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THE PROTESTANT CLERGY AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM*

BY HAROLD E. QUINLEY

This article, based on a survey of Protestant ministers in California conducted during the spring and summer of 1968, examines both the attitudes of the clergy toward the war and the positions they have publicly taken. The author concludes that the image of the clergy as one of the most militant opposition groups to the war in Vietnam derives not from any unanimous opposition within ministerial ranks, but rather from the much greater tendency of those who are opposed to the war to engage in highly visible public activities. The ministers' perceptions of the attitudes of potential reference groups, and the sanctions available to these groups, are also examined.

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CLERGYMEN have in the past few years gained a public image as one of the most militant opposition groups to the war in Vietnam. Assailed by the political right and indicted by the federal government, they have joined students, hippies, and professors as symbols of the anti-war movement. There is, of course, ample cause for such an image. Many church bodies—including the National Council of Churches and numerous regional and national denominational bodies—have criticized the escalation of the war; individual clergymen have organized and participated in anti-war demonstrations throughout the country; and local churches have served as symbolic, if temporary, sanctuaries for persons refusing military induction or service in Vietnam. Such activities are a part of a trend by many religious organizations and “new breed” clergymen to seek greater relevance for the church by speaking out on the issues of the day.¹

* This article is based upon data collected by the author under the auspices of the Institute of Political Studies, Stanford University. It is part of a larger research and research training project on the political behavior of the professions conducted under a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. This particular analysis was facilitated by funds from the National Science Foundation and the Anti-Defamation League. The author wishes to thank these institutions and the Survey Research Center of the University of California, Berkeley, for their support, and Heinz Eulau, Charles Glock, Rodney Stark, Jeffrey Hadden, and Sheila Babbie for their individual contributions to the study. A more detailed version of the article is available from the author upon request.

¹ Harvey G. Cox, “The ‘New Breed’ in American Churches: Sources of Social Activism in American Religion,” *Dædalus*, Vol. 96, 1967, pp. 135-150. For research

On the one hand, such an involvement appears to be a natural extension of religious belief and commitment. If the churches are indeed to exercise influence over man's moral judgments, then they must speak out on those issues which have a clear impact upon matters of conscience. On the other hand, however, the record of the church during wartime is hardly one of militant pacifism. Not only have some of the most bloody wars in history been fought primarily on religious grounds, but virtually all recent military conflicts have been carried out in the name of the deity. In the United States, while churchmen have continuously debated the causes, morality, and wisdom of warfare, they have invariably lined up behind the policies adopted by their national political leaders.² As one authority notes, "No unanimity has been reached in these discussions aside from the proposition that war is in general an undesirable method of settling international affairs, and that it should be avoided as long as possible."³

SOURCE OF DATA

In order to determine the positions of Protestant clergymen on Vietnam, a series of attitudinal and behavioral questions concerning the war were included in a survey of social activism among ministers in California conducted in the spring and early summer of 1968. Included in the sample of ministers were the members of the nine largest Protestant denominations in the state. Data were collected by means of a mail questionnaire sent to a two-thirds sample selected randomly from the mailing lists of each of these denominations; 1,580 clergymen (63 per cent) completed and returned usable forms.⁴

on the involvement of clergymen in political controversies see Jeffrey K. Hadden and Raymond C. Rymph, "Social Structure and Civil Rights Involvement: A Case Study of Protestant Ministers," *Social Forces*, Vol. 45, 1966, pp. 51-61; Ernest A. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis*, Washington, D. C., Public Affairs Press, 1959; and Kenneth W. Underwood, *Protestant and Catholic*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1957. In the past several years the church has come under intense criticism for aligning itself with the status quo and for not seeking the implementation of its own moral teachings. See Daniel Callahan, "The Quest for Social Relevance," *Dædalus*, Vol. 96, 1967, pp. 151-179; Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1961; Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, New York, Macmillan, 1962; Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1965; and Harvey Cox, *The Secular City*, New York, Macmillan, 1965.

² For a bibliographical review of the involvement of clergymen in American wars, see Nelson R. Burr, *A Critical Bibliography of Religion in America*, Vol. 4, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 621-645.

³ Burr, *op. cit.*, p. 631. See also Toyomasa Fuse, "Religion, War, and the Institutional Dilemma: A Sociological Interpretation," *Journal of Peace Research*, No. 2, 1968, pp. 196-210.

