

Accountability, Remembrance and Healing

How Christian Political Factions Influenced America During the Vietnam War

By Jennifer Esch

In 1968, the church board of an Arizona Methodist Church ejected its guest speaker, Thomas Ford Hoult, from the building amidst shouting and hostility long before his forty-five minute presentation ended, an incident that Hoult later dubbed “exorcism middle class church style.”¹ Hoult, the chairman of the Department of Sociology at Arizona State University in Tempe, had been invited by the “Social Concerns Committee” of the Phoenix, Arizona church to speak to the board about the Vietnam War. Hoult provoked aggression from the church board by challenging the basic assumption that many people in the United States held. While Americans viewed communism as their main enemy, Hoult instead urged citizens to view the conditions that lead people to communism, such as hunger and disease, as their ultimate nemesis. The members of the church board equated this argument with defending communism and threw him out of the building. While the majority of the group proceeded to do this, eight to ten church members quietly whispered apologies to Hoult, who continued to argue while being pressed outside. If the church did not take a collective stance against the war, he said, it was supporting it. The audience responded by stating, “we *want* to support the war!” And, with a few pointed comments hurled at one another, Hoult left the church, and the board members returned inside.²

¹ Thomas Ford Hoult, “Exorcism, Middle Class Church Style,” *Christian Century*, March 6, 1968, 294.

² Ibid.

Hoult's experience exemplified the numerous divisions that the Vietnam War created among the people in the United States, not just within the nation as a whole but within the American Protestant Christian community as well.³ As the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War increased between 1964 and 1972, the Christian community struggled to find a cohesive perspective on the conflict. Four groups emerged within the Protestant Christian community, each with a different opinion of what course of action the U.S. should take in Vietnam. The radical right; the mainstream, moderate-liberal Christian community; and the moderate-liberal, black Christian community all believed that Christians had the right, if not the duty, to participate in politics. The final group, mainstream, conservative evangelical Protestants, strongly believed that Christians should stay out of political affairs, but still involved themselves indirectly in the politics of the Vietnam War. In spite of the divisions, the collective Protestant Christian community kept the government accountable to the broad spectrum of citizens it represented during the escalation of the war and increasing conflict within the United States. The various Christian political factions also forced Americans to remember victims of the war, including unconventional victims such as draft dodgers, and showed the government a way it could heal the nation after the divisions of the 1960s.

Background

In 1947, Reverend Billy James Hargis formed Christian Echoes Ministry, which later became Christian Crusade and came to represent Christians on the far right of the political spectrum. Hargis traveled throughout the United States preaching a fundamentalist version of the Gospel and encouraged Christians to be concerned about

³ Throughout the paper, the terms "Christian" or "Christians" refer specifically to Protestant Christian(s).

the “deteriorating state” of the nation. In the 1950s, Hargis devoted much of his time to supporting Senator Joseph McCarthy’s crusade on communism, adamant in his belief that “Christian people have to be political as well as religious.”⁴ Hargis’s Christian Crusade developed into the radical right of Christian politics and eventually advocated that the United States launch an all-out military offensive in order to destroy communism in Vietnam.

On the left of the political spectrum, the moderate to liberal Christian community formed its own associations, including the National Council of Churches (NCC) and Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. The NCC originated as the social-gospel preaching Federal Council of Churches in the early twentieth century, but transformed into the National Council of Churches in 1950, two years after the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC).⁵ Membership in the NCC included churches of over fifteen different Christian denominations, such as the National Baptist Convention of America, the Church of the Brethren, Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, Friends, and the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.⁶

In January 1966, William Sloane Coffin, a chaplain at Yale University, announced the formation of the National Emergency Committee of Clergy Concerned About Vietnam, the precursor to the group Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). At his press conference, Coffin asked clergy throughout the United States to make the “moral” decision to support efforts by the government to negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam. Membership in CALCAV consisted mostly of

⁴ William Martin, *With God on Our Side* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9, 36.

⁶ “Membership of the N.C.C.,” *Christianity Today*, January 29, 1965, 5.

clergy from moderate to liberal denominations, including Methodists, Episcopalian, liberal Presbyterians and members of the United Church of Christ.⁷

The Christian Century, which historian William Martin calls the “premier journal of liberal Christianity,”⁸ supported both the National Council of Churches and Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. The *Century* began as the *Christian Oracle*, established by the Disciples of Christ in 1884. Renamed in 1900, the magazine became increasingly nondenominational in the early twentieth century.⁹ The moderate-liberal Christian community, including the NCC, CALCAV and *The Christian Century*, maintained an anti-war perspective throughout the Vietnam War, although the strength and passion of this position varied with time.

The liberal, black Christian community established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as an organization to gain civil rights for blacks. Headed by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., SCLC arose out of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955.¹⁰ King and his followers founded SCLC as a nonsectarian organization, “Christian” only in name because blacks in the South enjoyed little freedom of speech and expression outside the church in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference may be considered a true Christian organization since its philosophy of non-violence stemmed from the Hebraic-Christian tradition.¹¹ Furthermore, SCLC’s affiliates consisted mainly of churches, and members of the clergy made up the majority of its officers, staff and executive board. Eventually, Martin Luther

⁷ Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 1, 16.

⁸ Martin, 27.

⁹ The Christian Century, <<http://www.christiancentury.org>> (consulted December 6, 2006).

¹⁰ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 158.

¹¹ “This is SCLC,” n.d., Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Civil Liberties-Negroes-Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

King and SCLC took a strong stance against American involvement in the Vietnam War, although their focus remained primarily on issues concerning civil rights.

Mainstream, conservative evangelical Protestants created a moderate to conservative Christian community on the conservative end of the political spectrum. Members of this group founded the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 in order to establish an organization that could represent evangelical leaders of all Christian denominations. In January 1965, the NAE included affiliates of thirty-four different denominations, including the Assemblies of God, the Christian Church of North America, the Evangelical Mennonite Church, the Pentecostal Church of Christ, and the United Fundamentalist Church.¹² Overall, the NAE sought to be an association that broke from the “reactionary” and “negative” leaders of the Christian radical right, such as Billy James Hargis of Christian Crusade.¹³ The NAE strongly supported evangelical preacher Billy Graham, who founded the magazine *Christianity Today* in 1956. The periodical quickly became the “flagship publication of mainstream evangelicalism.”¹⁴ The mainstream, conservative evangelical community remained primarily silent on political issues throughout the 1960s, but eventually made strong statements in support of both President Lyndon Johnson’s and President Richard Nixon’s positions on the war. Together, all four political factions ensured that nearly every American, including Christians and unconventional victims of the conflict, had a voice in politics surrounding the Vietnam War.

The Christian Radical Right

¹² “Membership of N.A.E.,” *Christianity Today*, January 29, 1965, 5.

