

To the Editors: Richard Neuhaus was generous in some of his comments on the passing of *American Report*, but other remarks in his Excursion "The End of a Promise" call for an effort in rebuttal.

Pastor Neuhaus says religion was at the periphery of the paper's concerns. It's true we didn't report frequently or in detail on the doings of the WCC, the NCC, the denominational bodies, local parishes, or individual religionists. Neither did we publish essays on the relationship of theology to politics. But the paper came into being under religious auspices and in response to a religious impulse: the sense of moral outrage over realities of the Indochina war that were either neglected by the secular (and religious) media or that were presented "neutrally," outside any context of human feeling or ethical judgment. I believe most readers of *American Report* recognized its character as religiously inspired service to "the world."

It is also true that AR was consistently critical, even hostile, toward America's use of its power. To characterize this stance as one of "unrelieved animus" carries a suggestion of stridency and unreason. It was a committed paper, an example of advocacy journalism; I don't believe it was shrill.

As for content: The people of Cambodia, as I write, await their final grinding through the gears of American policy in Southeast Asia. The junta now gloriously reigning in the erstwhile republic of Chile labors faithfully to keep that corner of Latin America safe for Anaconda. The State Department has just announced the opening of arms sales to Pakistan, following swiftly on the disclosure of arrangements to ship American mercenaries to Saudi Arabia, of the sale of tanks to Israel and antitank weapons to Syria, not to speak of bombers for Iran and Egypt. Our Secretary of State is offended by the application of the rule of law to the Cyprus crisis; the Secretary of Defense is pleased by arrangements with the Soviet Union which will enhance and perpetuate our mutual reliance on nuclear terror;

our Secretary of Agriculture, confronting the prospect of famine in the world, projects complacency. Peoples who have recently overthrown repressive regimes (in Portugal, Greece, Mozambique) have no reason to believe their liberation was favored by the United States; peoples still subject to repression (South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines) expect no sympathy or help from us. In sum, in this 199th year of our independence our nation is viewed by politically aware people throughout the world, especially those who are the victims of repression or who are committed to peace and a just sharing of the world's goods, as a counterrevolutionary status quo power—and one which is capable of enormous public brutality, as in Vietnam, and of conscienceless covert subversion, as in Guatemala, Iran, Chile. . . .

There is some cause for animus, and if mine is "unrelieved" I'm not sure I should be sorry about it. Even if judgments like these, which I shared with my colleagues at *American Report*, contributed to its demise, I'm still not sure we should have sent them out to be nuanced in the nuancing factory. In the religious purview survival is not the ultimate value.

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To the Editors: Richard Neuhaus's comments about the passing of *American Report* were generally thoughtful. With my long-time friend Mr. Neuhaus I too think that more distance between *American Report*'s demise and a careful analysis of its importance and impact on the anti-war movement and the nation will come, most appropriately, five to ten years from now. However, two issues are raised by Neuhaus's remarks.

First, while I also regret the fact that *American Report* rarely lived up to its early expectations of being a "review of religion and American power"—concentrating almost solely on the latter theme—I am conscious that this failure has roots deep in the present Protestant church/social action enterprise generally in this country. Any accurate description of



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secular and religious social change groups in this country will reveal that they differ very little beyond personalities, size of budget, and length of service. Given this general atmosphere, the explicit religionlessness of *American Report* is less to be lamented than the large church/social action scene is to be criticized.

Connected with this issue, of course, is the *disconnectedness* of those who serve the church as theologians/social ethicists on the one hand and social change agents on the other. Because of their experiential detachment from the great issues of our time, there is no collective vision coming from American theologians and ethicists that can motivate, influence, or inform the church social change agents and agencies. Conversely, the church's social activists, some with modest reading in the liberation theologies emanating from Latin America, have been left to swim in the secular sea of pragmatism, relativism, and the uncritical acceptance of various socialisms imported from rural communities of the Third World.

That *American Report* failed as a "review of religion and American power" cannot be challenged, that this failure was organic to the publication—the staff or the parent organization, Clergy and Laity Concerned—is certainly debatable.

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Richard John Neuhaus Responds: Mr. Bland's version of the events surrounding the ill-fated history of *American Report* is interesting but seriously flawed by the fact that Mr. Bland was not around at the time. Those of us who were involved on an almost day-by-day basis in the launching of the paper know too well the time and energy expended