

EUROPEANS AND THE WAR

Gary MacEoin

"Many thinking people in Europe agree that United States policy in Vietnam is bankrupt," Enda McDonagh said. "It is on the way to making the 'free world' a myth." François Houtart said. "The futility of the Vietnam war outweighs anything to be gained from it." Michael Ramsey said. "and its continuation will cause world opinion to be hardened against America."

All three speakers know the United States intimately and are personally and by traditional commitment its devoted friends. Not one of them is French, and I am sure none is a Communist. Yet this is how they spoke in the second half of 1967. And between them they reflect a broad spectrum of the thought of Christian churchmen in Europe. The first two are Roman Catholic priests, professors of moral theology at Maynooth College, Ireland, and of sociology at the University of Louvain, Belgium, respectively. The third is Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury.

I regard the Houtart testimony as of particular significance. It was given in a lecture on the theological implications of world development at the Canadian Bishops centennial Congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church, at Toronto, August 1967. The comment drew a spontaneous response from the several hundred scholars present from both sides of the Atlantic. It was the one section of the 90-minute talk that provoked the staid audience to applause.

Having affirmed that peace is indissolubly linked to development, that (in the words of Pope Paul VI) "development is the new name for peace," Father Houtart added: "One war in particular symbolizes the current human drama, that of Vietnam. It is not only that the enormity of the material means used for destruction makes one think of what could be done with them in development — the United States alone spends there in a month the equivalent of all the aid in gifts and assistance of the entire developed world (to the entire underdeveloped world) in a year — but there is a deeper symbolism yet. Vietnam is becoming, whether we like it or not, the symbol of the battle of

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the underdeveloped against the developed, the poor against the rich, the oppressed against the oppressor; and it is on the way to making the 'free world' a myth."

Here we have one of the most universally agreed judgments by Europeans on the real results of the steady escalation of the war by the U.S., namely, that both its direct and indirect effects are disastrous.

The direct effect is to pulverize the social fabric of Vietnam which it purports to build up. The point was stressed by Federico Alessandrini, editorial chief of the semi-official Vatican daily, *L'Osservatore Romano*, as Ambassador Goldberg was arriving in Rome in July 1966, amidst anti-American demonstrations, to attempt on behalf of President Johnson to explain the recent escalations to the Italian leaders and to Pope Paul. "Public opinion is perplexed and confused by the American initiatives," Alessandrini wrote. "If the bombings achieve their tactical objectives in Hanoi and Haiphong, they will simultaneously destroy American policy, and not only in Asia."

More frequently and more emphatically I find Europeans present this argument in the concrete form of describing Vietnam as the Ireland of Asia. "One constant of thousands of years of history," they point out, "is the cultural and political opposition by little Vietnam to absorption by her powerful neighbor. It is the same role that Ireland has millennially played vis-à-vis England, deviously, tortuously, confusingly, as alone the weak can hope to contest the strong, yet successfully. If you regard England as your enemy, do you destroy or build up Ireland? If you regard China as your enemy, do you destroy or build up Vietnam?"

The indirect effect of the American strategy, hinted at by Alessandrini when he said that its success would negate American policy in other parts of the world as well as in Asia, is precisely that spelled out by Houtart. It convinces the poor nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America that the capitalist West, of which the United States is leader and symbol, still regards them as pawns in its game of world domination.

This is an emotional projection with strong racial overtones. The problem, however, is that there is a solid and continuing substratum for the image. As it lives in the European mind today, it is fed by a recollection of the arguments in 1945 in defense of atom-bombing Japan, namely, that a thousand American (read *white*) lives were more important than a million

Japanese (read *yellow*). It is fed by signs on latrine doors in Vietnam—"For round-eyed personnel only"—and by accounts of how we treat those "on our side" in the euphemistically named *pacification programs*.

"The Vietnamese woman ignored the crying baby in her arms. She stared in hatred as the American infantrymen with shotguns blasted away at chickens and ducks. Others shot a water buffalo and a pet dog. While her husband, father and young son were led away, the torch was put to the hut that contained the family belongings. The flame consumed everything—including the shrine of the family ancestors."