¹³ Martin, 22-23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

Members of the Christian radical right focused nearly all of their attention on the defeat of communism; they believed that Christians had the duty as well as the right to stop anti-religious communists. This ultra-conservative community still viewed the world in a good-versus-evil mentality reminiscent of World War II. To its members, communism in any form, in any place, challenged the American Christian way of life. In 1967, Christian Crusade reprinted and circulated an editorial from *The Wichita Eagle* in which Ezra Taft Benson compared the communists of the Vietnam War era to the Nazis from World War II. To Benson, and the radical right as a whole, communists perpetrated as much evil in the 1960s as the Nazis did in the 1940s.¹⁵ In this way, Christian Crusade viewed the battle against communism as part of a war for the greater good of the world.

The radical right believed that, in order to defeat communism, the United States had to prevent communist ideology from spreading across the world and, in particular, throughout Southeast Asia. With this mindset, Christian Crusade had to support a complete military solution in Vietnam. Hargis and Christian Crusade advocated that the United States use all of its military resources to stop the spread of communism. In the early 1960s, Hargis explained to his followers that Cuba had “clearly offensive communist intentions” and Americans “must stop it” at all costs in order to prevent the spread of communism as planned by the leaders of the Soviet Union.¹⁶ After 1966, Billy James Hargis made few direct statements about the Vietnam War, since the Internal Revenue Service had revoked Christian Crusade’s tax-exempt status for “engaging in

¹⁵ Ezra Taft Benson, “Trade and Treason,” April 11, 1967, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

¹⁶ Billy James Hargis, “Should We Surrender to Castro or Smash Him,” n.d., Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

political activity.”¹⁷ In the early 1970s, however, Hargis indirectly supported a pro-war position by sponsoring anti-communist rallies with speakers who advocated all out military solutions in Vietnam.¹⁸

Hargis did not have to clarify his viewpoint of the Vietnam War; members of the Christian community could deduce his position based upon his feelings toward communism and previous statements on Cuba. While the IRS did not appreciate Christian Crusade’s involvement in politics, the group’s unspoken support of an aggressive military solution in Vietnam allowed Lyndon Johnson to justify any escalation of U.S. intervention in the war; Johnson could easily argue that he was being accountable to his constituents.

Not only did Billy James Hargis and the radical right urge the United States government to increase its involvement in Vietnam, Hargis also tried to instill fear and urgency in his readers in order to generate greater support for his cause. In a 1965 letter that he wrote to the members of Christian Crusade, Hargis claimed that liberals within the United States created havoc for Christian Americans. American soldiers, he said, continued to die while politicians pursued a “soft on communism policy.”¹⁹ Members of Christian Crusade even claimed that communists penetrated the National Council of Churches, a Christian organization. In 1969, after hearing that the NCC believed that the United States government should recognize communist Cuba, Hargis urged members of

¹⁷ Donald Janson, “Wallace Endorses the Work of Christian Crusade,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1969.

¹⁸ “Christian Crusade Presents Tom Hollingsworth and Charles Secrest in an Outstanding Anti-Communist Rally,” 1971, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

¹⁹ Billy James Hargis, “The Disturbing Truth About the USA,” December 1965, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

Christian Crusade to abandon all churches that claimed membership in the NCC and join different ones instead.²⁰

Billy James Hargis deliberately painted the bleakest picture possible of what he viewed as the deteriorating American lifestyle. Hargis did this partially because he truly believed that communism was destroying the United States, but primarily so that readers would join his cause and donate money. In every letter Hargis wrote to his mailing list decrying the ills of communism, he also urged readers to donate money to his ministry, subscribe to his *Christian Crusade Weekly* newspaper and buy subscriptions for all of their friends.²¹ As such, Hargis's encouragement of fear in his followers served his own agenda more than it helped members of the radical right develop a clear understanding of the Vietnam War. Hargis never explained what would happen if the United States failed to win the conflict in Vietnam; he simply begged for money to help the cause. Since members of the Christian radical right only increased their support of a military solution in Vietnam when they fell into Hargis's web of fear, they provided Lyndon Johnson with the excuse he needed to continue escalation of the war in the mid- to late-1960s.

Throughout the years of the war, Billy James Hargis and the rest of the leaders of Christian Crusade emphasized "expert" testimonies and sources to support their pro-war position. In the late-1960s and early-1970s, Christian Crusade sponsored a series of anti-communist rallies throughout the United States. Hargis and other leaders often selected Tom Hollingsworth to headline the rallies, since, in addition to being consistent with the Christian Crusade beliefs of supporting a complete military offensive in Southeast Asia,

²⁰ Billy James Hargis, "National Council of Churches Agrees to \$500,000 Blackmail!!," October 1, 1969, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

²¹ Ibid.

Hollingsworth spent a significant amount of time in Vietnam as a Green Beret.²² This experience gave credibility to Hollingsworth, Christian Crusade and their position on Vietnam in such a way that Americans hesitated to challenge them. Billy James Hargis needed this sense of integrity so that conservative Christians would see his organization as trustworthy and therefore support its cause, both ideologically and financially.

The radical right's obsession with communism created two major implications for the rest of the Christian community. First, Christian Crusade and Billy James Hargis intensified the political divisions within the American Protestant community. They forced any Christian that did not have ultra-conservative political beliefs to take a different position than the radical right on the issues of communism and the Vietnam War. Various political views already existed among Christians, but Hargis's radical statements and accusations aggravated those differences. Second, the radical right heightened the political and social risks for other Christian groups who chose to speak out against the war. Hargis, in particular, accused Christians who did not support his position on communism, liberalism and the Vietnam War of being communist themselves. He attacked the National Council of Churches for growing too liberal when they pledged money to James Forman, a member of the executive board of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a civil rights organization.²³ Hargis also openly criticized Christian groups that advocated the withdrawal of all American troops from Vietnam, as the moderate-liberal Christian community did in the late-1960s. The radical right's strong stance against communism, however, enabled Johnson to demonstrate that

²² "Christian Crusade Presents Tom Hollingsworth and Jess Pedigo," 1970, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade and "Christian Crusade Presents Tom Hollingsworth and Charles Secrest in an Outstanding Anti-Communist Rally," 1971, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Subject Vertical Files, Radical Right-U.S.-Christian Crusade.

²³ Hargis, "National Council of Churches Agrees to \$500,000 Blackmail!!"

he had support for his decision to increase U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia in an attempt to defeat communism.

