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Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Nondualism in Action

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History shows a paucity of ethically based social action in most of East Asian Buddhist history. In Vietnam, however, the massive suffering caused by the recent wars convinced many Vietnamese Buddhist monastics and laypersons that it was imperative for them to actively engage in the political and social struggles of their country. To determine the form this engagement should take required the forging of a new Buddhism. Arguably the most important theoretician of this Vietnamese movement was the monk Thich Nhat Hanh. In this chapter, I examine the way in which Nhat Hanh drew upon the resources of Buddhist nondualism (no good/no bad, no self/no other) to meet the need for ethical social action by bringing experiential and theoretical nondualism directly to bear upon a socially active "Engaged Buddhism." I discuss Nhat Hanh's wartime actions together with those of the closely related Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and examine the theory behind those actions. Finally, I reflect upon the interface, in this Vietnamese engaged Buddhism, between theory and practice, between nondualism and social action.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a contemporary Vietnamese Zen master and poet. He was chair of the Vietnamese Buddhist peace delegation during the war and was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for the Nobel Peace Prize. He is the author of over sixty books ranging from scholarship to poetry, from mindfulness training to engaged Buddhism. He currently lives in exile in France where he continues his writing, teaching and helping Vietnamese refugees. He is a leader of the international "engaged Buddhism" movement, which seeks to create and nurture vehicles for social action among Buddhists.

Nhat Hanh was born Nguyen Xuan Bao in 1926 in South Vietnam, the son of a petty government official.[1] At 17 he entered Tu Hieu monastery in Hue (central Vietnam) as a novice. His teacher was the Zen master Thich Chan That of the fortieth generation of the Lam Te (Lin-chi, Rinzai) Zen school and of the eighth generation of the Lieu Quan school, an indigenous Vietnamese branch of the Lam Te school. Vietnamese Buddhism has long embraced both Theravada and Mahayana (especially Pure Land and Zen) traditions, with Theravada most popular in the south and Mahayana in the north.[2] Nhat Hanh's studies included both traditions, with emphasis upon mindfulness, *gatha* (short verses) and *koan*.[3]

After a one-year novitiate, Nhat Hanh attended the Bao Quoc Institute and received full ordination in 1949. The name he took, Nhat Hanh, evokes the name of Van Hanh, an eminent monk of the tenth to eleventh centuries, who was proficient in the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism and who served effectively as adviser to the reigning Vietnamese kings. The name Van Hanh means "ten thousand actions," while Nhat Hanh means "one action"; Nhat Hanh declared that he, unlike his eminent predecessor, needed to concentrate on one thing.[4] The evocation of Van Hanh proved apt for Nhat Hanh, who also proved himself dedicated to broad learning both within and without the Buddhist tradition and who followed the politically engaged footsteps of his religious forebear.

Already in the course of his studies, Nhat Hanh stepped out of the well-trod path and asked staff members to change the curriculum "to include more emphasis on philosophy, literature, and foreign languages."[5] When this request was rejected, Nhat Hanh and four others left. He proceeded to establish himself in Saigon, supporting himself by writing novels and poetry while studying at Saigon University. When he graduated, placing first in four subjects, "the elders in Hue wrote asking him to come back and promised to institute a new policy allowing monks to follow studies outside the pagoda."[6] Although he returned vindicated, harmony with the elders was short-lived due to Nhat Hanh's radical ideas.

In 1950 Nhat Hanh and Thich Tri Huu founded Ung Quang Temple in Saigon; this later became An Quang Buddhist Institute, the foremost center of Buddhist Studies in South Vietnam and a center of activism in the Buddhist struggle movement. In 1956 Nhat Hanh founded a new monastic community, Phuong Boi, near Dalat. At this time he taught in a local high school[7] and was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Vietnamese Buddhism* (Phat Giao Viet Nam), the official voice of the Association of All Buddhists in Vietnam (Tong Hoi Phat Giao Viet Nam). In this magazine he began to express in print the ideas of Engaged Buddhism.