That particular report appeared in an American publication, *Christian Century* (August 23, 1967), but the American general public is thoroughly shielded from such unpleasant aspects of what is happening, a tribute perhaps to the deadening influence of universal noise in our electronic age but surely no accolade to our vaunted press freedom and press dedication to the facts. The public of Europe gets not only a far wider spectrum of opinion regarding the war in Vietnam but also a fuller briefing on the events. Much of the information that reaches them, like much that reaches us, is present in a framework of opinion or prejudice. There, however, every kind of prejudice finds an outlet in the mass media, providing data for the intelligent man to make his own construction.

The belief is widespread and carefully cultivated in the United States that anti-American feeling on Vietnam is almost exclusively a French phenomenon, with the comforting deduction that it represents mainly the rantings of the bitter old megalomaniac who has been France's cross and dictator for years beyond recall. French attitudes, according to this theory, are hardened by bitterness at the U.S. refusal in the 1950's to support France effectively in Indo-China and later in Algeria, as well as by the jealousy of the once-great who see their role as a world power taken over by an upstart.

That such factors are at work in France and elsewhere in Europe (including Britain) is unquestionable. Nor are they the only complicating ones. The French don't like U.S. cultural expansionism, the so-called *coca-colonization* of Europe. Still less do they like the rapid increase in recent years of U.S. control of French industry and commerce, a major cause of the "gold flow" from the United States, and a major diversion of investment from the under-developed world, which needs it, to an area where it causes distortions but where it makes bigger profits.

These factors exist but they are secondary. The average Frenchman is only superficially and ephemerally anti-American, while deep down he is a friend for reasons that range from Lafayette and a common

tradition of political liberty to the tourist dollar. And if he is more aware of Vietnam than other Europeans, there is the good objective reason that he knows more about that country and feels an historical commitment to it, a commitment sealed in the blood of his relatives and friends.

There is in fact nowhere more discussion, judgment and condemnation of the Vietnam war than in France. This is something that transcends attitudes to de Gaulle. Not a single political party or journal of importance supports the U.S. role. A 1967 survey by the Institute of Public Opinion showed a mere 10 per cent as approving American policy, with 42 per cent disapproving, and a high level of skepticism among those without a definite opinion. A considerable majority of those who expressed an opinion didn't even believe that we are sincerely seeking a peaceful solution.

Insofar as there is a conditioning factor for the French attitudes, it is not the experience of Vietnam itself but that of Algeria. What shocked the national conscience finally was the barbarity of the methods which the French Government was willing to use to achieve its ends. This led to the institutionalization in the *jeune résistance* of selective conscientious objection (as subsequently affirmed by Vatican II) and an underground apparatus to hide young men and smuggle them to safety abroad.

That movement was given moral support in 1960 by the Declaration of the 121, signed by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Signoret and other intellectuals. The same people today lead the protest against Vietnam. The Billion Movement, started in October 1966 to raise a billion (old) francs, about \$2 million, for the Red Cross of the Viet Cong, was sponsored by Sartre, de Beauvoir, Alfred Kastler (1966 Nobel prize for physics), Jacques Prevert, Vercors, and many priests and pastors. It is but one of a crop of committees, most of them started by leftists but supported by Frenchmen of all ideologies.

The reason for this closing of ranks was summed up in September 1967 by Yves Chabas, of the French Protestant journal *L'Illustré*. "Here in Europe, even we who are not Communists cannot understand your obstinate pursuit of this war. You are destroying this little nation that you profess to be defending and protecting. To us you seem to be awash in a sea of ideological hysteria. . . . It is hard for us to recognize Christ in the rich dress of military and economic power. We would incline to see Him rather in a Cassius Clay and in all whose conscience requires them to refuse military service, in the black man who is turned out of the white man's church, in the citizen of Cuba or the Dominican Republic who fights for the

independence of his country. . . . Messianism is always suspect. Is it too much to ask you to give up your claim of believing that anything that comes from you is good and works for the welfare of others? . . . Why do you want to play at being the world's policeman, the universal moralist?"