The Moderate-Liberal Christian Community

The moderate-liberal Christian community maintained a consistent attitude towards the Vietnam War and held a very different view of the war than the ultra-conservatives. Throughout the years of the war, moderate-liberal Christians acted on their belief that Christians had the right to participate in national politics; their subsequent anti-war statements kept Presidents Johnson and Nixon accountable to anti-war Americans. In the mid-1960s, the National Council of Churches embraced the war as its main issue of concern and encouraged the United States government to initiate peace negotiations. In addition, the NCC strongly advocated that the U.S. declare itself in favor of phased withdrawal of all American troops based in Vietnam.²⁴ The editorial board of *The Christian Century* also believed that the government should “produce a cease-fire in South Vietnam – not a stepped-up war.”²⁵

Despite these beliefs, moderate-liberal Christians maintained an open mind about the war. Although the NCC urged the government to negotiate peace in Vietnam, it also believed in “the integrity of the Administration as it has expressed publicly its willingness to negotiate unconditionally to find peace in Viet-Nam.”²⁶ Although anti-war, the NCC still trusted the government to do the right thing; it did not suggest that Lyndon Johnson lacked direction in his policy making. When a delegation from the National Council of Churches visited South Vietnam in 1967, the organization revised its

²⁴ “Religious Coalition in Washington,” *Christianity Today*, May 21, 1965, 38.

²⁵ “Getting Out of Vietnam,” *The Christian Century*, December 23, 1964, 1583.

²⁶ “Religious Coalition in Washington.”

position on the war. The overall stance of the NCC remained “one of apology for U.S. involvement,” but the group adjusted its position to include the belief that the United States should not make a sudden, unilateral withdrawal of its troops.²⁷ Members of the moderate-liberal Christian community acknowledged that, as humans, they could make incorrect judgments and, therefore, changed their position on the war as they gained new information. Moderate-liberal Protestants wanted the federal government to listen to their position on Vietnam, but realized that, in exchange, they should acknowledge to the Johnson administration and evidence surrounding the war.

Despite their revisions in policy, moderate-liberal Christians remained decidedly anti-war. As early as the summer of 1965, the Clergymen’s Emergency Committee for Vietnam published an ad in *The New York Times* and *The Christian Century* directed at President Lyndon Johnson, pleading for him “with the utmost urgency” to declare his intention to withdraw American troops from Vietnam and to ultimately “turn [the] nation’s course...from cruelty to compassion, from destruction to healing, from retaliation to reconciliation, from war to peace.”²⁸ The next year, the NCC sent Johnson a telegram in which they urged him to avoid increasing the bombing campaign against North Vietnam.²⁹ In 1967, moderate-liberal Christians strengthened the passion of their arguments when members of the National Council of Churches, known as the “new breed” of churchmen among members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community, called for businesses, industries and schools to close in a twenty-four hour

²⁷ “Are Churchmen Failing Servicemen in Viet Nam?” *Christianity Today*, August 18, 1967, 30-31.

²⁸ Clergymen’s Emergency Committee for Vietnam, “2990 Ministers, Priests and Rabbis Say: Mr. President, in the name of God, STOP IT!” *The Christian Century*, June 30, 1965, 856.

²⁹ Edward C. Burks, “Churchmen Call for Peace Talks: National Council Cautions Johnson on Bombings,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1966.

strike protesting escalation of the Vietnam War.³⁰ As the war progressed, the NCC and other moderate-liberal Christians became more convicted in their belief that the United States should exit the war, and developed increasingly passionate arguments opposing the conflict.

The editors at *The Christian Century* even challenged the legitimacy of the Vietnam War under the validity of the Christian “just war” doctrine. Historically, Christians accepted three approaches to war: crusade (the glorification of war), pacifism (in which one refuses accept or participate in war) and the doctrine of just war (the specific criteria a war must meet in order to be morally accepted and conducted as a necessary evil).³¹ While the crusade approach could no longer bear the scrutiny of Americans in the twentieth century, the doctrine of pacifism struggled to satisfy most Christian Americans after the tragedies of World War II and the holocaust. Thus, the *Century* editorial board concluded in 1967, in order for a war to be acceptable to Christians, it had to adhere to the just war doctrine.³² In the case of Vietnam, however, moderate-liberal Christians argued that almost all of the traditional criteria of a just war had been violated. The war in Southeast Asia began as a civil war; no one was “attacked,” they explained. Furthermore, the good that might have come from the war did not exceed the evil resulting from the war itself; both sides continued to cause injury to noncombatants and, most importantly, the war was not declared and waged by a legitimate authority, since its origins could be traced back to a revolution against “irresponsible” and “imposed” French rule.³³

³⁰ “NCC Host the Radicals,” *Christianity Today*, November 10, 1967, 48.

³¹ “A Moral Reassessment of Our War in Vietnam,” *The Christian Century*, January 4, 1967, 7-9.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Moderate-liberal Christians firmly believed that the U.S. did not have legitimate authority to fight the war and felt that doing the right thing and asserting the power of the nation cannot be accomplished at the same time. The United States should not continue to fight the Vietnam War for the sake of power, especially since it did not appear as though the U.S. could win the war. Instead, the moderate-liberal community asserted, the U.S. should do the morally correct thing and get out of the war. Perhaps Tran Van Dinh, a journalist for *The Christian Century*, said it best when he explained that the U.S. could not win the war because “it is fighting a wrong war, at a wrong time, in a wrong place, in support of a wrong minority of Vietnamese reactionaries.”³⁴ Van Dinh could not foresee how the United States might win the war. Thus, he believed, the U.S. should withdraw from the conflict. Moderate-liberal Christians criticized the Vietnam War under the just war doctrine because they believed the war to be morally wrong, but also in order to force the Johnson administration to listen to their position. The moderate-liberal community had not received a satisfactory response to their anti-war statements from American political leaders, so they became more pointed in their attacks against the war, hoping that Johnson and his supporters would pay attention to their arguments.

Although moderate-liberal Christians strongly supported the anti-war movement, they decreased their efforts to stop the war in 1968 and 1969 in order to demonstrate to Johnson that they appreciated his efforts to end the bombing of North Vietnam in October 1968. When Johnson announced a halt to the bombing against North Vietnam on October 31, it took a few days for the Christian community to react. The moderate-liberal community had asked for an end to the bombing for so long that it surprised them when they finally got what they wanted. Finally, Robert Bilheimer, a leader in the NCC,

³⁴ Tran Van Dinh, “Why the War in Vietnam Cannot Be Won,” *The Christian Century*, July 24, 1968, 937.

pledged support to Johnson's efforts for peace on behalf of the National Council of Churches and recalled NCC demands for a bombing halt.³⁵

Since the Johnson administration had begun listening to the anti-war movement, moderate-liberal anti-war Christians did not want to continue protesting the war and risk losing the small victory of the bombing halts. Thus, they urged all Christians to "respond gratefully" for the action by Johnson and to "honor" the president for having the courage to stop the bombing. At all costs, they wanted to avoid provoking Johnson into bombing North Vietnam again.³⁶ This event did not change the fact that the community believed that the United States should withdraw all of its troops from Vietnam, not just end the bombing. They used a strategy of decreasing the number of anti-war protests as positive reinforcement for Johnson's decision to stop the bombing, hoping that he would continue to listen to anti-war Christians and push for an end to the war.