In 1961 Nhat Hanh traveled for the first time to the United States, where he studied religion at Princeton and, in 1963, lectured on contemporary Buddhism at Columbia. He maintained contact with the more radical wing of the Buddhist church in Vietnam and at the appeal of one of its leaders, Tri Quang, returned to Vietnam in early 1964, after the fall of Diem. This was a time of tremendous creative activity for Nhat Hanh. Together with other radical Buddhist monks, he quickly began planning the establishment of Van Hanh University, a Buddhist university to fulfill his concept of Buddhist higher education, incorporating the kind of broad curriculum on which he had earlier insisted. He also founded the School of Youth for Social Service, one of the primary vehicles of Engaged Buddhism during the war in Vietnam. During this period, Nhat Hanh and others established a publishing house, which grew to be quite large and influential during the war. He edited the weekly journal *Sound of the Rising Tide,* the official publication of the Unified Buddhist Church, as well as another weekly. He kept up a steady stream of articles, books, and poems calling for peace and reconciliation. His publications were threatening to the governments of both North and South; both banned his collection of poetry *Prayers for the White Dove of Peace to Appear.*

The manner in which Van Hanh University was established is revealing.[8] An Quang pagoda monks agreed to set up a new university with Nhat Hanh's assurance that he would handle the financing. Friends, professors, writers, and others agreed to teach without pay since they were all employed elsewhere. He persuaded the abbots of some pagodas and a nunnery to loan rooms and furniture. Then groups of three went door to door with a letter signed by Nhat Hanh asking for contributions. "If you do kind things with a pure heart, I think you will get support. Money is not the most important thing." Nhat Hanh stresses the importance of relying on the people, not the rich but the poor, who are the source of its strength. "If you have too much, you don't rely on the support of the poor people. You might become arrogant or be cut off from your true resources."

In 1965 Nhat Hanh founded the Tiep Hien Order, the Order of Interbeing, a new branch of the Lam Te school, designed as a manifestation of engaged Buddhism. The order is composed of laypersons as well as monks and nuns. Its charter gives four principles as the foundation of the order: (a) nonattachment to views, "the most important teaching of Buddhism"; (b) direct practice-realization; (c) appropriateness—conformity to the "basic tenets of Buddhism" while engaging oneself to "truly help people"; although there are 84,000 Dharma doors, "even more doors should be opened"; and (d) skillful means.[9]

In 1966 Nhat Hanh made a speaking tour of nineteen countries, arranged by the Fellowship of Reconciliation.[10] In the United States, Nhat Hanh met members of the Senate and House, spoke with then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, spoke on nationwide television, and addressed a large meeting at Town Hall in New York. After a long talk with Martin Luther King, Jr., they held a joint press conference, in which King for the

first time publicly repudiated the war, comparing the Vietnamese Buddhist peace movement with the American civil rights movement. Nhat Hanh also met with Thomas Merton; afterwards, Merton declared, "he and I see things exactly the same way."[11]

As the trip widened to international scope, Nhat Hanh spoke before the Canadian and the Swedish parliaments and before the British House of Commons. He spoke with the Queen of Holland, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dutch and French cardinals. His meeting with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican precipitated a papal mission to Saigon, the aim of which was to encourage Vietnamese Catholic involvement in the peace effort. (Vietnamese Catholics frequently tended to side with the United States and the Saigon government, while the Buddhists struggled against these.)

