

# Correspondence

## The Berger "Connection"

To the Editors: Peter Berger's "Connections" piece, "The Berrigan-Nixon Connection," in the March issue of *Worldview* was a shock to me, as I have always been one of his admirers—though at times reluctantly so after he has castigated positions and movements with which I have sympathy. I have no desire to defend Daniel Berrigan's unfortunate statements about Israel, but I resent this writing about him with contempt when, at an early stage in the Indochina war, he did so much to stimulate the conscience of Americans. But I see this attack on Berrigan as a side issue. Berger's generalizations about the peace movement and his embracing of the conservatism of an imaginary improved Nixon are the more significant themes.

I do not know what the boundaries of the "peace movement" are, but it is false to suggest that the very pervasive movement against the war in Indochina was dominated by "the New Left," the boundaries of which are also uncertain. The movement of dissent has been many-sided in churches, universities, the press, in Congress and even among former makers of war policy and Vietnam veterans. This widespread dissent was stimulated to a considerable extent by the pioneers of the "peace movement," who were the earliest to understand the nature of the war and who were so insistent on keeping the issues of the war before the country that others could not evade them.

Berger's specific charge that either "the peace movement" or the larger movement of dissent played down the atrocities committed by the other side needs to be examined. For one thing, those atrocities were not the work of our government, and pressure from Americans could not stop them. Also, it has been important to correct the habit of being blind to the atrocities on our side. Other examples of this blindness

have been the silence about the massacres of Communists and suspected Communists in Indonesia in 1965 and the cover-up of the massacre of Taiwanese by our Chinese allies in 1947. I do not defend terror by anyone because others commit acts of terror on a much larger scale, but I believe that it has been right to emphasize the scale of the terror on our side on two levels. On one level there was the "pacification" program with its planned torture and assassinations of tens of thousands of people and the routine American connivance at the torture and killing of prisoners by the South Vietnamese. On the other level there has been the technological destruction of people, villages, "structures" and even the land for nearly ten years. These horrors on both levels were matters of official American policy. There was something especially repellent about the spectacle of men—often rather elegant men—sitting comfortably in Washington planning these horrors for reasons that ceased to be clear to many years before they stopped that planning.

As for the POWs, it is probable that some of them were tortured at some stage. Both Anthony Lewis and Mary McCarthy in the *New York Review of Books* (March 7, 1974) admit that this was so before 1969. Insofar as it was so, it should be condemned, but it should be realized that at times of intense bombing the provocation was greater than anything that our country had ever experienced. However, there are two facts about the POWs for which the evidence is clearer than it is about the torture. They would not be alive today if they had not been rescued and cared for by the people whom they bombed. Also, their health on their return was surprisingly good. This was in sharp contrast with the condition of those who have come out of President Thieu's prisons and torture chambers, for which our government has helped to pay.

I reject, as Berger does, the fanatical anti-Americanism which has sometimes accompanied opposition to the war. Yet so many years of strug-

gle, especially on the part of young people who know very little history, against these horrible wrongs committed by our government naturally generates anti-Americanism. Berger himself says elsewhere that the American presence in Vietnam has been "morally outrageous" and that it has been in cooperation with the Saigon regime, which he calls "murderously oblivious to the welfare of its people" (*Movement and Revolution*, p. 66). He also speaks of "the massive collapse in the plausibility of American political ideals as a result of Vietnam" (*ibid.*, p. 42). I hope that this anti-Americanism will pass and that those who oppose particular American policies and acts will learn to appeal to the best in our tradition, one present sign of which is the freedom for dissent.

It is news that there is much in common between Berger's conservatism and the conservatism that surrounds Nixon. The early Berger used to use sociology to unmask the illusions that support the status quo. As recently as four years ago he wrote: "As a sociologist, I am professionally attached to an intrinsically debunking perspective on Society" (*ibid.*, p. 85). What a far cry from the spirit of Nixon and his characteristic supporters! Berger's conservatism has always seemed to me to be an extension of the debunking stance he describes, to the illusions that accompany proposals for change, and as such it has been very useful, at least as a warning, in spite of its tendency toward elitism. When Berger faces the most acute problems, as in his discussion of the need for a change of orientation of American power in the Third World (*ibid.*, p. 70) and in his attitude toward "the coexistence of unparalleled affluence and unparalleled poverty," his conservatism is of a completely different spirit from that of the conservatism that he gladly finds dominant in our country. Peter Berger is a many-sided phenomenon, and I hope that another side will soon appear.

John C. Bennett  
Berkeley, Calif.

(Continued on p. 62)

## Tonight They'll Kill a Catholic

by R. Douglas Wead

(Creation House [Carol Stream, Ill.]; 115 pp.; \$4.95)

The story of Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland who have discovered unity in Christian worship and the experience of the Spirit. Douglas Wead is an American "charismatic" who has visited Northern Ireland several times and demonstrates a fine feel for the human and tragic in Ulster's present plight.

