

# Correspondence

## “Reflections on Israel”

To the Editors: Michael Novak's "Reflections on Israel" (Comment, *Worldview*, February) contains two disturbing oddities. First, he moves without a break from "an absolute to be written into American foreign policy" to "an inflexible Christian imperative" without showing that these might be different orders of significance. Second, his inflexible Christian imperative is that "Israel must survive."

Clearly Mr. Novak is in no mood to argue; he pronounces. But he pronounces in the one case like a man who has learned little from the "Christian" foreign policies of the past. And his reasoning about why Israel must survive is, I fear, a disguised piece of Christian triumphalism made at the expense of the Jews.

To move from American foreign policy to a discussion of Christian principles of public action without offering any sign that he knows the difference between them smacks of the naive sins of our fathers ("the Christian social order") and the more sophisticated sins of our own generation, which ("responsibly," of course) baptized obliteration bombing, NATO, Kennedy adventurism and Vietnam. It is continuously impossible in Mr. Novak's article to locate the referent to "our" thinking, "our" dealings. Is it American? Is it Christian? Only Mr. Novak's confessor knows. The pronouncement style is perhaps at fault here. But why a pronouncement at all on issues as complex and ambiguous as these?

On the reasons why "Israel must survive" Mr. Novak is insulting to both Christians and Jews. Perhaps the style betrays again. But Israel must survive, it turns out, for the sake of Christian esthetic reasons and Christian self-respect. "Israel must survive. It is an inflexible

Christian imperative. It would profit us nothing to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of Israel. Were Israel lost through fault of ours, the world would lose its savor; the dignity of living would be forfeit." Why must Jews continue to be a means to Christian self-regard? Have they so little status, so little claim as human beings? Are they finally a property in the Christian stage setting? And are Christians such monsters as to have to be appealed to on grounds that their lives would be less dignified or the world less savory if Israel were decimated or scattered?

And finally: Need it be imperative for any of us to survive? I never heard that it was an "inflexible Christian imperative" that survival of anybody be taken as an absolute—not the Church, not Israel, not the world itself. It is only required that men stand to their posts and do their duty. We shall all die: Christians, Jews and secularists. And hopefully Mr. Novak wishes us to die on behalf of something better than survival. I wish he had told us so more clearly.

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Michael Novak Responds:

Survival is, of course, not absolute enough for everyone. But for me, on the matter of Israel, it is a goal quite high enough just now, and not yet assured. Precisely because Israelis are persons, ends-in-themselves, their annihilation would be intolerable to me as a Christian and as an American. It is not that they are means, but that my moral universe includes them as ends.

I write as a Christian and as an American, to an intelligent audience, for whom elementary lessons in the difference between one and the other do not have to be spelled out on every occasion.

Pronouncements are, occasionally, firm declarations of intent—a little different from argument, but in their own way illuminating.

## “Genocide in Vietnam?”

To the Editors: One really should forget the final paragraph of Hugo Bedau's "Genocide in Vietnam?" (*Worldview*, February). The author examines that charge with considerable intellectual acuity and with a proper pinch of skepticism. He concludes: "If my analysis is correct, the accusation of genocide in Vietnam against the United States can be sustained only by further conceptual argument or by the discovery of new evidence."

Still a second unsustainable conclusion is added: "History gives us no better term than 'genocide' with which to express our horror at what our government has done in Vietnam"; the term has "an undeniable rhetorical appropriateness." But even rhetoric has its rules; one should have a higher esteem than that for "the art of persuasion, beautiful and just." Say rather—after Bedau's own analysis—that the term has "an undeniable *sophistical* appropriateness." Sophists were skilled at making the worse appear the better reason, or at making an admittedly unproven accusation appear to be proven.

As for the substance of Bedau's analysis, he should be commended for having brought reason to bear on an emotion-laden subject. Destruction with malice, expressed or implied, needs the "specific intention," the *mens rea* as well as the *actus reus*, of destroying a people *as such*, or a part of a people *as such*, or *one* Vietnamese *qua* Vietnamese *as such* and not as combatant or as a collateral death, to constitute it genocide. That Bedau shows to be required to sustain the accusation.

The trouble with using the "model" of "express malice with further intention" as backing for imputing genocide to U.S. policy in general is that such an analysis still requires proof in the first place of that *specific genocidal* malice before reference is made to any further intention (which could in no case justify genocide). To establish that, as Bedau

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young manhood beating about the bush civilizing the natives.