During this tour, Nhat Hanh publicized his influential "Five Point Proposal to End the War," proposed in Washington, D.C., on June 1, 1966. The proposal asked the United States to:

1. State clearly that it respects the right of Vietnamese to choose the kind of government they want.
2. Cease all bombing, North and South.
3. Declare a unilateral cease-fire.
4. Set a date for total withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Viet Nam (in terms of months) and begin the withdrawal immediately.
5. Help rebuild Viet Nam, all aid being completely free of ideological and political strings.[12]

This tour, and the questions from Western audiences it engendered, led Nhat Hanh to write *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire,* which explained the Vietnamese Buddhist position to the West and in Vietnam became an underground best-seller, though banned by the government; the book was also published in eight translations in other countries.[13] The tour ended on a sorry note for Nhat Hanh personally. Colleagues in the Buddhist struggle movement advised him most strongly not to return. As a result of his speeches around the world, they were sure that upon his return to Vietnam he would either be imprisoned or assassinated (there had been an assassination attempt shortly before he left on his international tour).[14] The Buddhist leadership asked him instead to serve as an expatriate representative of the Buddhist movement. Thus began his life in exile, which continues to the present.

In 1968, at the request of the Unified Buddhist Church, Nhat Hanh established an office in Paris to further the work of the movement outside

Vietnam. In 1969 this office became the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, which Nhat Hanh headed. To help support the group, Nhat Hanh taught Buddhist history at the Sorbonne; other members of the delegation tutored or worked in a Vietnamese restaurant.[15] They worked to publicize the Buddhist position and to influence the Paris Peace Talks, though they were formally barred from participating in them. They worked to "supply information on the situation in Vietnam, send out speakers, put visitors to Saigon in touch with Buddhist social workers, and seek financial help for orphans in Vietnam."[16]

When the Paris Peace Accords were signed, the delegation decided to stop criticism of either side and to devote themselves entirely to reconstruction and reconciliation work.[17] They themselves could not return to Vietnam, as the Saigon government would not respond to their request for visas; on one occasion "a plane was held at the Saigon airport for an hour because of a rumor that Thich Nhat Hanh was aboard."[18]

The Paris office was closed and Nhat Hanh began a retreat period of several years duration in rural France, where he meditated, gardened, and practiced mindfulness, seeking constructive engagement with his new circumstances. During this period he, and members of the group with him, largely curtailed their public visibility, though they worked actively to get information out of Vietnam and to help the boat people fleeing the war's aftermath. In 1976–1977 they organized an effort to pick up the boat people who were drowning in the Gulf of Siam; this effort was ultimately discontinued due to the hostility of the governments of Thailand and Singapore.

Nhat Hanh emerged from this period of relative retreat from public life with his energies devoted to the people both of Vietnam and the West. He and his associates continue to work on behalf of political prisoners in Vietnam and to ease the plight of the Vietnamese people, especially refugees and the very poor. Their base is a practice center in the south of France, Plum Village. Nhat Hanh contributes to the international engaged Buddhism movement with a steady stream of publications, public talks, and frequent workshops in many Western countries. On the day on which this paper was originally given, he conducted a walking meditation at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.[19] This is an example of both his creativity and his ongoing efforts to heal the wounds which continue to be suffered on all sides of the war.

The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: The Struggle Movement

Nhat Hanh's relationship with the political activism of the Unified Buddhist Church (U.B.C.) is a matter of some complexity. The Buddhist

Struggle Movement was not monolithic. Individual monks and nuns' views differed and factions did develop. A contemporary witness of these events, Don Luce, characterizes the Buddhist movement as composed of three main factions.[20] (1) The most visible, politically active group were the An Quang pagoda monks, among whom Thich Tri Quang, Thich Tam Chau, and Thich Thien Minh were the most prominent. This group was aligned with neither Saigon nor the National Liberation Front (NLF). This was the group that was able to stage massive street demonstrations at will, shoring up and bringing down governments. The headlines were theirs. As the war went on, they became progressively angrier and progressively more anti-Saigon and anti-United States, though certainly never pro-NLF. (2) Thich Nhat Hanh, the School of Youth for Social Service and some Van Hanh University people comprised the second group. These were very close in outlook to the first group but less angry and more thorough-going in their pacifism. While some of them certainly engaged in street demonstrations, Nhat Hanh was less inclined to do so, more averse to having anything to do with political machinations, and much more interested in pure, spiritually based pacifism motivated by love and compassion. (3) There was also a pro-NLF faction, though their story has not yet been told. In addition to these three, there were of course also monks and nuns who wanted nothing to do with politics or activism of any kind.

