

Relevance? Yes, *but*. The *caveat* is entered by Bill Novak, editor of *Response* and a member of the Havurat Shalom Community Seminary, in reference to attempts at rendering "Judaism and Jewish life . . . more relevant to young people" (*Judaism*, Summer, 1971).

"If Jewish texts are taught conscientiously," he contends, "as a blueprint for our lives in some cases, as theology, history, advice, ritual prescription, legal formulation, poetry, or polemic in others, then, in a very real sense, *everything* is relevant as it fits into the totality of human experience. Contradictions and differing opinions will be found, and they must be wrestled with. One need not take all guidelines and suggestions with equal seriousness." But "most of all," Novak cautions, "we must avoid the kind of 'relevance' which is mostly political in nature, and which preaches, a little too often, that which we most want to hear. 'Judaism says that . . . ' or 'Jewish tradition teaches . . . ' Coming, when they do, from rabbis and scholars, such remarks sound impressive to the young, the less learned, the novice. All too often, the generalizations which follow these standard formulae are something less than models of intellectual integrity or honesty.

"The quest for the *relevant* must be replaced by the search for the *authentic*. Among many young Jews, who have already made this progression, it takes the form of a revitalized or, in many cases, new interest in European Jewry, or Yiddish, or Jewish history, or Bible. For others, more overtly concerned with the religious search, it often leads to Orthodoxy, or even Hasidism, for these worlds provide a consistency which bespeaks an authenticity rarely found or experienced in other segments of Jewish life. To be sure, these contacts are often merely flirtatious, and for those who will not be bound by religious dogma other answers must be found.

"Relevance is also being replaced by the growing conviction that answers will be found elsewhere, especially in the realm of the non-rational. Taken too far, of course, this leads to worship of the occult, magic, astrology, or superstition. And, as we have seen, these trends have, for some young Americans, resulted in a *total* rejection of the rational and intellectual worlds which, to a Jew, is tantamount to paganism.

"If we are on the road to a new understanding of religion, the Jewish component must seek an authenticity which allows relevance to be organic rather than artificial or merely convenient, and which, at the same time, allows one the freedom to continue the search. We must accept the realization that the rational world will not necessarily take us as far as we want to go, while at the same time rejecting the

counter-assertion that the human mind and its creations are, therefore, worthless. If honesty and authenticity guide our quest for religious experience, we shall attain heights which the world of pure relevance does not, and cannot, embrace."

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"Moral distortion and intellectual degeneration are inherent in the theory and practice of counterinsurgency," writes Eqbal Ahmad in a long, highly readable, article appearing in *The Nation* of August 2. For openers:

"To write on counterinsurgency one must first explain what the so-called 'insurgencies' really are. In the United States that may be difficult because for the most part the social scientists who write on revolutionary warfare have been proponents of counterinsurgency. As a result, the biases of incumbents are built into the structure, images and language of contemporary Western, especially American, literature on the subject. We have come to accept ideologically contrived concepts and words as objective descriptions.

"... Like all coinages in this area, [counterinsurgency] is value-laden and misleading. In fact, counterinsurgency is not at all directed against insurgency, which Webster defines as 'a revolt against a government, not reaching the proportions of an organized revolution; and not recognized as belligerency.' The truth is, the Congress and the country would be in uproar if the government were to claim that U.S. counterinsurgency capabilities could conceivably be available to its clients for putting down 'revolts not reaching the proportions of an organized revolution.' The truth is the opposite: counterinsurgency is a multifaceted assault against organized revolutions. The euphemism is not used by accident, nor from ignorance. It serves to conceal the reality of a foreign policy dedicated to combating revolutions abroad; it helps to relegate revolutionaries to the status of outlaws. The reduction of a revolution to mere insurgency is also an implicit denial of its legitimacy. . . ."

