

certainly government rhetoric to the contrary, can offset the fact that American policy in Vietnam, a policy devised by high-minded perhaps, but ideologically rigid and unimaginative men--this policy has run amok. The war is not only unjust but unjust, and if that is true then it is not we who are demoralizing our boys in Vietnam, but the government, which asks them to do immoral things.

As the war to us is immoral, so also is the draft. For the National Selective Service Act not only places the major burden of the war on the backs of the poor; it also confronts thousands of men with a choice of either violating their consciences or going to jail.

As the law now stands, for a man to qualify as a conscientious objector he must believe in God. Could anything be more ethically absurd? Have humanists no conscience? Why,--and as a Christian I say this with contrition--some of the most outstanding humanists I know would think they were slipping from their high ideals were they to take steps towards conversion. As a Christian I am convinced it is a gross misfortune not to believe in God, but it is not automatically an ethical default.

Then despite numerous appeals by numerous religious bodies, Congress last spring chose to provide alternative service only for the absolute pacifist. This too is absurd, for the rights of a man whose conscience forbids him to participate in a particular war are as deserving of respect as the rights of a man whose conscience forbids him to participate in any war at all. This is the ancient Jewish and Christian tradition we honor. Yet the tradition we honor the government steadfastly refuses to honor.

So both the war and the draft are issues of conscience. And an issue of conscience is one a man may not seek but hardly one he can avoid.

We admire the way those young men who could safely have hidden behind exemptions and deferments have elected instead to risk something big for something good. We admire them and believe theirs is the true voice of America, the vision that will prevail beyond the distortions of the moment.

We cannot shield them. We can only expose ourselves as they have done. The law of the land is clear. Section 12 of the National Selective Service Act declares that anyone "who knowingly counsels, aids, or abets another to refuse or evade registration or service in the armed forces...shall be liable to imprisonment for not more than five years or a fine of ten thousand dollars or both."