⁴ A one-page questionnaire was also sent to half of the remaining nonrespondents to test for the representativeness of those answering the survey. No major attitu-

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WAR

Clergy attitudes toward the Vietnam War were elicited on each of five major policy proposals.⁵ In order to construct a scale representing the range of opinion on the war, respondents were assigned the most extreme policy position of those they favored.⁶ The results of this classification, shown in Table 1, indicate a high level of disagreement

TABLE 1
POLICY PREFERENCES OF PROTESTANT CLERGYMEN FOR THE WAR IN VIETNAM

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Increase Military Efforts</i>	<i>Continue Bombing</i>	<i>Stop the Bombing</i>	<i>Withdraw to Enclaves</i>	<i>Complete Withdrawal</i>
Southern Baptist	82%	15%	1%		2%
Missouri Synod-Lutheran Church	50	20	13	4	13
American Baptist	40	25	13	7	15
American Lutheran Church	39	23	20	4	14
Lutheran Church in America	28	13	19	10	30
Episcopal	18	22	22	9	29
Presbyterian	18	24	16	14	28
United Church of Christ	13	10	31	6	40
Methodist	9	16	22	13	40
<i>Total</i>	29% (439)	19% (286)	18% (271)	8% (128)	26% (392)

among Protestant ministers over the course of action that should be adopted. The two largest groups of respondents were found at the two ends of the Vietnam scale—29 per cent favoring an increase in military efforts and 26 per cent advocating preparations for complete withdrawal. The distribution of anti-war sentiment also varied sharply among the nine denominations in the sample: 82 per cent of the

dinal differences were found between those responding to the original questionnaire and this latter form.

⁵ The five policy alternatives were: (1) Increase our military efforts in order to win the war; (2) Seek negotiations while continuing to exert military pressure on the enemy, including the bombing of North Vietnam; (3) Unilaterally stop the bombing of North Vietnam and offer to negotiate; (4) Unilaterally stop the bombing of North Vietnam and withdraw to the coastal areas and population centers; and (5) Unilaterally stop the bombing and begin preparations for complete withdrawal. The percentage of clergymen agreeing to these proposals was 29, 45, 57, 29, and 30 per cent respectively.

⁶ Classification was carried out according to the following ordering of policy preferences: (1) an increase in military efforts, (2) a continuation of the bombing, (3) preparations for complete withdrawal, (4) withdrawal to coastal enclaves, and (5) a halt to the bombing. About 10 per cent of the most hawkish group also checked the extreme "withdrawal" alternatives—indicating a policy of "win or get out."

Southern Baptist ministers favored an escalation of the war, while 40 per cent of the United Church of Christ and Methodist clergymen advocated withdrawal.

Although the Protestant ministers were about evenly divided in their opinions toward the war, they were still considerably more dovish in their views than the general population at this time. While 57 per cent of the ministers favored a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam, only 21 per cent of the public agreed to such a policy in June of 1968.⁷

The clergy's positions on the war, furthermore, were found to be part of a highly structured political and theological belief system. Contemporary Protestantism is divided into four major schools of religious thought: fundamentalism, conservatism, neo-orthodoxy, and liberalism.⁸ These four theologies differ substantially in their attitudes toward the supernatural, Biblical authority, salvation, and religious orthodoxy. Most important, the former two groups of ministers are largely other-worldly in orientation, concerned primarily with the preparation of the individual for salvation. Neo-orthodox and liberal ministers, in contrast, emphasize "doing good for others" as a means of salvation and possess an activist social ethic.⁹ As Table 2 shows,

TABLE 2
THEOLOGICAL POSITION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD VIETNAM WAR POLICY

Self-Designated Theological Position	Position on Vietnam War					N
	Increase Military Efforts	Continue Bombing	Stop the Bombing	Withdraw to Enclaves	Complete Withdrawal	
Fundamentalist	76%	15%	5%	1%	3%	(85)
Conservative	50	23	13	2	12	(507)
Neo-orthodox	15	16	25	13	30	(266)
Liberal	8	16	20	13	42	(429)

⁷ These findings for the general public are taken from unpublished data collected by Sidney Verba and Richard Brody in June, 1968. At that time, among those who held an opinion on the bombing, 49 per cent favored an increase, 21 per cent a stop, 25 per cent no change, and 5 per cent "other"; results from their February survey were similar. Those groups which are most similar to the clergy—professionals and the highly educated—did not differ substantially from the rest of the sample on the authors' withdrawal-victory measure.