In the following pages I give a brief account of the actions of the U.B.C. during the 1963–1966 period. Nhat Hanh would not necessarily have agreed with all of the actions taken. Nevertheless, he was an important leader in the U.B.C., took actions as he saw appropriate that were in harmony with the overall aims of the U.B.C., and arguably made the most important theoretical contributions to the evolving U.B.C. program. By the same token, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam was also the institution, which, more than any other, nurtured Thich Nhat Hanh as an engaged Buddhist. Thus the relationship between Nhat Hanh and the U.B.C. was mutually formative, though the two cannot be simply identified.

The political power of Vietnamese Buddhists first came to international attention in 1963 with the struggle against Diem. Ngo Dinh Diem, president of South Vietnam, was pro-Catholic and, of course, pro-United States. His strong Catholic identity and sympathies, reinforced by his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and sister-in-law, Madame Nhu, in itself put him out of touch with the 80 percent of the Vietnamese who were at least nominally Buddhist. On May 8, 1963, Buddhists in Hue flew Buddhist flags as part of a celebration of Buddha's birthday.[21] Religious flags were technically illegal, but this had heretofore always been ignored and Vatican flags had only recently been flown for a ceremony honoring Diem's brother. On this occasion, Buddhist flags were torn down. That evening, a crowd gathered at

a radio station when an expected Buddhist program failed to be aired.[22] Thich Tri Quang was inside, arguing with the head of the station and occasionally emerging to calm the crowd. The crowd continued to grow. Government officials arrived and ordered the crowd to disperse. Shortly thereafter, without warning, troops opened fire on the crowd. Eight people were killed, including seven children and one woman. Diem claimed that a Viet Cong hand grenade was responsible, despite a film showing government troops firing. When the American public watched these events on television, American support for the Diem government began to erode.

This event radicalized the Buddhist public of Vietnam and propelled more radical monks into positions of leadership in the Buddhist Church. On May 10, over ten thousand people participated in a protest demonstration in Hue. Buddhist monks demanded "legal equality with the Catholic Church, an end to arrests, greater freedom to practice their faith, and indemnification of the families of victims of the May 8 shootings."[23] Diem ignored these demands and jailed many activist monastics and students.

Note that it was originally government harassment and oppression of the Buddhist Church and its faithful that Buddhists organized to oppose. This kind of Buddhist activism, which struggles against the government expressly for the sake of religious freedom, has a historical precedent.[24] It is, of course, less common for this kind of struggle to escalate into one which can bring down governments and struggle with the greatest military power on the planet, as occurred during the war in Vietnam.

On June 11, the monk Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death in protest of these events. Photographs of the burning monk dominated the front pages of U.S. newspapers the next day, stunning the American public. Under U.S. pressure, Diem signed an agreement acceding to Buddhist demands but failed to change his actions. Tension continued to raise as increasing numbers of monks, nuns, and students protested with marches, strikes, and fasts. The pagodas were the center of many of these activities. Diem, under the influence of the Nhus, identified the Buddhist movement with activities of the Communist National Liberation Front and continued his policy of persecution and arrest. Further self-immolations by Buddhists occurred, which Madame Nhu mocked as "barbecues," as was widely reported in the American news media.[25]

The situation came to a head, from the Buddhist perspective, on the night of August 21, when Diem's forces raided Buddhist pagodas in Saigon, Hue, and other cities in South Vietnam. In the assault, monks were forcefully ousted, 1,420 of them arrested, several killed, about thirty injured and pagodas ransacked. From this point on, coup planning by top South Vietnamese generals became serious. In the United States, the Kennedy administration recognized the politically disastrous nature of Diem's actions in a

country that was 80 percent Buddhist and worried about "the continued reliability of 'the predominantly Buddhist composition of the armed forces' if further Buddhist suicides or demonstrations were attempted."[26] Under the circumstances, the U.S. government gave encouragement to the coup planners.[27] Protests and arrests of protesters continued throughout September and October.