During the time that they avoided participating in the anti-war movement, moderate-liberal Christians shifted their focus to the individual victims of the war in an attempt to force Americans to remember the unconventional sufferers of the conflict. In March 1969, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam launched a ministry for American deserters and draft resisters in Sweden in an effort to help "reunite" the American people. CALCAV also advocated amnesty for deserters and draft resisters who wanted to return to the United States.³⁷ *The Christian Century* published an editorial a year later which supported amnesty for selective conscientious objectors, such as those who objected specifically to the Vietnam War but not all wars.³⁸ Both the World and

³⁵ "Bomb Halt Reactions," *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1968, 44.

³⁶ "The Bombing Stops at Last," *The Christian Century*, November 13, 1968, 1423-1424.

³⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, "Ministry to G.I.s in Sweden," *The Christian Century*, March 19, 1969, 378-382.

³⁸ "The Greatest Victory," *The Christian Century*, January 28, 1970, 99.

National Council of Churches followed suit in 1971 by raising money to provide food, clothing, and counseling for American deserters and draft resisters in Canada³⁹ and, in 1972, sponsoring a “religious event” which advocated amnesty for all draft resisters and deserters.⁴⁰ Multiple moderate-liberal Christian groups shifted their resources from protesting the war to advocating on behalf of the American “victims” of the war: the white, middle-class men who avoided the draft or the war in any way that they could. These Christian groups believed that the draft resisters and deserters had made moral decisions and, thus, sought to help them return to their middle-class lifestyle without any punishment for their actions. By publicly supporting these unconventional victims, the moderate-liberal Christian community forced Americans to remember them and also attempted to start the healing process for the nation.

Moderate-liberal Protestants also spoke out on the behalf of the Vietnamese that had been injured or otherwise harmed in the war. In 1971, Quakers advocated that the United States provide health care for the Vietnamese, since the U.S. caused much of the destruction that hurt Vietnamese civilians in the first place.⁴¹ The same year, *The Christian Century* published an editorial criticizing all Americans, particularly Christians, who had forgotten Vietnam’s “other war,” the battle to help South Vietnam’s orphans, refugees and wounded. He urged citizens of the United States to have “the moral courage and national determination” to do whatever it took to win the “other war” in Vietnam.⁴² By resolving to help both the Vietnamese and middle-class American victims of the war, moderate-liberal Christians demonstrated their compassion. They realized that the U.S.

³⁹ “World Scene,” *Christianity Today*, January 1, 1971, 47.

⁴⁰ Harold O. J. Brown, “Amnesty: Grasping for Leverage,” *Christianity Today*, April 14, 1972, 39.

⁴¹ Dorothy Weller, “Our Finest Achievement,” *The Christian Century*, October 27, 1971, 1263-1264.

⁴² Randy Engel, “Whatever Happened to Vietnam’s ‘Other War’?” *The Christian Century*, March 17, 1971, 350-353.

stood on the verge of losing the war, but it could choose to be a good loser instead of a bad one by helping the war's victims.

By the end of 1969, Richard Nixon had been in office for one year and the American public had yet to see the success of his Vietnamization plan, in which the United States transferred the fighting of the war from American soldiers to the South Vietnamese.. Members of the moderate-liberal Christian community believed that Nixon had “shamefully oversold” his plan to voters during his presidential campaign.⁴³ In order to keep Nixon accountable to the citizens who elected him, moderate-liberal Protestants quickly resumed their anti-war protests where they had left off, calling for a massive withdrawal of troops by the United States government.⁴⁴ Moderate and liberal Christians acknowledged that they had gotten swept up in Nixon's “silent majority” rhetoric and the romanticism of the life of the average American citizen, but regained sight of their true beliefs about the war. Thus, both the National Council of Churches and *The Christian Century* endorsed the October 1969 Vietnam Moratorium, an anti-war protest organized by two college students, one Jewish and the other Protestant. The *Century* agreed with the rhetoric used to promote the Moratorium, which stated that the Vietnam War “has had a corrupting influence on every aspect of American life, and much of the national discontent can be traced to its influence.”⁴⁵ The NCC, along with a dozen other religious leaders, also endorsed the Moratorium, hoping for “speedy and decisive political initiatives” that would bring an end to the war.⁴⁶ In essence, the moderate-liberal Christian community continued to create a “war” at home in order to punish Nixon for

⁴³ “Nixon's Peace Plan,” *The Christian Century*, May 28, 1969, 734-735.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “The Ides of October,” *The Christian Century*, October 29, 1969, 1369 and “The Vietnam Moratorium,” *The Christian Century*, October 8, 1969, 1270.

⁴⁶ George Dugan, “Religious Leaders Endorse Vietnam Moratorium,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1969.

ignoring the promises he made to the electorate. They forced Nixon to utilize all of his resources to fight two battles, one in Vietnam and one at home, as Johnson had been required to do, leaving him unable to emphasize any other domestic issue.

The moderate-liberal Christian community continued to increase the passion of their protests against the war throughout the early 1970s. Members of the community became enraged when Nixon announced that he refused to be the first president to lose a war. “We must learn from Vietnam,” Michael Stone wrote for *The Christian Century*,

the danger of allowing pride to dictate policy, of holding too dear the claim of preeminence, of viewing every encounter as a test of our power and prestige. No less for nations than for individuals does pride go before a fall... Misplaced pride has prompted this nation to fight the wrong kind of war in the wrong place, and has rendered it incapable of leading the way to a just resolution in the land it went to save. In the next war it could mean the destruction of us all.⁴⁷

Stone and his colleagues not only opposed the war, they hated the fact that government leaders would rather save face than admit that they made a mistake in not exiting the war sooner. Not only did they fear the destruction that the current war in Vietnam created, both in Southeast Asia and in the United States itself, they also became alarmed at the thought of the possible obliteration of the U.S. if its citizens did not learn from their mistakes.

One month after Stone published his analysis of the sins the government had committed, *The Christian Century*, *Christianity and Crisis*, *Commonweal*, and the *National Catholic Reporter* published a joint editorial written specifically for Holy Week, which equated Nixon’s policy in Vietnam with the crucifixion of Christ. The authors of the editorial blamed American political leaders for everything that had gone wrong in the U.S. since Lyndon Johnson took office, including the war in Vietnam, the suffering of the

⁴⁷ Michael Stone, “Power and Prestige: Premises of Policy,” *The Christian Century*, March 11, 1970, 286.

poor, and the growing distrust of the American government.⁴⁸ The actions taken by these publications and their supporters reflected the growing hopelessness moderate-liberal Christians felt over the conflict they had protested for over five years with still no end in sight. Leaders in the moderate-liberal community tried everything that they could think of to bring Nixon in line with their point of view. They participated in protests, which led to the arrest of the editors of *Christianity and Crisis*, *Commonweal* and the *National Catholic Reporter* along with seventy of their supporters after a sit-in near the White House in April 1971.⁴⁹ They even sent a delegation of over fifty churchmen to the peace talks in Paris and appealed for delegates to “declare immediately their *pledge* to withdraw *unconditionally* all U.S. military forces from Indochina in the immediate future” (italics theirs).⁵⁰ In the end, the efforts of moderate-liberal Christians did little to bring the war to an immediate end; the final American troops did not leave Vietnam until the mid-1970s.⁵¹

Despite their failure to impact the war, moderate-liberal Protestants had a significant influence on the rest of the Christian community. They demonstrated to Americans that Christians could apply their principles, such as the just war doctrine, to the political world. In addition, they showed other Christians a way in which they could make faith part of their life decisions. Many moderate-liberal Protestants devoted a significant amount of time to protesting the war and were willing to be arrested if it would help end the war. The devotion that they had to their political beliefs stemmed from their religious convictions and, thus, proved that religion and politics cannot be

⁴⁸ “A Call to Penitence and Action,” *The Christian Century*, April 7, 1971, 419-420.

