

# worldview

A JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## THE ALTERNATIVES IN VIETNAM

The present crisis in South Vietnam comes as no surprise. There are even a number of people, in and out of government, who can take a sad pleasure in seeing their guesses and predictions fulfilled. For the elements of the present situation have long been present and discernible. An autocratic, brave, inflexible leader, President Diem knew that America could not easily desert him and he had made sure they could not easily replace him. The growing influence of Diem's family—particularly his sister-in-law Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu—confirmed rather than lessened his own intransigence and make ever wider the gap between the Vietnamese rulers and the ruled. And in spite of the uninspired fight they are waging against the Communists, the Vietnamese government was willing to move against Buddhists in a conflict which the Buddhists claim is not political and which the Diem family claim is not religious.

The picture which emerges through the mists of censorship, propaganda and contradictory reports is taking on familiar and unpleasant outlines. Once again the United States is seen as the main and necessary support of a harsh regime that is increasingly removed from its own people and which justifies every harsh measure in the name of anti-communism. It is, at this point, a regime which President Kennedy has publicly rebuked and which, in return, has declared that it feels "Kennedy's information is inadequate and his judgment is quite wrong." As if to provide the last further complication, President de Gaulle has offered to help the Vietnamese remove alien influences and bring about an independent, neutral and united country. As the unreflective moralist might say, it's a problem that has no right to exist.

But the problem does exist and it poses a distinct challenge to all the resources of our government. As frequently happens, the first solutions offered are those extreme solutions that offer a definite answer now rather than an uncertain answer in the future. We could, it is sug-

gested, pull out; we could withdraw our advisers, our materiel and cut off the substantial aid that goes daily to support the regime. This opinion is phrased, in its crudest form, as "If they won't help themselves, why should we?"

The second extreme solution is almost the reverse for it proposes that we should become more than advisers, do more than supply money, weapons, skill and advice. We should move in wholeheartedly and impose on the present Vietnamese regime our will and desires and replace the present regime with one responsive to our wishes.

These proposed solutions have all the emotional appeal of the instant solution. Each offers the pleasant illusion that we would be doing something rather than passively watching the situation drain away, completely out of our control. Neither, of course, grows out of an awareness of the complex problems in which the United States has engaged itself. They are not proposals to dispute seriously.

The only real alternatives that the U.S. government must face in its immediate, short-range decisions is whether to continue support for the Diem regime or whether to search for and support a viable alternative acceptable to the Vietnamese. The arguments in favor of continuing to work with Diem are based partly on respect for his earlier successes in opposing both Communists and French colonials; partly on the fact that he has power even though it does not, unfortunately, rest upon popular support, but on patronage, intimidation and intrigue—weapons he still has; and partly on the assumption that there are no obvious Vietnamese leaders with the strength and ability to replace him.

The obvious advantages of finding a new, amenable leader with the support of the people are countered not only by the difficulty of finding him and seeing that he does gain the office of the Presidency, but of retaining the support of a people who now look upon the policies so

far offered by the United States with suspicion, distrust and contempt. When the simple, clean solutions are not very effective and the effective

solutions are complex and muddy the choice is difficult. But even those alternatives seem not to be present in Vietnam.

## in the magazines

"Three elements of the Christian message should continually illumine the mind of Christians as they deal with the problems of world politics," John C. Bennett has written in the August 5 issue of *Christianity and Crisis*. He states these to be, first, that "each nation is under the judgment, providence and mercy of God," second, "the commandment of love for the neighbor, for all neighbors," and third, "the understanding of man's creation in the image of God and the depth and universality of sin."

While the thorny issues of international affairs do not admit of any "uniquely Christian guidance," Dr. Bennett says, the church has great responsibility in emphasizing the elements of Christian teaching pertinent to these situations. It cannot play this role if it is an apologist for state policy, or if it advocates "over-all idealistic solutions" to cold war problems. Its role should be that of "helping the American people to think with greater freedom about the world in which they live," challenging "many of the prevailing assumptions about the cold war and nuclear armaments," and inspiring "the debate on public questions about which most people prefer to be silent."

Only in this way, he concludes, can our churches be, "more clearly than they are at present, part of the world-wide Christian community that never allows us to forget the humanity of those beyond barriers that limit our understanding."

Outside of the "revolutionary changes in the international environment" which the goal of a disarmed world under international law would appear to demand, what purposeful steps can be taken in this direction which are consistent with present realities? George E. Pugh has approached this problem in the summer issue of *Orbis*, and contends that measures can be taken for arms control, measures which are "soundly based on military and political realities and well integrated with other aspects of national strategy."

He calls attention to the role which restraint has played in international affairs, even in times of war, and inquires into the motives which underlie a nation's observance of such restraints. These principles

are then related by the author to present-day problems of disarmament and the strategy of deterrence.

Pugh finds that "a measure of arms control automatically inheres in a defense policy which offers a wide range of choices below the level of general nuclear war," and thus the first steps towards "a feasible arms control policy" is the "careful assessment of the range of military options available."

In his discussion of the Second Vatican Council which appears in the July issue of *The Ecumenical Review*, Karl Barth expresses his misgivings at the emphasis the World Council of Churches has placed upon the opportunities the proceedings in Rome afford for dialogue between Catholics and other Christians. To Barth, the interest maintained in this area has eclipsed the importance which should be lent by non-Catholics to the central purpose of the concave: "the renovation" of Rome's "own house," and what would "appear as a movement of renewal within the Roman Church." The main line of inquiry which the Vatican Council should serve to advance in the rest of the Christian world, the theologian asserts, is whether "something has been set in motion—or not set in motion!—on our side, in the rooms of our church."

Indeed, Dr. Barth asks, "of what use would any conversation with those others be to us, and how could they be conducted with a view to a this-worldly or at least other-worldly unity of the Church, if the presupposition on our side were something else than the altogether concrete entreaty for the Holy Spirit within our troubled church?" Is there not a like need for change and flexibility in other Christian groups? "Are there not also non-Roman, even 'Protestant' Ottavians . . . who everywhere to some extent determine the appearance of the non-Roman churches?"

Both Christian groups "live to the extent that they are living communities of the living Jesus Christ," and "the question that confronts them . . . each in its own way and both in their coexistence, is not the cooperation of their different doctrines and institutions" but "the dynamics of the evangelical Word and Spirit . . ."

PAMPHILUS