On October 8, Thich Nhat Hanh, who was at Columbia University at the time, presented documents on human rights violations in South Vietnam to the United Nations; the UN General Assembly authorized a fact finding mission. On October 27, in the midst of this mission, a Vietnamese monk immolated himself. Finally, on November 1, the coup occurred; the coup was bloodless except for the executions of Diem and his brother Nhu.

Thich Nhat Hanh has said this about these events:

> Some said the coup was not entirely nonviolent, because, at the end, the army intervened. But even the soldiers did not open fire, although they assassinated Diem and his brother after the coup had taken place.
>
> There was much discussion, though I think it's very hard to draw conclusions. . . . And all the things that we did were done without any prescribed doctrine, from the circulation of mimeographed documents to the self-burning of the Buddhist monks and nuns. In particular, the self-immolations were not planned by any movement at all. They were the decision of individuals.
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> There was no conscious ecumenical movement either. Christians and Buddhists, Catholics and Caodaists—they just struggled together. And we never said, 'Now we have done all we can do. Now you, the army, you have to do the last thing.' Members of the army worked side by side with nonarmy people.
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> There were people who described it as a holy struggle, because the intention was so pure. The struggle in 1966, 1967, and on up to the present has never been as pure as it was in 1963. Because, when we speak of a third force, of replacing the government, of all those things, there is always an intention of seizing or at least sharing power. During the 1963 struggle nobody thought of toppling the Diem government in order to come to power. But after that, in 1964, 1965, and 1966, Buddhists, Catholics, Caodaists, thought of themselves, thought of their own power.
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> I certainly don't mean to say that the more we carry the struggle forward, the more we fall spiritually or morally. But I think the motive of the struggle determines almost everything. You see that people are suffering and you are suffering, and you want to change. No desire, no ambition, is involved. So, you come together easily! I have never seen that kind of spirit again, after the 1963 coup. We have done a lot to try to bring it back, but we haven't been able to.
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> . . . It was so beautiful.[28]

The new regime, headed by General Duong Van Minh, lost no time in establishing good relations with the Buddhists. His first day in office, Minh began freeing 75,000 political prisoners, including many Buddhist monks.

At this time, a four-day Buddhist congress was held that unified Theravada and Mahayana in Vietnam and resulted in the creation of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam. In an opening speech, Thich Tam Chau, who would become one of the leading activists in the Church, enunciated the basic assumptions behind an engaged Buddhism:

> The experiences of recent months have shown us that social events can deeply influence the religious life, because Buddhists are at the same time the citizens of the country. . . . This organization does not aim to dominate, but to guide, educate, and aid disciples to fulfill their social duties. What are those social duties? They are the practice of Buddhist doctrine in daily life, the propagation of this doctrine to the people around them. In other words, the Buddhists have to participate in social and cultural activities.[29]

Again, we see the basic motivation to be the creation and protection of conditions to allow for the free and authentic practice of Buddhism. Here it is made explicit that since social and political conditions can "deeply influence the religious life" it is not only justified, it is a Buddhist's duty to be involved in influencing those social and political conditions in such a way as to permit freedom of religion.

Minh's short-lived administration was noted both for its good relations with the Buddhists and for its disinclination to pursue an aggressive military policy, preferring to look for a negotiated political settlement, possibly involving a "neutralist" government unaligned with any military bloc. "Neutralism" was very much in the air at the time. The United States was very unsympathetic to any talk of neutralism or negotiated political settlements, believing that this would result in defeat for perceived U.S. interests and victory for the North Vietnamese Communists. As the voice claiming to represent the majority of the people, the Buddhist movement became increasingly identified with "neutralism" (the refusal to side with North or South) and a negotiated political, as opposed to military, solution to end the war. Here was the basis for the subsequent chasm between the goals of the American government and those of the Vietnamese Buddhist movement. Through their opposition to the American prosecution of the war, the Buddhist movement also became popularly identified with Vietnamese nationalism, which was expressed in strong opposition to foreign, that is, American, domination.