⁴⁹ David Kucharsky, “Unconditional Withdrawal: Strategy for Peace?” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 1971, 37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵¹ Chafe, 413-415.

separated from one another. Members of the moderate-liberal Christian community escalated their protests against the war as an attempt to force the federal government to be accountable to its anti-war citizens and in order to remind all Americans of the victims of the war, including draft dodgers and Vietnamese civilians.

The Moderate-Liberal, Black Christian Community

On the left of the political spectrum, the moderate-liberal, black Christian community struggled to decide how much attention they should devote to the Vietnam War. While Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference believed that Christians had the right to participate in politics, they had always focused on civil rights. They did not want to take attention away from the struggle for equality by shifting their focus to the war. Thus, when members of the New Left, anti-war and civil rights groups, including Students for a Democratic Society and Lutheran, Congregational and Roman Catholic clergymen, met in January 1966 to discuss linking their protests into one large movement, King and SCLC did not attend.⁵² Eventually, both King and SCLC spoke out against the war in order to hold the government accountable to its citizens; however, they did so at a later date than the mainstream moderate-liberal Christian community.

Individual members of SCLC spoke out against the war first. As early as July 1965, Martin Luther King suggested that he might shift his focus from civil rights to the peace movement.⁵³ One month later, King announced his plans to appeal to President Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam and President Lyndon Johnson to stop the war. In addition,

⁵² Austin C. Wehrewin, "New Left Scans Chicago Politics," *New York Times*, December 9, 1965.

⁵³ "Viet Nam: Bullets and Brickbats," *Christianity Today*, July 30, 1965, 49.

he “called for ‘unconditional and unambiguous’ statements from President Johnson of [the] nation’s willingness to negotiate with the Vietcong.” When asked why it took him so long to criticize the war he explained, “We have neither the resources nor the energy to organize demonstrations on the peace question. It’s physically impossible to go all out on the peace question and all out on the Civil Rights question...I held back...until it got to the point that I felt I had to speak out. The time is so potentially destructive and dangerous that the whole survival of humanity is at stake.”⁵⁴ King realized the impracticality of speaking on behalf of the civil rights and anti-war movements at the same time, but felt that he had a moral obligation to do something to stop the war, keep the government in check and force American political leaders to respond to the growing discomfort in the black community surrounding the Vietnam War. Ralph Abernathy, the vice-president of SCLC, demonstrated his opposition to the war and agreement with King’s position several years later. In January 1968, Abernathy participated in a peace delegation that traveled around the world, including Vietnam.⁵⁵ In addition, Abernathy, along with SCLC member Jesse Jackson, signed a petition in support of “massive antiwar demonstrations” as a part of National Moratorium Day in October 1971.⁵⁶ Both King and Abernathy felt that Lyndon Johnson needed to listen to its anti-war citizens.

Martin Luther King also received support from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference itself. When King came out against the war in August 1965, the executive board of SCLC unanimously approved his decision.⁵⁷ Furthermore, at its annual convention during the same month, SCLC voted to allow King, if he deemed it necessary,

⁵⁴ Homer Bigart, “Dr. King to Send Appeal to Hanoi,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1965.

⁵⁵ Val Adams, “U.S. Clerics of 3 Faiths Begin Trip to 7 Nations in Peace Effort,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1968.

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, September 26, 1971.

⁵⁷ Bigart.

to “throw the full resources” of the organization into efforts to end the war in Vietnam.⁵⁸ In the same vote, SCLC reaffirmed that the “primary function of [their] organization [was] to secure full leadership rights for the Negro citizens of [the] country.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the majority of members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference trusted that King had made the right decision when he finally chose to speak out against the war, indicating their belief that the government needed to listen to the concerns of citizens about the Vietnam War as well as civil rights.

Despite the support that Martin Luther King received from individual members of the civil rights movement and the majority of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, some members of the civil rights movement, including supporters of SCLC, believed that King should not have turned his attention from civil rights. Andrew Young, the National Executive Director of SCLC, sprang to King’s defense by compiling a pamphlet composed of various newspaper clippings about King. The authors of these newspaper articles defended King’s decision to come out against the war, declaring King a “patriotic” man and his position a “moral” one.⁶⁰ Young tried to demonstrate to supporters of the civil rights movement that Martin Luther King made his decision for religious reasons and, therefore, the moderate-liberal black Christian community should support his position.

Even though King, Abernathy, and SCLC became increasingly anti-war in the 1960s, they still saw civil rights as more important than stopping the war. SCLC

⁵⁸ “Dr. King May Make A Wider Peace Bid,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1965.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Andrew Young, “These questions have been asked...does Martin Luther King, Jr. have the right? The qualifications? The duty? To speak out on peace,” n.d., Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Civil Liberties-Negroes-Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

demonstrated this when they endorsed Hubert Humphrey for president in 1968, rather than Richard Nixon.⁶¹ If the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had focused on finding a way to end the war, the organization would have endorsed Nixon, who campaigned on a plan to end the war, rather than Humphrey, who largely supported Johnson's position on the war. SCLC clearly viewed civil rights as their main goal and, thus, supported Humphrey, who had a more liberal position on civil rights than Nixon.

After King's death, SCLC remained open to addressing issues other than civil rights by reaffirming its commitment to represent the anti-war faction of the black Christian community. In 1974, SCLC issued an official statement in which they advocated amnesty for all Americans who avoided the draft, deserted during the war or received a dishonorable discharge from the armed services.⁶² SCLC decided to support amnesty for draft dodgers later than the moderate-liberal Christian community, as they did in criticizing the Vietnam War, since they still viewed civil rights as their first priority. Many of the Americans who avoided the draft came from upper-middle class homes;⁶³ by supporting them, SCLC proved to American leaders a credible method in which it could help heal the class divisions in the nation.

The moderate-liberal, black Christian community did not spark drastic changes in the political beliefs of the radical right and mainstream, conservative evangelical Christian communities, although it undoubtedly served as a target for everything the two conservative groups viewed as wrong with politics. The radical right equated liberalism with communism; and mainstream, conservative evangelical Protestants thought

⁶¹ "The Election: Who Was for Whom," *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1968, 44.