If the Algerian debacle can be pinpointed as catalyst of French opinion on Vietnam, the Vatican Council's evaluation of modern warfare and conscientious objection served the same function in other European and non-European countries. The arguments of Archbishop Philip Hannon of New Orleans in November 1964, arguments backed by many of his U.S. colleagues, were read as telling the Council that the Catholic Church should adjust its teaching to conform to the practice of the United States government. Such caesaro-papism has long gone out of style in Europe west of the Iron Curtain.

From that time, there has been a clear line of disapproval, clear even in the statements of the Holy See which always practices extreme circumspection in its expressions. Here, for example, is what Pope Paul said in February 1965, just when the whole world was asking itself to what extremes the U.S. policy of reprisals in North Vietnam would lead.

"We address ourselves in the name of all mankind," the Pope told a general audience on February 10, "to those who risk pushing events along extremely dangerous paths, to those who today are responsible for the wellbeing of the peoples. We urge them to re-establish relations between states on reciprocal respect and confidence, on moral principles which are natural and accordingly Christian. We urge them to strengthen international institutions able to prevent appeals to force, and to use these institutions which command general respect in order to ensure loyal observance of agreements."

Europeans also gave significant stress to certain passages in Pope Paul's address to the United Nations in October 1965. Even more than his impassioned plea, "Never Again War!", they singled out his statement that "one cannot love while holding offensive arms . . . especially those terrible arms which modern science has given you." The reference at the time could be only to American arms, for the inevitable counter-escalation by the other side had scarce begun.

Cardinal Alfrink of Holland pursued the same theme in April 1966. As president of Pax Christi, he told the movement that it should go further than Vatican II in stressing the natural incompatibility between the Gospel and war. Every act of violence is in some way an anomaly and a contradiction of the Gospel teaching, he said. When one takes modern arms into account, "it is impossible to maintain the theory of

a just war, because the employment of these arms is not proportional to the suffering they cause."

The international Catholic-inspired peace movement took its president's call seriously when it met at Bergamo, Italy, in October. It issued "a cry of alarm at the worsening of the international situation and the multiplication of violence in the whole world." It called for a de-escalation in Vietnam, starting with a cessation of bombing, and asked the whole world in a gesture of solidarity to join in rebuilding Vietnam.

Two months earlier, the head of the Vietnam Union of Buddhist Churches, Bonze Nhat Hanh, had made a deep and favorable impression by his talks during a tour of Western Europe sponsored by the International Committee of Conscience for Peace in Vietnam. He said that a great majority of Vietnam's Catholics (the minority consisting mainly of refugees from the North), while opposing communism, sought peace and rejected military solutions.

Protestant opinion in Europe was by this time equally polarized. In February 1966, a declaration of the Board of the World Council of Churches asked for suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam, the withdrawal of American troops, and peace negotiations with the Viet Cong. The Conference on Church and Society of the W.C.C. (which has 214 Protestant and Orthodox member denominations) reaffirmed this declaration in July. It condemned "the massive and growing military presence in Vietnam," and said there could be justification "neither for the American presence nor for the bombings in the North and South."

In England, about the same time, the British Methodist Conference by an overwhelming majority condemned the American bombings and urged the British Government to disassociate itself from U.S. policy. Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury expressed approval of the W.C.C. initiatives. And in an open letter to Pope Paul in the *Manchester Guardian*, Brian Wicker said that the bombings were "a deliberate destruction of innocent human lives."

One who helped to define the W.C.C. stand is its youth secretary, Alfred van den Heuvel, a Dutch Reformed minister, a man who has traveled every continent widely, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. In mid-1966, shortly after returning from Vietnam, he summed up his conclusions.

