

Vietnam: No good ending

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All along we felt that it would happen, but no speculation could comprehend the horror of its unfolding. There could be no “good ending” to this terrible war. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese swarm the tortuous trail southward. They are running not from the war but from the “peace” that, rightly or wrongly, they believe their “liberators” will impose.

Antiwar activists dare not evade the fact that this conclusion too is part of our “success.” We can hope and believe that the present agony is a lesser evil than the consequences of continuing warfare. Too many public figures are now scurrying for cover in an unseemly attempt to shed their share of responsibility both for the war and for the horror of its ending. As Christians, we must stand forth in the courage of our uncertainties, recognizing the moral ambiguity of all our positions, trusting the judgment of the future which is, finally, God's judgment.

As long ago as 1965, in answer to the “bloodbath” argument of the hawks, we had to anticipate the final collapse of South Vietnam, which now seems at hand. I well remember my conversations with John Bennett, Bill Coffin, the late Abraham Heschel and others—talks that led to our calling publicly for a program of asylum for the many thousands of Vietnamese who, it is reasonable to believe, are marked for execution or other reprisals in the event of a certain victory by North Vietnam and the PRG. It is now time—God willing, it is not too late—to renew that call.

An evacuation of this size would no doubt cost many millions of dollars. It would require changes in the immigration policies and attitudes of the U.S., Taiwan and other countries where Vietnamese may seek refuge. Of course, it could not be administered with absolute fairness. Decisions about who shall live and who shall die never are. Certainly we Americans are in no moral position to apply purity tests as to degrees of complicity with the Saigon regime. The criterion must be need alone; asylum must be granted to all of those most directly endangered by a new regime.

Such a program will not end the suffering, but it can significantly reduce its proportions. In Vietnam and Cambodia, the U.S. walked in at its own convenience, unleashing devastation. And now the U.S. walks out at its own convenience, further revealing its moral corrosion. In all the terror, both military and political, that sweeps across the lands they call home, the peoples of Indochina are consulted by no one. They are left to fend for themselves as best they can. We as a nation are guilty of a barbaric war; we need not compound our guilt by an utterly callous withdrawal from the aftermath of our actions. The threat to the southern provinces of South Vietnam is grave. Saigon may fall soon. Perhaps there are a few weeks, perhaps several months. We dare not delay. Now is the time to act if we are, in some small way, to blunt the edge of evil in the ending of an evil war.