⁶² "Amnesty: A Moral Forgiveness," April 4, 1974, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Subject Vertical Files, Civil Liberties-Negroes-Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

⁶³ Chafe, 316.

Christian groups should avoid becoming involved in any political issue. Moderate-liberal black Christians not only held fairly liberal political beliefs, but also participated in two political issues. In addition, King and SCLC strengthened the position of the mainstream moderate-liberal Christian community, despite their late entrance on to the anti-war scene. Although the National Council of Churches, CALCAV, and many other Christian anti-war groups began protesting the war and supported amnesty for all American victims of the war long before the moderate-liberal black community, SCLC's support, as a respectable political group, gave additional credibility to the entire Christian anti-war movement and helped force the United States government to begin finding a solution to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. In this way, the moderate-liberal, black community kept the government accountable to its citizens and their beliefs about the Vietnam War and demonstrated the ability of the nation to reconcile its differences.

The Mainstream Conservative Evangelical Community

Compared to the other three Christian political factions, mainstream, conservative Christian evangelicals had a complex and often hypocritical view of the Vietnam War. They repeatedly argued that Christians should avoid a role in politics, while at the same time made political statements about Vietnam by supporting the president's policies, even when the policies or the president changed. Contrary to the radical right's immediate support of an all-out military solution in Southeast Asia and the moderate-liberal community's inherent anti-war feelings, the mainstream, conservative evangelical community first refused to take a position on the Vietnam War during the first years of the conflict. The conservative evangelicals strongly believed that Christian organizations

had no place in politics because of “their tax-exempt status that is based upon non-participation in political affairs and non-sponsorship of legislation.”⁶⁴ Instead, mainstream, conservative Protestants focused their attention on spreading the Gospel to the rest of the world. They appeared to believe that if they put too much time and effort into figuring out whether to support or oppose the Vietnam War they would be contradicting their emphasis on evangelism. Mainstream, conservative evangelicals felt that if they devoted too much attention to the Vietnam War, they would imply that the soldiers, government, protestors, and the war were more important and influential than evangelism, missions and Jesus. By deemphasizing the importance of the Vietnam War, mainstream, conservative Christians allowed government leaders to continue their current policy in Vietnam.

Members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community demonstrated the uncertainty of their beliefs in the early 1960s through editorials in *Christianity Today*. In December 1964, the magazine depicted the war as a sad event. “We bemoan wars of ‘containment,’” the editorial stated, “that seem to contain only us, and to confer needless advantage upon our enemies. American soldiers die daily in South Viet Nam in a war we have no intention of winning.”⁶⁵ Mainstream, conservative evangelicals positioned themselves to develop an anti-war position because of their sorrow over the growing number of casualties in Vietnam, but reversed their policy two months later. On February 12, *Christianity Today* published an editorial criticizing the 105 clergymen in the Washington, D.C. area who signed a statement asking President Lyndon Johnson to initiate action leading to a cease fire of the war in Vietnam. In addition, the magazine

⁶⁴ “A World Short of Breath,” *Christianity Today*, November 6, 1964, 29.

⁶⁵ “A Test of Moral Courage,” *Christianity Today*, December 4, 1964, 32.

commended the “wise judgment” of the six-hundred clergymen who refused to sign the petition.⁶⁶ After inching toward a position on the war, mainstream, conservative evangelicals soon retreated to a neutral position; they declared that they had no opinion on the war since they did not have the knowledge necessary to make such a decision.⁶⁷ Even Billy Graham expressed indecisiveness to the American public. “I’ve been baffled and mystified by foreign policy for 20 years,” he said, “We have to get in or get out.”⁶⁸

When mainstream, conservative Protestants finally chose a position on the Vietnam War, they elected to support the president, Lyndon Johnson. In April 1965, *Christianity Today* published an editorial glorifying Johnson and the military strength of the United States. President Johnson, a “brave soldier,” the author wrote, had no ulterior motives; the Vietnam War was merely an “honorable pledge” to help South Vietnam.⁶⁹ Contrary to their previous statements about staying out of politics, mainstream, conservative evangelicals at *Christianity Today* took a firm position on the war. They continued publishing editorials supporting Johnson’s Vietnam War policy and criticizing those who did not agree. The editors of *Christianity Today* even disapproved of college students who requested conscientious objector status and declared that those who burned Selective Service cards treaded “perilously close to treason” and “[struck] at the heart of democracy.”⁷⁰ By making statements supporting Lyndon Johnson, the editors at *Christianity Today* instantly became involved in politics, despite their previous statements that they should avoid political affairs at all costs.

⁶⁶ “Ignorance Often Has a Loud Voice,” *Christianity Today*, February 12, 1965, 35.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ “Billy Graham Baffled by Policy in Vietnam,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1964.

⁶⁹ “Halting Red Aggression in Vietnam,” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 1965, 32.

⁷⁰ “Dodging the Draft,” *Christianity Today*, November 5, 1965, 36.

As the war progressed, members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community made bolder and more frequent statements in support of the war. Although conservative Protestants had once expressed sorrow for the lives lost in the war, they quickly eliminated those feelings from their public statements. Acknowledging sadness over the increasing number of North Vietnamese civilians killed in the war, they still asserted that the United States should continue its bombing campaign. Mainstream, conservative evangelicals assumed the United States would win the war this way. Furthermore, they asserted, the civilians in North Vietnam accepted the risk of bombing when their country went to war.⁷¹ Conservative Christians' continued support of the Johnson administration enabled Johnson to maintain his Vietnam policy, despite the growing number of anti-war activists during the late 1960s, including the mainstream and black moderate-liberal Christian communities.

Mainstream, conservative evangelicals made it clear that they had considered other options besides supporting the president. In 1968, *Christianity Today* published a report by a Vietnam veteran, Dr. Harold John Ockenga, which analyzed the options that the U.S. had in regard to Vietnam. First, Ockenga wrote, the United States could withdraw its troops, which would result in a communist takeover of Southeast Asia. Second, the U.S. could negotiate with the North Vietnamese, which would also result in a clear communist triumph. Finally, the United States could "go for victory" in Vietnam, the strategy that Ockenga and *Christianity Today* supported.⁷²

Not only did conservative evangelicals clarify their perspective of the Vietnam War through statements of what they believed, they also emphasized what they did not

⁷¹ William K. Harrison, "Is the United States Right In Bombing North Viet Nam?" *Christianity Today*, January 7, 1966, 25-26.

