

in the magazines

From an editorial in *Reconstructionist*, A Jewish Bi-Weekly (April 19), this view of "The Rabbi's Obligation in Peace and War": "Whatever the ultimate outcome of President Johnson's historic decision, the war in Vietnam will not end suddenly." Men now in arms "will need not only proper equipment and medical care; they will need what men in uniform have always needed — chaplains who are concerned with them as individuals, lonely, fearful, seeking meaning and purpose not only in the particular war they are fighting, but in life itself. . . .

"Rabbis are as aware of these facts as anyone else — perhaps even more so. Nevertheless, in recent weeks two major rabbinical organizations have moved to revise their methods of recruiting Jewish chaplains. The Orthodox and the Conservative rabbis have decided that they will leave it to individual rabbis to volunteer their services, or refuse to do so, without penalty. . . .

"This does not mean that the rabbis have adopted a policy of pacifism or generalized conscientious objection. They have apparently revived the ancient distinction between a *milhemet hovah* and a *milhemet r'shut* — a war which is dictated by the desire to obey the will of God, and one which is, so to speak, 'optional.' The war in Vietnam, they feel, is definitely in the latter category. They still recognize the fact that Jewish men need the services of chaplains, but they are depending upon the willingness of enough rabbis to volunteer, so that enough chaplains will be available.

". . . The Association of Jewish Chaplains of the Armed Forces seems to be skeptical about the workability of the plan. Rabbi Bertram W. Korn, a Naval Reserve chaplain and head of the Association, declared that 'any clergyman who uses "selective conscientious objection" as a reason for avoiding service as a military chaplain does not understand the essential nature of the military chaplaincy, which is that the military chaplain's task is to give spiritual solace and religious guidance to troubled human beings, not to act as a special pleader for any particular ideology or course of political action.' In view of this lack of understanding, it appears, a severe shortage of chaplains is bound to result, ironically at this time when more and more Jewish men are being drafted (namely, those graduate students who, until now, were exempt).

"We need not, we hope, reiterate for our regular readers our opposition to the war in Vietnam; but we do not concur in the decision to liquidate the system of self-imposed draft. We not only believe that it will not work; we believe that it is a disservice to the Jewish men in the armed services. . . . This may not be a *milhemet hovah*, but a rabbi has an

obligation (*hovah*) to serve his fellow Jews — in uniform or out."

"Is it possible to know principle and act on it?" The editor of *Peace News* (London) believes this question "was answered affirmatively by Dr. Martin Luther King in every word he uttered and every deed he undertook." "It was his enduring achievement," the editorial states, "to fuse together in working synthesis the best of four traditions — the Judaeo-Christian, the American heritage of the dignity of man, the tradition of the socialist, anarchist, and labor movements of Europe and the United States, and above all, the heritage of committed non-violence and civil disobedience best exemplified by Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Thoreau. And the result was a profoundly 'American' style of thought and action. We ought to remind ourselves here that it is an integral part of American tradition to hold that freedom cannot be handed to people on a silver platter and that real men and women stand up for their rights. At its worst this comes to the sort of paranoid anti-communism that is prepared to blow up the whole world for the sake of a few missile bases in Cuba. At its best it comes to young Negro children walking into school past jeering mobs — and demonstrators standing firm in front of Bull Connor's fire hoses and police dogs."

And further: "Non-violence is meaningless — was meaningless to Dr. King — except in terms of ideal goals and compassionate will to remedy intolerable wrongs. Then perhaps this is the greatest gift he leaves to mankind: he taught us all, both black and white, that sooner or later we are going to have to live together in community, and that the best way to fight glaring evils that we really want to get rid of permanently is to use groups and methods of organization that already contain within them the elements of that better society in embryo. Dr. King may not have known exactly *how* to build the Good Society — who does? — but he knew that the only way to find out is through non-violent conflict and resistance.

"And at this point we should be less concerned with the apocalyptic rhetoric of Stokely Carmichael and other Black Power militants, and more concerned with our own failure as radical pacifists to help spread the kind of action that Dr. King continually engaged in. . . . For the institutionalized, camouflaged, orderly violence of established society on both sides of the Atlantic is being challenged at this very moment by the crude and unpredictable violence of a slowly forming counter-society. . . .

"In each case radical pacifists must move on from

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