

worldview

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RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND DISSENT ON VIETNAM

COMMUNISM, REVOLUTION AND THE THIRD WORLD

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SOME THOUGHTS ON PROTEST

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What are the attitudes of the various religious communities—Protestant, Catholic and Jewish—to the war in Vietnam? To many people the question itself seems impertinent and possibly dangerous, particularly in an age of ecumenism when Catholics and Protestants are finding it easier to cooperate with each other and both to cooperate with Jews in a variety of new, rewarding and significant ways. There is a submerged fear that the attempt to relate religious beliefs to hard questions of foreign policy will give new life to mistaken attitudes and prejudices that are being overcome. The comments about the recent flare-up concerning President Johnson and the Jewish community provide a case in point.

President Johnson is reported to have been unhappy that his policies in Vietnam are not more strongly supported by the American Jewish community and, in contrast, invoked the friendship his Administration has expressed for Israel. Although some people discarded the entire concept of a "Jewish community," a group of Jewish leaders thought it worthwhile to clear up the mischievous inferences that might legitimately be drawn from the statements attributed to Johnson. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, with the skilled diplomacy for which he is renowned, dampened down the brief flare-up by offering an acceptable account of the President's actual meaning.

Whether the meeting between Mr. Goldberg and the Jewish leaders should have taken place is doubtful. We agree with the *New York Times* which editorialized: "Mr. Goldberg's role was as ill-conceived and the presence of the other participants as mistaken as were the remarks attributed to Mr. Johnson." No religious group in America needs a special emissary from the government. But from other conclusions drawn by the *New York Times* and most other editorial comments we dissociate ourselves. While the religious communities do not, of course, have monolithic stands on the crucial political questions, it is simply not true that religious affiliation and training are without observable influence.

In the recent Gallup poll which showed the country evenly divided on U.S. policy in Vietnam, the religious poll was of particular interest.

	Approve	Disapprove	No Opinion
Jews	41%	41%	18%
Protestants	39	43	18
Catholics	54	31	15

These statistics must be coupled with the knowledge that many prominent, highly placed ministers and rabbis have criticized U.S. policy in Vietnam. Their counterparts among Catholics have, on the whole, been silent. Cardinals Cushing and Spellman have expressed support for U.S. policy in Vietnam, Cardinal Shehan has urged caution, but no Cardinal has dissented. Among Catholic clerics the burden of dissent has been shouldered by a few who are prominent in their isolation.

These facts are particularly interesting if read in conjunction with Pope Paul's recent plea to those engaged in the Vietnamese conflict, "We cry to them in God's name to stop." Pope Paul

did not overlook the rights of persons and communities when he called for a settlement of the war now. But can there be any doubt that his thinking and expression closely parallels that of U Thant, who said in his annual report to the U.N., "I see nothing but danger in the idea, so assiduously fostered outside Vietnam, that the conflict is a kind of holy war between two powerful political ideologies"? Does not this idea provide much of the justification and emotive force for the Administration policy? And are not American Catholics particularly receptive to the force and logic of the idea that communism is a global and indivisible threat?

What is beyond question is that, in contradiction to both Jews and Protestants, a significant majority of American Catholics support U.S. policy in Vietnam. It may be, of course, that U Thant and Pope Paul are misguided in this issue, and that in supporting President Johnson the majority of American Catholics are supporting the course of wisdom. But the contrary may also be true.

J. F.

in the magazines

German naturalist Konrad Lorenz, author of the recently published *On Aggression*, a study of the fighting instinct in man and beast directed against members of the same species, has contributed to the September issue of *Encounter* an examination of "the dangers which humanity incurs by rising above the other animals by virtue of its great specific gifts." And he has attempted "to show in what way the greatest gift of all, rational, responsible morality, functions in banning these dangers." Although a complete reading of the article is to be recommended, one interesting section is reprinted here.

"Anthropologists concerned with the habits of *Australopithecus* [first inventor of pebble tools] have repeatedly stressed that these hunting progenitors of man have left humanity with the dangerous heritage of what they term "carnivorous mentality." This statement confuses the concept of the carnivore and the cannibal which are, to a large extent, mutually exclusive. One can only deplore the fact that man has definitely not got a carnivorous mentality! All his trouble arises from his being a basically harmless, omnivorous creature, lacking in natural weapons with which to kill big prey, and, therefore, also devoid of the bone-in safety devices which prevent "professional" carnivores from abusing their killing

power to destroy fellow-members of their own species. A lion or a wolf may, on extremely rare occasions, kill another by one angry stroke, but all heavily armed carnivores possess sufficiently reliable inhibitions which prevent the self-destruction of the species. . . .

"Not that our pre-human ancestor, even at a stage as yet devoid of moral responsibility, was a fiend incarnate, he was by no means poorer in social instincts and inhibitions than a chimpanzee which, after all, is—his irascibility notwithstanding—a social and friendly creature. But whatever his innate norms of social behavior may have been, they were bound to be thrown out of gear by the invention of weapons. If humanity survived, as after all it did, it never achieved security from the danger of self-destruction. If moral responsibility and unwillingness to kill have indubitably increased, the ease and emotional impunity of killing have increased at the same rate. The distance at which all shooting weapons take effect screens the killer against the stimulus situation which would otherwise activate his killing inhibitions. The deep, emotional layers of our personality simply do not register the fact that the crooking of the forefinger to release a shot tears the entrails of another man. No