⁸ For a discussion of these general theological positions, see Langdon Gilkey, "Social and Intellectual Sources of Contemporary Protestant Theology in America," *Dædalus*, Vol. 96, 1967, pp. 69-98; John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity*, New York, Scribner's, 1954; and Walter M. Horton, *Christian Theology*, New York, Harper, 1955.

⁹ For a presentation of data validating these statements see *The Prophetic Clergy* (forthcoming).

these four theological positions are closely related to the clergy's attitudes toward the war. Fundamentalists were strong advocates of greater military pressure, while conservatives were not far behind in their hawkish orientations. Ministers classifying themselves as liberal and neo-orthodox, on the other hand, were predominantly dovish in their views. A close relationship between theological and political beliefs was also found on all of the other measures of political attitudes included in the survey: military interventionism, economic liberalism, civil rights, civil liberties, civil disobedience, and party identification.¹⁰ The attitudes of Protestant ministers toward the war in Vietnam are thus bound up in a highly structured world view; the theological doctrines which divide contemporary Protestant ministers divide them on political grounds as well. Such a belief pattern differs substantially from that found among the general public, where little or no relationship exists between attitudes toward either foreign policy or Vietnam and domestic politics.¹¹

CLERGY PARTICIPATION IN THE VIETNAM DEBATE

While the hawks slightly outnumbered the doves among these nine denominations, the latter group of ministers were more likely to favor an activist role on the part of the clergy itself. Those who possess anti-war beliefs, as a result, may be more likely to make their positions known publicly; and this in turn may explain the pre-dominant public image of the clergy as anti-war protesters.¹² Table 3

¹⁰ Cf. Benton Johnson, "Theology and Party Preference among Protestant Clergymen," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 31, 1965, pp. 200-208, and "Theology and the Position of Pastors on Public Issues," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 32, 1967, pp. 433-442; Jeffrey K. Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches*, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1969, ch. 3.

¹¹ See Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, New York, Wiley, 1960, pp. 194-201; Warren E. Miller, "Voting and Foreign Policy," in James Rosenau (ed.), *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*, New York, Free Press, 1967; and Sidney Verba, Richard A. Brody, Edwin B. Parker, Norman H. Nie, Nelson W. Polsby, Paul Ekman, and Gordon S. Black, "Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 61, 1967, pp. 324-326.

¹² There is some evidence to suggest that active participation in the Vietnam issue might be greater among the hawks than the doves. Converse, Clausen, and Miller ("Electoral Myth and Reality: The 1964 Election," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 59, 1965, pp. 321-323) have found that it is those of the right end of the ideological spectrum rather than the left who are most likely to write letters to public officials and to newspapers. Even more relevant are the findings of Verba and associates, who report that there were no significant differences in attitudes toward the war between those who wrote letters to public officials and to newspapers and those who did not (*op. cit.*, pp. 328-330). More recently they have discovered that those on both ends of the withdrawal-military victory continuum are more likely to participate in the issue, but that the hawks were even more active than the doves (unpublished findings by Sidney Verba and Richard Brody).

TABLE 3

CLERGY PARTICIPATION IN THE VIETNAM ISSUE ACCORDING TO POSITION ON THE WAR

<i>Clergy Participation</i>	<i>Position on the Vietnam War</i>					<i>Total Sample</i>
	<i>Increase Military Efforts</i>	<i>Continue Bombing</i>	<i>Stop Bombing</i>	<i>Withdraw to Enclaves</i>	<i>Complete Withdrawal</i>	
Public Involvement:						
Made a public statement (<i>N</i> = 1,504)	41%	47%	50%	68%	67%	53%
Wrote a public official (<i>N</i> = 1,499)	20	19	27	48	45	30
Signed a petition (<i>N</i> = 1,499)	4	8	31	52	55	27
Church Involvement:						
Discussed with parishioners (<i>N</i> = 1,511)	94	97	98	98	98	97
Delivered a prayer before congregation (<i>N</i> = 1,504)	79	84	86	89	90	85
Delivered a sermon (<i>N</i> = 1,507)	49	60	72	83	79	66
Organized a study group (<i>N</i> = 1,505)	12	27	36	48	42	30
Protest Involvement:						
Attended a protest meeting (<i>N</i> = 1,512)	4	11	34	48	46	25
Joined a peace organization (<i>N</i> = 1,502)	1	5	16	30	39	16
Participated in an anti-war protest march (<i>N</i> = 1,511)	0	1	7	12	19	8
Participated in anti-war civil disobedience (<i>N</i> = 1,508)		0	1	4	7	2