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Recent fiction—the novels of Bellow, Malamud, Solzhenitsyn, among others—is the basis for Terrence des Pres' examination of "The Survivor" which appears in the September issue of *Encounter*. Recent works, not merely modern ones, for where once we were offered "the sense of gathering darkness" (Faulkner, Mann, Woolf, Bellamy), we now find "the specific awareness, closely tied to political developments, of the disappearance of familiar conditions of life, and the coming of a condition so extreme as to
(Continued on p. 19)

the Korean War and the insurgency in Malaya. Moreover, as Cooper makes abundantly clear, it was not necessary to share the worldview of John Foster Dulles to perceive the critical period of 1954-56 rather differently from the way it was later interpreted in the 1960's with the advantage of hindsight.

Or again, with all the appropriate criticisms of various dimensions of U.S. policy, Cooper's description of the decisive points of escalation under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson does not make it obvious that the purpose of continued involvement in Indochina was only the fabrication of a crusading spirit. It ought to be added that Cooper's examination, in Chapters 11 and 12, of the escalation of 1965 would have been greatly improved by setting that decision in the context of regional developments in 1964,

especially regarding the threatening détente between Jakarta and Peking. (Arnold Brackman has shown conclusively the relevance of these events to Vietnam policy in his indispensable book, *The Communist Collapse in Indonesia*.)

Finally, Cooper's own way of defending political free choice for the South Vietnamese raises questions about the adequacy of his attempt to reduce all aspects of U.S. policy to a "crusading spirit." Cooper justifies this objective more in terms of the need Americans have "to perceive that something of value was accomplished in Vietnam" than in terms of the interests of the Vietnamese. A defeat in which nothing at all was salvaged would be "alien to our history and our national personality." Crusaders need to feel that their crusade wasn't a total loss.

But this is a misleading way to put the matter. At the heart of much of the debate is the question of whether the principle of self-determination, of being free of arbitrary forceful intervention, is or is not applicable to affairs in Indochina. Are there or are there not political entities or potential entities in South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos which ought, if possible, to have "the right to determine their own future free of outside interference"? Is that right seriously threatened or is it not? If one's answer to these questions is affirmative, he will not be disposed to picture military intervention as *simply* a crusade. For Cooper to prove that U.S. policy in Vietnam is nothing more than a crusade, he will first have to settle these prior questions about the applicability or inapplicability of the principle of free choice.

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Continued from p. 2

threaten if not the continuity of the race then surely our claim to value as human beings."

Both in literature and in the reality it reflects, this condition seems to "require a heroism commensurate with the vastness of desolation in our time," says des Pres. "And we begin to ask whether, in the struggle to preserve and extend the human realm, circumstances may not arise in which it is better—more useful and courageous, less self-indulgent—to stay alive than to die. If it is right that men should die to preserve ideals without which the human enterprise could not sustain itself, it is also true, as men in power like to think, that to kill an idea we need simply kill those who hold it. And with the application of this policy, with the ideology and technology of genocide ready at hand, the man who survives may be more valuable than the thousands who die. Here the excruciating wisdom of the Diaspora becomes apparent: when men must live against overwhelming odds and death is a condition of life, when mere existence is miraculous, to die is in no way a triumph. . . .

"In time of crisis . . . the issue of survival moves from background to the centre. Each thought and gesture, for those in the concentration camps, each

nuance of feeling and expression is directly a matter of life and death. When extremity prevails, all men become self-consciously survivors, engaged in a struggle whose single aim is to carry on, to come through. But here a distinction arises, for a man may live in more than one way, at his own or at others' expense. In extremity, that is, survival involves moral choice. . . . Nature red in tooth and claw is not the human way. This is the crucial difference, and to describe the way in which a man survives without betraying his innocence is to define the human, as opposed to the Darwinian, survivor."

And finally: "Why one man survives and another does not, is not fully explicable; chance and character play their part, but something else as well, a sort of grace. And what the survivor arrives at by reaching past despair *and* hope would seem to be similarly unnameable. But surely he comes on something, an entrance to the heart of being, the furious purity of an endless energy, of life in itself, something unexpectedly uncovered when the spirit is driven down to its roots, all insolence lost, and through its pain brought to a pristine concentration, and to a sense of finality and quietude that, once again, surpasses understanding. In another age we might have called it God, God the bleak, the rush, the final point of a vibrant, unshakable peace. . . ."

PAMPHILUS