

# worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## RELIGION AND PEACE

Organized religion, it becomes increasingly clear, is going to address itself to the hard problems of war and peace. And it will frequently do so on specific issues in terms that are precise and definite. It has been cogently argued that preceding and during World War II the religious communities failed their mandate. On issues that called for a clear voice giving direction or at least warning, organized religion was silent, incoherent or irrelevant. There were individuals and isolated religious groups that refused to bend under the vast pressures of that war and directed their criticism at injustices committed by both sides. These people are now singled out for honor, but that honor is often a judgment on the larger religious communities to which they belonged and from which they had received little support.

There are a number of important religious leaders in this country who are determined that a similar judgment will not be levelled against the churches and synagogues today. Faced with the crucial social and political problems of our time they intend to see that organized religion speaks relevantly and that its word is heeded.

From initial reactions to recent statements by organized religious groups it is evident that these leaders will need all the determination, energy and intelligence at their disposal. Already they have encountered opposition from respected and influential critics. For example, in an issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg wrote, "The relevance of religion in the modern world cannot mean that there is a direct and clear mandate from God either to get into South Vietnam further or to get out entirely, or to recognize Red China tomorrow. . . . we should stop pressing for ecumenical declarations, or their equivalents, on a whole range of current concerns."

In a letter to the *New York Times*, Paul Ramsey said of the "Clergy Concerned About Vietnam" that each individual in the group "knows as much or as little as he happens to know about such specific policy decisions," and suggested that the fact of their "concern," of their status as clergy or of their religious adherence gave them no special significance.

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JOHN C. BENNETT

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APRIL

1966

VOL. 9 NO. 4

When, in a recent statement, the World Council of Churches criticized both Washington and Hanoi for continuing the war in Vietnam, the New York *Herald Tribune* commented editorially that the Council had assumed "a political function for which it bears no constitutional responsibility, concerning which it is not necessarily well-informed and toward which it cannot contribute practical means of implementation."

These criticisms do not, of course, go unanswered, but they suggest the gauntlet that organized religious groups must run. Almost all of the harsh charges and admittedly complex issues were directed at the first National Inter-

Religious Conference on Peace that was held in Washington last month. John Bennett's opening address, which is included in this issue, dealt with many of these issues, and the Conference as a whole was a response to others. The Conference confirmed, however, that even among the participants there were differences of opinion, attitude and expression. Some of these were made evident by Arthur J. Moore in an article which will appear in the next issue of *worldview*. What is apparent from the discussion to date is that organized religion has a role in matters of war and peace; what is less clear is exactly what that role is to be. J. F.

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## **in the magazines**

What are some of the prospects for dialogue and collaboration to which Vatican II's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions "exhorts" the Church's "sons"? Rabbi Elmer Berger of the American Council for Judaism writes in his organization's monthly newsletter, *Education in Judaism* (February-March) that "probably the *only* consideration which can lead proponents of both Judaism and Christianity—and Islam, too, for all of that—to genuine, earnest and perhaps fruitful intellectual intercourse is the very deepest commitment to a fundamental principle bandied about by both politicians and churchmen but, so far, not very convincingly implemented by very many of either camp. This is that the world is truly engaged in a struggle of staggering dimensions between *all* the systems of thought, on one side, which hold man is essentially a spiritual creature and, on the other side, *all* the forces which reduce him to some computerized statistic in a punch-card system. The thin, dividing line is not so easily drawn as the clichés 'Communists' and the 'anti-Communists' suggest. To the really sensitive, upward-reaching, more-than-creature-comfort human, there are already too many, on 'our' side of the iron curtains, who struggle all over the world and threaten to extend themselves, who live by 'nose-counts,' 'consensus,' computerized sociological findings—all the gadgetry, the cynicism, the bandwagoning, the inanities, the corrupted concepts of democracies run by majority rule while ignoring minority dissent. These are today's mass tyrannies suffocating the human spirit. These mass tyrannies are all about us. We need not look to Eastern Europe or Vietnam. Beyond the Iron Curtain or north of the 17th parallel

forceful computerization of human life sits in the seats of power. But closer to home the arts of mechanized persuasion much too often attempt all too similar patterns of management of human life. Avoidance of controversy and banal public expressions of love for 'the people' by politicians who manipulate blocs and sociologists who extrapolate statistics are hardly less corrosive to a democracy than admitted, totalitarian regimes which are instituted and advertised to endure only long enough to 'uplift the people.'

"Both the Church and Judaism ought to see these mechanisms and devices as a common challenge. And if the purpose of an ecumenical dialogue between the two is to find common truths to sustain the spirits of individual men and to inspire some of those now on the bandwagons to climb down, to find criteria other than 'what do the Joneses say,' to begin to think about their own, individual, immortal souls and potentially free minds, then the risks of conversion, either way, due to preferences for specific expression of the basic spiritual truths would be, indeed, a small price. The inevitable alternative, it seems, is the total submergence of everything good man has meant by the word religion for the past 2,500 years, with the consequences falling without favor on both Judaism and the Church."

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An interesting view of the role critics of the Administration's Vietnam policy play in shaping policy has been supplied by Richard Rovere in the March 19 issue of *The New Yorker*. Rovere writes from Washington that "despite the bad feeling that is said