shows a consistent and dramatic tendency of those ministers who hold more dovish positions on the war to make their views known to their parishioners and to the general public. It further shows the large-scale involvement of those who do hold dovish views in the Vietnam debate. Those who favor withdrawal from Vietnam are one-and-a-half times as likely as those favoring greater military escalation to make their views known in a public statement, twice as likely to write a public official, and almost seven times as likely to sign a petition. Virtually all ministers have discussed the war with members of their congregations and most have delivered a prayer before their congregation. The doves, however, have a greater tendency to deliver a sermon on the issue and to organize a study group within their churches.

Perhaps as dramatic as these differences is the large-scale involvement of Protestant clergymen in the Vietnam debate. Virtually every

respondent in the sample has made some type of public acknowledgment of the war. More than half have made a public statement of their position, 30 per cent have written a public official, and 27 per cent have signed a petition. An even greater number of ministers have discussed the war during the course of their formal ministerial duties. The involvement of clergymen in political protests, finally, is impressive. Almost half of those advocating withdrawal had attended a protest meeting, and 7 per cent had "risked arrest" in anti-war civil disobedience.

Thus Protestant clergymen are very much involved in the Vietnam debate—both as public figures and as leaders of their own congregations. From the rate of their participation as portrayed in Table 3, it would appear that few other groups in American society are as involved in the Vietnam issue as are the clergy. The significant aspect of this involvement, of course, is that it is highly over-representative of the dove position among those in the sample.¹³ Thus not only are people likely to hear the views of the clergy—whether through the public media or in their own churches—but they are also much more likely to hear the case for withdrawal and de-escalation than for support of the war and increased military commitment. The public image of the clergy as militant opponents to the war is thus understandable in light of the highly disproportionate involvement of ministerial doves in the issue. In contrast to political expressions among the general public, it is the liberals and radicals among the clergy who are most apt to make their views known publicly. In addition to whatever personal motivations such ministers may possess, their activism is both encouraged and sustained by their theological beliefs. Thus "new breed" activists may still be in the minority in most Protestant denominations, but their influence is likely to continue to exceed their numbers.

THE OCCUPATIONAL MILIEU OF HAWKS AND DOVES

It remains, finally, to discuss the involvement of Protestant clergymen in the Vietnam debate in terms of the occupational milieu in which the clergy carry out their ministerial duties. The hawks and

¹³ In part, this disproportionate involvement may result from the fact that it is the doves who are trying to make changes in present Vietnam policy. Such an explanation, however, does not account for the greater activity of hawks among the general public. A similar disproportionate involvement between professors who supported and opposed the war was reported by David J. Armor, Joseph B. Giacchino, R. Gordon McIntosh, and Diana E. H. Russell, "Professors' Attitudes toward the Vietnam War," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 31, 1967, pp. 167-168. However, since the authors included in their "activity index" some forms of protest which would normally be taken only by those who oppose the war, it is difficult to determine the exact degree of this disproportionate involvement.

doves in the sample, as shown above, represent two highly differentiated theological and political groups. It is possible that ministers adopting these two opposing positions merely represent the predominant views of those individuals with whom they commonly interact professionally. In order to determine whether this was the case, the respondents were asked to compare their own views on Vietnam with those of their colleagues and the members of their own congregations. In addition, they were asked whether their local denominational officials had taken an official position either in support of present policies or of greater efforts toward negotiation. These three groups—the clergy's colleagues, parishioners, and denominational leaders—constitute the primary referents with which Protestant ministers commonly interact and which control a major portion of their occupational rewards and sanctions.