⁷² Harold John Ockenga, "Report from Viet Nam," *Christianity Today*, March 15, 1968, 35.

believe. In particular, mainstream, conservative Protestants objected to the protesting, anti-war clergymen who could easily give the media and government the false impression that they spoke for the 258,000 clergymen who stayed at home ministering to their parishes.⁷³ Even if religious leaders made up the largest organized group opposing Lyndon Johnson's policy on Vietnam, numerous Christians had given Johnson "expression[s] of support."⁷⁴ Members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community went out of their way to point out that the anti-war Protestant groups did not speak for all Christians.

Despite their efforts to clarify their position in support of the Vietnam War, mainstream, conservative evangelicals also acknowledged an uncertainty about war itself, including the conflict in Southeast Asia. Many of the comments that conservative Protestants made included a disclaimer stating they, as all Christians, disliked war and, like all Americans, wanted peace.⁷⁵ Billy Graham, upon his return from a trip to Vietnam in December 1966, expressed what many mainstream, conservative Protestants thought. "It's a complicated, confusing and frustrating war," he lamented, "I don't see an early end to it."⁷⁶ Even though Graham still firmly believed that American citizens should support Lyndon Johnson, he identified himself as not a "hawk" or a "dove" but rather a "lamb" who mourned over the tragedy of war.⁷⁷ Although Graham and the rest of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community held a pro-war position, they acknowledged the destruction of war in a way that the radical right did not. Both the radical right and conservative Protestants supported the war, but had slightly different

⁷³ "War and Peace in Viet Nam," *Christianity Today*, February 17, 1967, 29.

⁷⁴ "The President's Reaction," *Christianity Today*, August 19, 1966, 42.

⁷⁵ "Viet Nam: Where Do We Go From Here?" *Christianity Today*, January 7, 1966, 30-31.

⁷⁶ "Billy Graham Sees No Early End to War," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1966.

⁷⁷ "Graham Preaches Peace in Viet Nam," *Christianity Today*, January 20, 1967, 36-37.

political positions that Johnson had to try to balance in addition to his anti-war constituents.

When Lyndon Johnson altered his position on the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, mainstream, conservative evangelicals also changed their view of the war in order to stay in line with the government's policy. Johnson announced a bombing halt on October 31, 1968, exactly seven months after he informed the public that he would not run for reelection. Initially, members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community did not know how to view Johnson's sudden change in position. If they chose to fully analyze the situation and ended up selecting an opinion different than Johnson's, they would justify the war as an issue as important as evangelism. Yet if they just blindly agreed with Johnson, they would contradict their past statements in support of the war. The editorial board at *Christianity Today* carefully dictated the position of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community. "Until more facts are in," the editors wrote, "responsible commentary on the cessation of the American bombing should give the greatest benefit of the doubt before assigning a political motive to such a life-and-death matter. One surely hopes that history will confirm compelling non-political reasons, or at least that the politicking was not on the American side."⁷⁸ In essence, mainstream, conservative Protestants decided to give Johnson the benefit of the doubt until an overwhelming majority of credible sources said otherwise. They assumed that Johnson had made a moral and righteous decision instead of bending to American anti-war protestors. This position satisfied members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community because it meant that they could continue to focus on spreading

⁷⁸ "The Bomb Halt," *Christianity Today*, November 22, 1968, 27.

the Gospel. Johnson, at least, did not have to worry about gaining support from at least one Christian political faction.

Protestants from the conservative evangelical political community continued this course of action throughout the transition of governmental leadership from Lyndon Johnson to Richard Nixon. Mainstream, conservative evangelicals supported Nixon and his policies on Vietnam after his inauguration in January 1969. Even though they remained unsure of the best course of action, conservative Protestants believed that “whether or not Mr. Nixon’s decision [was] the ideal one...the welfare of the nation [would] best be served if its people [rallied] behind him and give his plan...time to succeed.”⁷⁹ Even when protestors in America began attacking Nixon’s Vietnamization plan for lack of success, mainstream, conservative Protestants continued to support him. Although they did not consider Nixon’s plan “ideal,” conservative evangelicals saw it as “the best of the available alternatives.”⁸⁰ They continued to take the easy path of finding a position on the Vietnam War that required little thinking and deliberation so that they could continue to focus on evangelism.

As the mainstream, conservative evangelicals involved themselves in American politics by making statements in support of the government’s policy on the war under both Johnson and Nixon, they continued to contradict themselves by asserting that Christian groups did not know enough about politics to make any recommendation of government policy. As late as 1970, conservative evangelicals such as Clark Kucheman argued that churches, whether conservative or liberal, should not be involved in politics. Christians, as “fallible human beings,” Kucheman believed, “cannot claim justifiably to

⁷⁹ “The President’s Viet Nam Policy,” *Christianity Today*, November 21, 1969, 25.

⁸⁰ “Viet Nam – Continuing Impasse,” *Christianity Today*, August 6, 1971, 25.

have God's support for [their] fallible political judgments and actions." Thus, he declared, American Christians should support the president.⁸¹ Kucheman and mainstream, conservative Protestants as a whole, did not acknowledge that they had taken a political position when they made statements in support of government policies. In reality, their position just did not require them to make decisions about the war for themselves.

Throughout the hypocrisy of their political statements, the dedication that members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community had toward their religion remained undeniable. *Christianity Today*, for instance, emphasized missionary work and evangelism in Southeast Asia much more than the anti-war protests in the United States or the Vietnam War itself. When conservative evangelical reporters traveled to Vietnam, they reported on a brigade building a "peace chapel" rather than on the actual war.⁸² The magazine also published countless articles on Protestant missions overseas, including Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and criticized sects of American Christians who only became interested in Vietnam after communists gained strength there.⁸³ Mainstream, conservative Protestants firmly believed that evangelism should be the main concern of Christian groups and publications, regardless of whatever chaos the Vietnam War created. Spreading the Gospel remained their primary goal.

Conservative evangelicals viewed their role in the Vietnam War through their religious ideals. In 1966, conservative evangelical leaders acknowledged that there did not appear to be a quick end to the war in sight and, thus, asked readers to pray for

⁸¹ Clark Kucheman, "Churches and the Viet Nam Issue," *Christianity Today*, October 23, 1970, 15-16.

⁸² "Paratroopers Build 'Peace Chapel,'" *Christianity Today*, June 24, 1966, 39-40.

⁸³ "Putting First Things Second," *Christianity Today*, March 1, 1968, 27.

peace.⁸⁴ Three years later, *Christianity Today* asserted that not only did Christians need to pray for peace, but the entire nation needed to seek God's help as a last resort for a peaceful solution in Vietnam. Furthermore, the magazine stated, Nixon needed to encourage Americans to turn to God.⁸⁵ Members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community supported the position of the United States government and trusted political leaders to make the wisest decisions in regards to the war, but placed the most hope for a peaceful solution in God.