"If the Christian family has any reality," he said, "then the essential task of the Church in the northern hemisphere is to listen to the Christian forces in Vietnam. Christians in Vietnam, as elsewhere, are divided on many issues, but they are agreed in preferring the

conference table to the battlefield. Most Vietnamese Christians have a much better understanding of what the Viet Cong stand for than do the people who are allied with the United States in the Vietnam conflict. The first task of the Christian community today may be to make heard the dream of the Viet Cong as it is repeatedly stated by the Vietnamese forces. That dream is not, as is so often said in the United States, that they are people who hate and destroy. The Viet Cong have from the beginning been a national liberation movement which wants to rid the country of feudal powers and substitute a modern socialist state. Socialism does not necessarily mean communism. Vietnam has been exceedingly afraid of China all through its existence. To presuppose that the withdrawal of American forces would bring Vietnam immediately into the power area of China is only a dream. There are Christians among the Viet Cong, and they feel that the Americans should get out and should not stop the development of an indigenous socialist society."

Placing the Vietnam war in a world perspective, Dr. van den Heuvel said it is only a symptom of a much greater disease, namely, of the social revolution involving Asia, Africa and Latin America as they struggle for a new and more human society. "Were peace to come to Vietnam, the next day we could expect a war somewhere else on the borders of the *imperium* of the United States," he asserted. "We must cure the disease if we want to get rid of the symptoms, and this will become increasingly the issue of the next decade. We have examples in Rhodesia, Santo Domingo and Indonesia. The whole continent of Latin America will never be at peace any more until it has found a new way of structuring its society."

Dr. van den Heuvel was particularly critical of the United States for its abandonment of its own deep traditions. "The U.S. always supported those who wanted to determine their own destiny. It was a leader in the decolonization movement. Now it is close to doing the very opposite by preventing 30 million Vietnamese from determining their own fate. The reason is that nobody in the United States knows what communism is about. Americans have set up a spook and called it communism, and everything that has the same sheet over its head is called communism. This is an exceedingly dangerous situation for the United States, and it can be battled not simply by protesting government measures — which again are only symptoms — but only by a larger educational process through which people will learn to live with very different kinds of socialism and communism."

Perhaps no one incident did more to unify European opinion than Cardinal Spellman's 1966 Christmas statements. They were reported and commented by

all the media of communications from Dublin to Moscow. The items specially singled out were the statement that Vietnam was "a war for the defense of civilization," that "any solution other than victory was inconceivable," and that the United States is "the Good Samaritan of all nations" (Saigon, Christmas Eve); that Americans were fighting in Vietnam "as soldiers of Christ" (Manila, Dec. 28); and that they were defending "the cause of civilization and the cause of God" (Lubic, Philippines, Dec. 29).

Bishop Schmitt of Metz expressed the universal consternation in an open letter published in his diocesan newspaper. How do you reconcile your views, he asked Cardinal Spellman, with Vatican II condemnation of the destruction of cities and regions with their inhabitants as "a crime against God and man." How, at the moment the Pope is urging a negotiated peace, can you call for military victory? Similar reactions came from elsewhere in Europe and North Africa, strengthened by public demonstrations.

At the height of this uproar, Cardinal Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers, announced his support of a peace assembly in Brussels being organized by people of all shades of opinion. Its proclaimed purposes were to call for an immediate end to American bombing, withdrawal of American troops, self-determination for Vietnam, and an end to all indirect help for the Vietnam war by Belgium as a member of NATO.

Simultaneously, 66 professors of the Catholic University of Louvain issued an appeal in the Belgian press. "The United States," they said, "is carrying on in Vietnam a war which is a denial of the official principles of its policy, and which is conducted against the right of a people to build sovereignly a new society on juster bases, a war which is the horrible result of a system of international relations in which the Third World is assigned by the industrial nations a form of development conformable to the ideology and interests of the rich." Far from being a war for Christian principles, it is "a prolongation of the traditional policy of hegemony of the great powers."

Such is the kind of thinking which has dominated the European intellectual and religious community throughout 1967. It was expressed again, for example, at the *Pacem in Terris* conference at Geneva in June and at the meeting of the central committee of the World Council of Churches at Herakleion, Crete, in August. The general verdict of the more than 300 participants at Geneva was that the U.S. war policy in Vietnam was a mistake. Many speakers described the United States as "savage," "brutal," and "uncivil-

THE CLERGY AND THE DRAFT

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ized." The W.C.C. committee recalled the various previous W.C.C. statements and reaffirmed almost unanimously that "the hardening of positions and continuing military escalation open an apparently endless vista of horror."