A comparison of the clergy's position on Vietnam with that of these three reference groups reveals clearly the conflicting role pressures experienced by most Protestant ministers who participate in political controversies. The clergy's local denominational leaders and their colleagues were perceived primarily as either the same as the respondent or as "more dovish" in orientation. In contrast, a large proportion of the clergy reported that the attitudes of their parishioners were "more hawkish" than their own (see Table 4). Even among those ministers who themselves favored an intensification of war efforts, 23 per cent reported that the majority of the members of their congregation held more hawkish attitudes on the war. On the other end of the scale, 72 per cent of those who advocated withdrawal from Vietnam felt their parishioners held more hawkish beliefs. Thus the overwhelming impact of perceived parishioner attitudes was to reinforce the position of the hawks and to contradict those of the ministerial doves.

The effect of these occupational reference groups in encouraging

TABLE 4
MINISTERS' COMPARISONS OF THE ATTITUDES OF THEIR PARISHIONERS
WITH THEIR OWN VIEWS ON VIETNAM

<i>Perceived Attitudes of Majority of Congregation</i>	<i>Minister's Position</i>				
	<i>Increase Military Efforts</i>	<i>Continue Bombing</i>	<i>Stop the Bombing</i>	<i>Withdraw to Enclaves</i>	<i>Complete Withdrawal</i>
More hawkish	23%	35%	57%	74%	72%
More dovish	4	6	4	2	4
About the same position	57	41	28	14	15
Not sure	16	18	11	10	10
	(436)	(282)	(269)	(128)	(390)

or discouraging clergy participation in the Vietnam issue depends largely, of course, upon the sanctions available to each group and their willingness to use them. In most Protestant denominations congregational members control the major sources of the minister's personal success: his salary, his tenure, and the enactment of his church programs.¹⁴ For this reason data were collected on the nature of parishioner sanctions taken either against or in support of those clergymen who had made their positions on the Vietnam issue known publicly. The exercise of negative sanctions, it was found, corresponded directly with the dovishness of the minister. Thus a large proportion of those clergymen who advocated withdrawal from Vietnam were censured by their parishioners for their anti-war activities and views: 69 per cent reported that their parishioners had expressed private opposition to their views, 20 per cent had the issue taken up publicly before the church board, 24 per cent lost financial contributions because of their stand on the war, 8 per cent faced attempts to have them removed from the church, and 28 per cent lost members over the issue. Such sanctions were even more severe for those ministers who engaged in the more extreme forms of dissent. Among ministerial doves who risked arrest to dramatize their anti-war views ($N = 26$), for example, 39 per cent reported formal opposition before their church board, 52 per cent had financial contributions reduced, 21 per cent faced efforts to have them removed from their parish positions, and 58 per cent lost members.

Thus the more active the minister in anti-war activities, the more likely he was to have actions taken to censure his conduct. Just as significant to the future of clergy activism, however, are the efforts which are made by parishioners to support the involvement of their ministers in such controversies as Vietnam. Dovish ministers, it was found, were not only more likely to create opposition to their involvement among the members of their congregations but also to generate support. Such positive actions, furthermore, increased in direct relationship to the form of activism reported by the ministers; those who engaged in such activities as protest marches and civil disobedience were most likely to have actions taken in support as well as in opposition to their actions. What appears to be taking place, then, is a

¹⁴ Cf. Paul M. Harrison, "Church and the Laity among Protestants," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 332, 1960, pp. 37-49; Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1965, ch. 6; David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962, pp. 501-505; and Robert B. Mitchell, "Polity, Church Attractiveness, and Ministers' Careers: An Eight-Denominational Study of Inter-church Mobility," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, 1966, pp. 241-258. For an example of the exercise of such controls over the social involvement of the parish ministers see Campbell and Pettigrew, *op. cit.*

polarization of opinion within those congregations which are headed by activist ministers. Many of those parishioners who oppose such activities are resigning from churches headed by an activist minister and reducing their contributions, while others appear to be attracted to the church precisely on these grounds.

These findings suggest that ethics may not lead to the "death of Christianity," as some have predicted¹⁵ but rather to a reduction and transition of the membership of the activist church denominations. While those ministers active in anti-war activities experienced severe negative sanctions as a result of their involvement in the issue, they also received assistance from a substantial number of their parishioners. Thus the "activist parishioner" may well be a crucial factor in encouraging the emergence of the "activist clergyman."

¹⁵ Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, "Will Ethics Be the Death of Christianity?" *Trans-action*, Vol. 5, June 1968, pp. 7-14.