Prayer, conservative evangelicals believed, could bring peace, but demonstrations against the war could not. Thus, they criticized anti-war Christian groups for protesting the war, not only because they disagreed with their position, but also because they thought the demonstrations detracted from the truly important things in life. Protests did not tell the government anything that it did not already know; the presidents surely realized "that the majority of the people [wanted] to see the war end."⁸⁶ Conservative evangelicals believed that anti-war Christian groups ignored the importance of the Gospel. If Protestants choose to mobilize on an issue, mainstream evangelical leaders stated, they should "raise their voices against non-peaceful dissent; they should penetrate the strongholds of the radicals with the Gospel that can transform them."⁸⁷ Peace would only come to the world when every human accepted the Gospel as truth; thus, Christians should not protest the war, but pray for peace and focus on evangelism.

The mainstream, conservative evangelical community's position on the Vietnam War and emphasis on evangelism had several consequences for other American

⁸⁴ "Viet Nam: Where Do We Go From Here?"

⁸⁵ "Prayer for Peace," *Christianity Today*, November 7, 1969, 31.

⁸⁶ "The Peace March: A Post-Mortem," *Christianity Today*, December 5, 1969, 26.

⁸⁷ "Shutting Down the Government," *Christianity Today*, May 21, 1971, 35.

Christians. Conservative Protestant leaders' support of the president, regardless of circumstance, allowed indecisive Christians to justify their own political apathy, particularly towards the war. They simply allowed others, such as Billy Graham and the president, to set policy for them. As long as they prayed for peace, they felt as though they had contributed to the war effort. Thus, the rhetoric of mainstream, conservative evangelicals encouraged Christians to remain apathetic about politics.

The emphasis that conservative evangelicals placed on religion and prayer had a positive influence on other Christian groups. It served as a reminder, much to the horror of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community, that religion and politics cannot be completely separated. Contrary to what conservative Protestants said publicly during the years of the Vietnam War, their actions clearly demonstrated that Christians could incorporate religion into political decisions, such as their position on the war, as well as their everyday choices. The apathy of mainstream, conservative Protestants also allowed Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon to maintain pro-war policies for several years, since the presidents could use the support of conservative evangelicals as justification for their positions and feel they were being accountable to at least a portion of American citizens.

Legacies

The four different Christian political factions left a mixture of legacies for American Christians and the United States as a whole. Christian Crusade and Billy James Hargis believed that they could create their own utopia. Hargis adamantly believed that if he put enough money, effort, and prayer into his ministry, he would eventually win all Americans over to his cause. The radical right viewed the Vietnam

War and every other issue they addressed from this ultimate optimistic point of view. Hargis and members of Christian Crusade realized that not everyone viewed the war in Southeast Asia in the same way, but they did not fully comprehend that not everyone held the same ideals. Today, members of the Christian right continue to embrace these legacies of optimism and perseverance. Conservative Christians, for instance, maintain support for military conflicts abroad that they believe will spread democracy.

After American involvement in Vietnam ended, some of the groups that made up the moderate-liberal Christian community lost strength, but their legacy of political involvement remained. Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam had little to fight for after the Vietnam War finally ended while *The Christian Century* found other issues to debate without too much trouble, since it had never devoted all of its attention to the conflict in Southeast Asia. The magazine joined both the secular world and the rest of the Christian community in the shift to the right and the rise of conservative politics in the United States in the 1970s.⁸⁸ However, the opportunity for part or all of the Christian community to shift back to the left remains to this day; Christians do not have to remain conservative if they find a liberal issue that needs their attention for religious or moral reasons. They can even stage protests and demonstrations in order to ensure that government leaders will remain accountable to the citizens that they represent, as the moderate-liberal Christian community did in the 1960s.

Martin Luther King, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the entire moderate-liberal black Christian community left a legacy similar to members of the mainstream moderate-liberal Christian community. King and SCLC took their attention away from the civil rights movement and turned toward the Vietnam War in order to

⁸⁸ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies* (Cambridge, Mass: Da Capo Press, 2001).

force government leaders to end to the conflict, if possible. Their willingness to emphasize the war needs of the United States before the civil rights needs of the black community and their statements on behalf of the draft dodgers demonstrate the opportunity that all Americans have to overcome oppression, hatred, and differing opinions. Some Americans in recent years have called for the fulfillment of this legacy as the nation becomes further divided over the Iraq War; modern American citizens want to help the nation come together similar to the way in which the black Christian community attempted to heal the nation in the early 1970s.

Members of the mainstream, conservative evangelical community never intended to create the legacy that developed. For all of their efforts to stay out of the politics of Vietnam, mainstream, conservative Protestants became further involved in governmental affairs with every statement they made in support of Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon. They demonstrated to American citizens the possibility of being simultaneously involved in religion, such as evangelism, and politics, such as the Vietnam War; Christians did not have to choose one over the other. Christian politicians of various ideologies embrace this view today, including members of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and use religious rhetoric in order to explain their political views.

Conclusion

Each Christian group left a unique legacy for American citizens from their experiences with the Vietnam War. Collectively, the four distinct Christian communities demonstrated to the political leaders of the United States the ability of the American electorate, specifically Christians, to impact government policy. The various opinions of

the groups on the war made it difficult for presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon to balance their responses to the pro-war communities, such as the Christian radical right and mainstream, conservative evangelicals, and the anti-war factions, including the moderate-liberal Christian community and members of the black, moderate-liberal Christian group. While the conservative Christian communities implied by their support that Johnson and Nixon correctly maintained or escalated U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the moderate-liberal communities asserted that that government needed to be more accountable to anti-war citizens.

At the same time, mainstream, conservative Protestants, moderate-liberal Christians and members of the moderate-liberal black community reminded the government of the victims of the war, including Vietnamese civilians who died during the conflict and white middle-class Americans who avoided the draft or deserted during the war as well as the stereotypical American casualties. The emphasis that conservative Christians placed on missions in Southeast Asia served as much of a reminder of these victims as the statements in support of amnesty for draft dodgers and the money raised on the behalf of Vietnamese civilians made by the two moderate-liberal communities. The groups merely brought the unconventional victims to national attention in different ways.

Collectively, the four groups demonstrated to American political leaders how they could help heal the divisions within the United States after the Vietnam War ended. Both moderate-liberal Christian communities believed that the government should begin with amnesty and forgiveness for white middle-class victims of the war, while mainstream, conservative Christians, in their apathetic view of politics, would follow whatever the government ended up doing. The radical right, though disappointed with the U.S.

“defeat” in Vietnam, still remained optimistic that the world could change and the nation would come together.

In recent years, Americans have quickly equated the current war in Iraq with the Vietnam War. Vietnam left a legacy of defeat that has led to the appearance of countless comparisons and analogies in conversations, newspapers and on the internet. If Americans truly want to do something about the Iraq war, perhaps they could learn from the experiences of American Christians during the Vietnam War. Americans today can take a lesson from the Christian community of the Vietnam era which, because of its division into four political factions, reminded government officials of the numerous political perspectives that voters held and, thus, influenced government policy. They reminded political leaders of the victims of the war, and demonstrated a way in which it could heal the divisions of the nation.

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