## The Life and Times of Eamon de Valera by Constantine Fitzgibbon and George Morrison

(Macmillan; 151 pp.; \$8.95)

In marvelous photographs and fast-paced narrative the book fulfills its title. Eamon de Valera, a fighter for Irish independence since the turn of the century, retired at ninety years of age as the President of the Republic of Ireland. The book is a great introduction to the bloody, tortuous and yet somehow grand history of modern Ireland.

## Correspondence

(from p. 2)

To the Editors: Peter Berger's little essay, as one has come to expect from Peter Berger, is provocative. The chief problem with his "The Berrigan-Nixon Connection," however, is that he never makes the connection.

As I understand him, he condemns Daniel Berrigan chiefly because he operated with a double standard in terms of the atrocities of "our side" and "their side." Surely he is not suggesting, however, that there is a similar double standard in the sleazy politics of Richard Nixon. To put it another way, is it not obvious that while, for the sake of the argument, one might allow that Berrigan was a "dupe" and not consciously dishonest, there is every reason to believe that Richard Nixon has been fully conscious of the discrepancy between what he has said (in most conservative tones) about public integrity and what he knew was going on in his own campaigns and Administration?

A further difficulty with the Berger argument is that he seems to deny any legitimacy to the thesis that indeed the character of the cause may have some bearing on the justification of the means that are used. I seem to recall that a few years ago Berger wrote with Richard Neuhaus a book entitled *Movement and Revolution* in which he said that he agreed with Neuhaus on the criteria for a justified war. Yet in "The Berrigan-Nixon Connection" he has nothing but disdain for those who justify Viet Cong cruelties by reference to the "necessities of the liberation struggle." Would it not be more honest to say that Professor Berger simply does not believe in that or other liberation struggles and therefore can, from the luxury of his noncommitment, pronounce a pox on both houses?

Barbara Goldhush

Cambridge, Mass.

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### Peter Berger Responds:

I have great respect and affection for John Bennett, and it distresses me that my recent observations offended him. Still, I must stand by them. It is true that the boundaries between the peace movement and the New Left were uncertain. Part of the reason for this is that those in the movement who were not of the latter persuasion took little or no trouble to make those boundaries clear, thus contributing to the widespread public image of the movement as anti-American. It is also true that one has primary responsibility to denounce atrocities committed by one's own country. However, the very credibility of this denunciation is undermined if the atrocities of the other side are ignored or denied. This, I think, is what happened with the credibility of the peace movement. In that case the "double standard" was not only morally reprehensible but politically self-defeating. As to my conservatism, surely this very article, if nothing else, should make amply clear that it has little in common with the spirit that moved into the White House with Richard Nixon.

As to Barbara Goldhush's comments, I can only affirm my opposition to the "double standard" in *all* camps. Those who denounce torture in North Vietnam but remain silent about torture in Brazil are just as immoral as those who reverse this procedure of selective outrage. On one point, though, Goldhush has understood me very well indeed: I do not accept the proposition that an allegedly noble cause justifies all and any means—I do not accept it in the cause of "liberation struggle," and just as little "in defense of the Free World."

Bennett feels that my political stance is "elitist." I wish that he would tell me what élite he has in mind. I'm badly in need of an élite to identify with, being just about equally alienated from the political élite "on the right" and the intellectual élite "on the left." And Goldhush characterizes my noncommitment as a "luxury." I wish it were.

I would rather describe as luxurious (psychologically luxurious, that is) those commitments that allow an individual to justify this or that set of human agonies in the name of alleged "necessities."

### "The Last Time We Had a Multipolar World . . ." Doesn't Work Out Very Well

To the Editors: Efforts to draw historical parallels are, of course, often very useful. They are just as often grossly misleading. I'm afraid that Donald Brandon's "The Last Time We Had a Multipolar World Things Didn't Work Out Very Well" (*Worldview*, March) falls more into the second category.

Perhaps the fatal error is that Mr. Brandon focuses excessively, maybe exclusively, upon the structural similarities between the 1930's and the 1970's. Even there, however, he overlooks one major structural difference: namely, the existence of the United Nations (which, despite the Nixon Administration's downgrading of it, has not yet gone out of business). Then too he fails to take fully into account the enormous difference between a world in which the United States and the Soviet Union are the dominant partners and a world of the 1930's in which the dominant imperial powers were already, largely as a consequence of World War I, sapped of both energy and vision.

Beyond the structural questions, however, there are enormous substantive differences. National Socialism in Germany, Fascism in Italy and imperial militarism in Japan were all quite candidly committed to geopolitical expansion through military means. While the ideology of the Soviet Union and perhaps of China might reflect a similar commitment, their histories over the last twenty years belie their ideological posturings. Indeed, it is the United States, presumably the most ideologically "pacific" of the super-

powers, that has, notably in Indochina engaged in the only major military aggression. One hopes that even in that case a lesson has been learned and the fiasco is not likely to be repeated in the near future.

Historians are always contending that the worth of their craft lies in its supplying historical parallels from which lessons may be drawn. I am not unsympathetic to the argument. Unfortunately, when the parallels are drawn in such a strained and implausible fashion as Mr. Brandon draws them, it tends to discredit the worth of historical study, especially in the area of international affairs.

Harry W. Stewart

Chicago, Ill.

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