Mr. Iiams's anecdote about devotion to soccer is reminiscent of an even more affecting tale related by Al J. Venter, a South African journalist, in his book *The Terror Fighters* (Capetown and Johannesburg, 1969). A Portuguese major at Luso told Venter about leading a platoon which came across a group of guerrillas gathered about a radio listening to the World Cup finals at Wembly. According to the major, whenever the Portuguese team was on the offensive or the name of Eusébio—the great Mozambican *futebol* hero—was mentioned, the “terrorists” cheered. His own men leaned forward to hear the game. So touched was he by this display of Lusotropical solidarity that he spared the “terrorists.” Some of them, according to the major, were fighting with the Portuguese army; one or two were still to be seen around town.

Nationalism has been the most vital political force of modern history. Like all political forces, it is catalyzed by passionate minorities. These are not wanting in Portuguese Africa. Portuguese education and public life are supersaturated with nationalism, but one man's glory is another man's shame, and the educated African who has been inoculated with nationalist values by the Portuguese knows he is not Portuguese. He will not say it in public if he wishes to avoid a date with the DGS—the political police—but the feeling is there, sharpened by the sense of past and present wrongs. The past was slave trading, forced labor and general brutality; the present is, at best, unavoidable repression and second-class citizenship.

I believe the Portuguese colonies some day will be independent states ruled by Africans. It may be that Portugal will succeed for a fairly long time to hold on to its empire, fending off external foes, repressing internal dissent and perhaps even flourishing economically. It would be a good trick if it can be done, but not, I think, one which merits any cheers.

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says, “puts the argument under *evidential* strain.” That is, there is little or no evidence for it. Indirect evidence can count not at all. Are we, for example, to say that the twenty million Russian lives taken in the destruction of World War II was, on Stalin's part, a case of *genocidal* sacrifice, “express malice” to sacrifice a part of the Russian people *as such* with the further intention of saving Mother Russia? That may not have been worth the cost, but it was certainly not genocidal.

The case of the specific intention of genocide can be compared to the specific intention directly to attack noncombatants “with further intention.” One cannot conclude from the *actus reus* of large-scale civilian destruction that this was not destruction collateral to striking the legitimate targets (the insurgent fish). One also needs *evidence* of the *mens rea*, the specific intention of destroying noncombatants *as such*. If that is difficult to prove, it is *a fortiori* more difficult to prove specific genocidal intent. That would require a showing that the objective was to get rid of Vietnamese *as such*, and not to dry up the noncombatant “ocean” or separate them from the “fish.” I think neither of these things can be shown with regard to our Vietnam military policy, no more than either is likely to be the reason for the unavoidable destruction of Omaha or Colorado Springs in an adversary's future possible nuclear strike on the bases there. Of course, in such events there *may* be a violation of noncombatant immunity or there may be genocide done. But either requires a showing of specific intent. The intents would be different; but in their specificity they are alike.

One can establish, I believe, that a food blockade, the oil embargo and the very design of insurgency warfare are indiscriminate modes of war. They strike by design at populations to get at governments. The oil weapon also has terrifying indirect impact, shattering agricultural production and increasing starvation the world over that can only be

compared to “fall-out” on Third World peoples in the event of nuclear war. Yet one should hesitate to characterize those “weapons” as “genocidal” without proof that such specific intentionality governs the policy. So many “shapers of opinion” have been so busy calling our war in Vietnam “genocidal” (or simply indiscriminately “immoral”) that we have torn our country apart and at the same time lost our grasp of the moral discourse needed in appraising any of these political uses of forceful means.

To condemn a war policy as disproportionate is one thing. To say instead or in addition that it is indiscriminate or genocidal is an entirely different censure. To accuse political and military leaders of the destruction of a people or part of a people *as such* or of the destruction of noncombatants *as such* calls for an additional showing of those different specific intentions.

So much for the argument. The rest is “rhetoric” (in Bedau's bad sense).

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## Father Ryan Responds to Critics

To the Editors: In my article “The Myth of Annihilation and the Six-Day War” (*Worldview*, September, 1973) I stated from experience that “anyone daring to challenge the myth may, on occasion, run into a hornet's nest of objections—even vilifications.”

Vilification came from Philip Perlmutter, an official of the American Jewish Committee (Correspondence, November), and a host of objections from Carl Hermann Voss (Reader's Response, December). Professor Voss seems not to understand that his objections to the *substance* of my article must be directed not against myself but against the Israeli generals whose views I presented. (Incidentally, since the October,

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