

What days are holy?

At this time of the holy days of four world faiths — Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam — when men's thoughts turn to peace, the American Friends Service Committee calls once again for the United States to take the lead in ending the war in Vietnam. We do not believe that good can come from the violence of this war to any of those engaged in it.

In 1967, more and more young Americans gave themselves for nameless hilltops or inconsequential pieces of jungle. More and more Vietnamese suffered and died or clung precariously to insecure lives. The cold statistics of the daily bodycount blinded men to the fact that these, too, are beloved husbands and fathers — and children of God. All through the year, the degeneration and corruption of Vietnamese life have proceeded inexorably, and in their wake has come a rising tide of Vietnamese bitterness against the American juggernaut. All through the year, America has poured its efforts into yet another pacification program and once again it is all but barren of results; the hold of the South Vietnamese government on its own countryside and people is still tenuous. Elaborate constitutional procedures and an election, from which candidates who were known to seek peace were excluded in advance, have brought no significant change.

Meanwhile, here in the United States, citizens are divided and troubled as never before. Parents fear for their sons. Increasing numbers of young people reject the war as wrong. Social problems that cry out for vast and immediate reform are intensified by neglect and deepen the erupting divisions in American society. At all levels, the country's

resources, its attention, and its will have been diverted from those positive programs which could create a truly democratic order. Our spirits are inured to the daily ration of violence that invades our homes with each newscast, and the corrosive effects of a war regarded as unjust by the great majority of mankind poison our relations with the world community and further weaken the United Nations.

Once again there is in the land a contrived optimism that peace on American terms is coming closer; yet the evidence from many sources in Southeast Asia is otherwise. Perhaps the United States in Vietnam is moving to fulfill the judgment of Tacitus: "Where they make a desert, they call it peace." But peace with justice will not come to Vietnam through military might, whether the war is escalated, as now a notch at a time, or whether, in frustration, we loose Armageddon. A victory so won can only be sterile, bringing with it a host of new and intractable problems, and the promise of yet more hatred and violence.

America must turn about. Whatever others do, our country must stop hating and killing. Ours is the most powerful nation on earth; Vietnam is one of the weaker. We are therefore the ones on whom responsibility for initiative rests. The time is now, not after American elections that are still more than ten months away — months in which more boys will die, more resources be squandered, and more destruction visited upon an already ravished people.

Let the United States this Christmas time urge all Vietnamese factions to come together to decide their own destiny. Let us

call on the community of nations to aid in restoring ordered life there. Above all let us cease all destruction ourselves, undertake the withdrawal of American forces in a phased and orderly fashion, and offer our resources for the rehabilitation of Vietnamese life however its people may choose to shape it.

The American Friends Service Committee does not suggest that these things are either safe or easy for the United States or Vietnam. We do say that they will result in placing the future of Vietnam in the hands of the Vietnamese where it belongs, and we do believe that good consequences must flow in the long run from actions based not on expediency but on abiding moral values.

This belief is at the root of the American Dream; it vindicates the democratic hope; it makes real the Christian witness. It does no good for America to profess faith in moral conduct unless American policy exhibits it. If this nation does not stop making war, how shall we presume this year to remember the Christmas message? How shall we dare to wish each other a Merry Christmas?

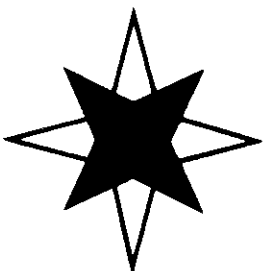
What days are holy?

Gilbert F. White

GILBERT F. WHITE, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Colin W. Bell

COLIN W. BELL, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY



AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, INC.

NATIONAL OFFICE: 160 NORTH 15th STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19102