshevik romance to be credible, doubted the genuineness of T.S. Eliot’s Anglo-Catholicism: Wilson spoke for many when he said that he found in men “like Eliot a desire to believe in religious revelation, a belief that it would be a good thing to believe, rather than a genuine belief.”

Yet though it did not issue in orthodox baptisms, the impulse that underlay both Hiss’s and Chambers’s conversions to militant socialism was a religious one. Bossuet speaks of “men who have lost the taste of God.” Chambers replies that neither he nor Hiss had lost the taste of God; each still yearned for a purer and more encompassing compassion, a new heaven and a new earth. But each had fallen, Chambers argues in *Witness*, for the latest form of the oldest heresy: the belief that men themselves can “be as God” and build the new Jerusalem with their own mortal hands.

Good as it is as a study of Hiss’s duplicity, *Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars* is less successful in explaining why so many American liberals refused to accept evidence of Hiss’s guilt and embrace instead a host of improbable exculpatory theories. The solution to the puzzle, Chambers suggests in *Witness*, lies in liberals’ protectiveness of the New Deal. The New Deal, Chambers writes, was a “genuine revolution, whose deepest purpose was not simply reform within existing traditions, but a basic change in the social, and, above all, the power relationships within the nation.” The revolutionary intent of the New Dealers was nowhere more evident than in their approach to the rule of law. Jerome Frank of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, one of the most influential New Deal agencies, was an advocate of “legal realism,” a

Founded in 1953, the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, under the leadership of Dr. Fred C. Schwarz, has been publishing a monthly newsletter since 1960. *The Schwarz Report* is edited by Dr. David A. Noebel and Dr. Michael Bauman with the assistance of Dr. Ronald H. Nash. The Crusade’s address is PO Box 129, Manitou Springs, CO 80829. Our telephone number is (719) 685-9043. All correspondence and tax-deductible gifts (the Crusade is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization) may be sent to this address. Permission to reproduce materials from this *Report* is granted provided our name and address are given. **Check out our updated website at www.schwarzreport.org.**

movement which attempted to overthrow the classical liberal ideal of the rule of law by insisting on the discretionary authority of judges and administrators to implement novel social and economic policies in the interest of the community. Hiss's mentor, Felix Frankfurter, shared Franks' enthusiasm for the new administrative state and recruited bright young lawyers to staff it. Hiss was one of these legal mandarins; he learned the art of rule by administrative fiat at the AAA under Frank before moving higher in the New Deal hierarchy.

Yet the New Deal revolution in law and politics was vulnerable, not least because some of its brightest stars—among them Hiss himself—were not only doctrinaire Marxists but actual agents of the Soviet Union. “Every move against the Communists,” Chambers wrote, was therefore “felt by the liberals as a move against themselves.” The liberals, “to protect their power,” sought “as long as possible to conceal from themselves and everybody else the fact that the Government had been Communist-penetrated.” When, in 1939, Chambers brought the existence of an underground espionage network to the attention of the Roosevelt Administration, the president declined to listen. Chambers spoke directly to Adolf Berle, an assistant secretary of state responsible for domestic security. Berle took the matter to Roosevelt. The result? “The President had laughed.” When, Chambers writes, Berle insisted, the president told him, “in words which it is necessary to paraphrase, to ‘go jump in a lake’.” Few presidents have been more adept at gathering intelligence than Franklin Roosevelt; one supposed that he knew what an investigation of Chambers' claims might reveal. In refusing to investigate those claims, FDR became the first New Deal liberal to sacrifice the truth in order to protect a program. He was not the last.

Why did Hiss spend decades vindicating his lie? White devotes much of his book to answering this question; but I am not sure that his labors have been repaid with a commensurate degree of illumination. Hiss probably acted out of some notion of fidelity to the Revolution; but the question of what particular variety of revolutionist's honor upheld him in his elaborate charade is not especially interesting. White is better at describing his subject's effort to redeem himself by exploiting the changing historical climate of the post-war decades. Even in his atheism Hiss might have been tempted to view the rise of the New Left and the fall of Nixon as god-sends. The year after Nixon resigned, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts reinstated Hiss's law license—implicitly endorsing his claim that he had never engaged in espionage or committed perjury.

For all its strengths, *Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars* does not, like *Witness*, force the reader to grapple with the

largest, one might almost say the eternal, questions raised by the Hiss Case. It is true that the 20th century wars against socialism resulted in socialism's defeat. National Socialism was defeated in 1945; the Marxist-Leninist socialism of the Bolsheviks died with the fall of the Soviet Union; the Fabian socialism of the *Wohlfahrtsstaat* was checked, in its progress in America, by men like Chamber's admirer, Ronald Reagan, and his friend, William F. Buckley, Jr. But the belief at the heart of socialism—the belief that a class of men and women trained in the precepts of some esoteric science can, through the beneficent exercise of extraordinary coercive powers, create purer and more ideal communities—this belief survives.

Chambers thought of himself as a man of the Right, a “counterrevolutionist,” rather than a conservative; he doubted the conservative's ability to understand and overcome the perennial heresy that in the 20th century took the form of socialism. He would, I think, have raised his eyebrows at the triumphalist tone of much contemporary conservative writing, would have been put off by the reek of self-congratulation. Yes, socialism has been more or less licked. But the war, Chambers would have said, will go on.

A difficulty for the conservative today is that he finds himself obliged to fight another, unlooked for war against radical Islam. That struggle now monopolizes his energies. But the threat of radical Islam, however great it may be, differs from the threat of the militant socialism of the last century in an important way. The ideals of the radical Mohammedans hold little appeal for Westerners, while those of socialism, embodying as they do an ancient Western heresy, have a great appeal—and nowhere greater than among the highly educated men and women who dominate the professional classes of the West. What form will the old heresy assume next? How can it best be resisted? Busy as they are fighting the Arabian war and patting themselves on the back for beating the social democrats, conservatives have neglected the questions raised by Chambers's book.

When Chambers abandoned the secular millenarianism of socialism and made his stand for God and liberty, he told his wife that “we are leaving the winning world for the losing world.” The words have in retrospect been thought too pessimistic. But conservatism, however superficially optimistic it may be, must always be sustained by a deep core of pessimism. The conservative who wishes to prepare himself for the coming battles will find much instructive material in Edward White's book on the Hiss Case; but he will do even better to turn again to Whittaker Chambers's book and relive that man's fall from grace and his ascent.

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