EDITORIAL

THE PEACE MOVEMENT

by Kenneth C. Kinghorn*

It is not possible to identify any specific organization as the "peace movement." In fact, the peace movement is more a mood than an organized body. For present purposes, this editorial will consider the peace movement to be the general desire for peace in Vietnam. With reference to Vietnam, the peace movement has developed certain overtones which in many ways are unique in the history of our nation.

In the first place, never before in the history of the United States has such a sizeable percentage of our population raised the question which has been characteristic of the modern "peace movement." That question is whether American policy is necessarily the right policy. "My country: right or wrong" is a slogan fewer and fewer people are willing to adopt with respect to the present war in Vietnam. Many persons regard an uncritical acceptance of national policy as irresponsible "pseudo-patriotism."

For the most part, in other periods of international conflict Americans have regarded our national objective as the right one, and one worthy of support even to the extent of personal sacrifices. Naturally, Americans have not always agreed with the *methods* or *strategy* used by the military; they have, by and large, agreed with the over-all *goals* of our national policy.

But the goals of the Vietnam conflict have never had the full support of the American people, although early in the war most of the Congress did vote to increase U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Support for the war has steadily dwindled. Presently all but a very few Americans are saying, "It's not a matter of whether we should get out of Vietnam, but a question of how fast we can get out."

The growing sentiment for peace is perhaps typically illustrated by the *Readers Digest.* From the beginning of the Vietnam conflict, that journal supported U.S. government policy. This is no longer the

*Professor of Church History, Asbury Theological Seminary.

case. Present *Digest* policy seems largely to ignore the conflict. Perhaps a reversal of its position of support for the war would prove embarrassing. At any rate, the journal no longer attempts to justify the enormous expenditure of men and arms. What all of this seems to be saying is that the peace movement cannot be identified with any one segment of our population such as young or old, liberal or conservative, labor or management.

A second issue is also raised in connection with the current push for peace—the question as to whether force and violence, which are the *raison d'être* of the military, are the best methods to achieve peace. This editorial is not the place to debate this issue. It is significant, however, that a growing number of Americans look with horror on a ravaged Vietnam and say, "In terms of basic humanity, it would have been better if we hadn't gone to Vietnam in the first place."

Part of the peace movement includes, of course, the pacifists, who view the killing of another human being as wrong at all times, at all places, and under all circumstances. Christian pacifists insist that their stand is in full accord with the New Testament. They argue that the notion of Jesus killing an antagonist is unthinkable, and it is held that Christ's disciples are called to follow the example of their Lord in this. Such verses as the following are offered in support of pacifism: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:38, 39). Peace making is regarded as one of the most important virtues taught in Jesus' Beatitudes. When Peter used the sword to defend his Master, pacifists remind us of Jesus' rebuke: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

The pacifist ranks include others who make no appeal to the Christian faith for support in their position. They argue from the standpoint of "humanity." Since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, these pacifists have steadily increased in numbers. Many persons, who formerly felt that "war is the lesser of two evils," reversed their opinion as they saw the real possibility of mass annihilation. Among them is Linus Pauling, the Nobel prize winning scientist, who has argued that 800 million people might be killed in a nuclear war. Bertrand Russell has spoken eloquently for non-violence, arguing that what many have called "realism" is actually irresponsibility because of the threat of "the bomb."

Christian and secular pacifists have grown in numbers because of the stimulation of what many regard as an "irrational and immoral" war in Vietnam. Thus, today there are probably more people disavowing war than ever before in U.S. history.

Many observers, ranging from Christians to secular humanists, insist that one cannot stop the spread of ideologies by force. Freedom must mean also freedom to choose communism. These observers feel that our use of force in Vietnam to assure democracy will in the long run do more than any other single thing to encourage communism in the far east. As an illustration, these supporters of pacifism point to the fact that Ho Chi Minh turned to China to an extent that he otherwise would not have done. Without U.S. involvement, it is insisted, that the government of North Vietnam would under normal circumstances have never become so dependent on China for aid.

The pragmatists in the peace movement argue that the kind of war being fought in Vietnam cannot be won under any circumstances. At the least, it could drag on for decades. At the worst, it could embroil the earth's three billion people. And the risk of a third world war with nuclear weapons is too enormous to consider. These pragmatists believe that the United States should have long ago swallowed national pride and left Vietnam. At this writing, the present embarrassment with a threatened "no contest" election in South Vietnam has only strengthened the hand of the "peace movement."

Social reformers complain that the poor are really the ones who are paying for the war. Socially sensitive observers insist that the enormous sums of money spent on the war should have been spent in ridding social ills at home and abroad.

These, then, are the principal arguments of the peace movement.

How ought a Christian to look at the entire issue of the peace movement? Perhaps this is an appropriate time to resurrect Paul's ancient theological doctrine of *hope.*

1. The Christian hopes that the growing hatred of violence as *modus operandi* will cause people to turn to the only source of real peace—Jesus Christ. There is some evidence that this is happening.
2. The Christian hopes that, regardless who is right or wrong, the abomination of war will end at the earliest possible second in our present history.
3. The Christian hopes that out of the ashes of war will arise new cultures and alignments which will be more in accord with God's infinite wisdom and grace.
4. The Christian hopes that he personally will be the type of human being who is a reconciler and a healer.

Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom of God. The Christian ought to feel the necessity for qualifying for his place among the "children of God" on this basis.