"The unconditional ending of the bombing would be a decisive step towards peace," wrote Archbishop Paul Gouyon, of Rennes, president of the French section of Pax Christi, in the October 1967 issue of the movement's magazine. "Christians cannot acquiesce in such methods," said Msgr. George Hüßler, director of German Catholic Aid. He had been in Hanoi on an aid mission some months earlier.

An extremely dramatic expression of world Catholic opinion emerged from the Congress of the Lay Apostolate, which assembled 3,000 delegates from all the world in Rome in mid-October 1967. A resolution on peace in Vietnam developed at the workshop on Peace and the World Community, failed for technical reasons (as did most of the resolutions which emerged from the eight workshops) to come to the floor. It was nevertheless clear to observers that it would have been overwhelmingly approved. "We demand in particular that an end be put to the war which is destroying the people of Vietnam and which is a major obstacle to development," it reads in part. "We condemn the bombing and massacres of civilian populations. We demand . . . negotiations for cease fire to be initiated immediately . . . for this purpose the bombing of North Vietnam be immediately stopped . . . a rapid withdrawal of all foreign troops. We appeal . . . to all Christians to personally engage in the reconstruction task of Vietnam . . . (and) to the people of the United States . . . to persuade the Government . . . to take the initiative."

Although European opinion makers have noted with approval the emergence of a growing number of opponents to U.S. official policy on Vietnam in the United States, as well as the appearance of a few churchmen to challenge the monolithic stand of the U.S. Roman Catholic institution behind the government, it is the common belief in Europe that the United States world leadership is ended because of Vietnam. The reason is twofold: the bankruptcy of intelligence shown by the policy itself; and the *herrenvolk* attitude of treating all allies as satellites and dismissing their objections with contempt. "Perhaps a Marshall Plan for South-East Asia, with no strings attached, would restore your tarnished image slightly, after you have openly admitted your tragic mistake and got the hell out," a seasoned observer commented to me. "The United States is big enough to be able to admit it was wrong. But, since President Kennedy's assassination, who is left with the statesmanship to cut strings?"

I suppose I should start this piece by clearly stating that I do not believe in the draft in any form. I happen to hold with Benedict XV that it is an abomination among free men. Yet, if we must have a draft, it must be as equitable as humanly possible. There must be no privileged groups in a truly democratic society; it is, therefore, unjust that seminarians and clergy be exempted from the draft.

Before going into the specifics of the argument, I take it as an accepted political as well as theological fact that the absolute pacifist must be exempted from active military duty as long as he is willing to make his contribution to his countrymen in another capacity. This principle was upheld by Vatican II (*Pastoral Constitution*, par. 79^o) and, as such, rejoins a pacifist tradition of the Church almost entirely forgotten for some sixteen hundred years. The document is ambiguous in that it leaves open "the case of those who for reasons of conscience refuse to bear arms" in any particular conflict. What if one is not an absolute pacifist but in conscience objects to a particular war as being immoral? It seems reasonable in reading the text to conclude that it covers this contingency as well. From the point of view of the individual, it seems very clear morally that not only should he refuse to take up arms (Martin Luther King) but that he has no real moral choice but to refuse to do so, no matter what the personal consequences for himself. This is a hard doctrine, and in this we may be certain that Freedom House will no longer walk with us. The hoary argument that the government knows more than the citizen and that somehow he must "trust" the public authority is as obscene as it is historically unfounded. Morally, no one can make decisions for a free man if he is to remain truly free. In the momentous decision that a man must make in regard to killing, this responsibility revolves directly upon him as a free agent, not on a church or a government. There is danger here, but the danger is intrinsic to the very notion of freedom.

The present draft exemption of the clergy contained in both Canon law and in various *concordats* concluded by the Holy See is the last vestigial trace of the pacifism of the early Church. For the first three

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