The Minh regime was overthrown by a coup on January 30, 1964. Discontent among South Vietnamese generals and American mistrust of

the Minh regime both played a role in the coup.[30] Minh's successor, Major General Nguyen Khanh, initially cooperated enthusiastically with American personnel and policy, but he was much more out of step with the wishes of the Vietnamese people, among whom antiwar and neutralist feelings were strong. This was a matter of great concern in Washington. President Johnson instructed Ambassador Lodge that the latter's mission was "precisely for the purpose of knocking down the idea of neutralization wherever it rears its ugly head and that on this point I think that nothing is more important than to stop neutralist talk wherever we can by whatever means we can."[31]

On August 16, Khanh promulgated a new constitution rearranging the government (the "Vungtau Charter"), giving himself sweeping new powers and sharply curtailing civil liberties.[32] Massive demonstrations led by Buddhist activists of the U.B.C. and enthusiastically joined by students followed almost immediately. On August 24, Khanh met with the top three leaders of the U.B.C.—Thich Tri Quang, Thich Tam Chau, and Thich Thien Minh—who demanded "that he abolish his new constitution, establish a civilian government, assure full freedom of religion and expression, and schedule free elections by November 1, 1965."[33] Khanh made concessions that did not fully meet these demands and demonstrations continued to mount.

U.S. General Westmoreland worried that the Buddhist spokesman, Thich Tri Quang, "had not repeat had not agreed to denounce the Communists" and observed that although the army continued to be "the key power factor, it is, at the moment, effectively neutralized . . ."[34] by the Buddhist-led popular movement. A contemporary CIA report reflected American lack of understanding of Buddhist motives, stating that Tri Quang "is capable of allying himself with the Communists at any time such an alliance strikes him as advantageous for his own political ambitions and religious objectives—two causes he almost certainly views as one." It describes him as "a fanatic nationalist, undoubtedly anxious to see the U.S. out of Vietnam at the earliest possible moment. . . . Consequently, some negotiated or neutralist solution which would expedite the U.S. departure must have considerable appeal in his eyes."[35] Such was the American understanding of the Buddhist desire for a negotiated peace, an end to the killing and freedom from foreign domination. The judgment of the final sentence, however, was essentially accurate, as was borne out by subsequent statements and actions of the U.B.C.

Kahin summarizes the situation well. Already at this time,

> the abiding problem for American officials was that the more broadly based and responsible to public opinion a Saigon government became, the less disposed it would be to continue with the fighting, and the greater the popular pressure it would be under to negotiate a neutralist political settlement incompatible with any continuing U.S. presence.[36]

In other words, any government acceptable to the United States, which wanted to pursue the war, would be unacceptable to the Vietnamese people, who wanted to stop the war, and vice versa. It was the Buddhist movement that voiced this popular dissatisfaction with American policy and actions.

This fundamental incompatibility of American and popular Vietnamese wishes that was already well established in 1964 only grew more pronounced. Thich Nhat Hanh's important 1967 work, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire,* refers to the same phenomenon, by then exacerbated by the expansion of the war.

> The business of war itself has been taken over almost completely by the American troops now, with the South Vietnamese army occupying a strictly subordinate role. . . . The more American troops sent to Vietnam, the more the anti-American campaign led by the NLF [National Liberation Front, communist forces in South Vietnam] becomes successful. Anger and hatred rise in the hearts of the peasants as they see their villages burned, their compatriots killed, their houses destroyed. Pictures showing NLF soldiers with arms tied, followed by American soldiers holding guns with bayonets, make people think of the Indochina war between the French and the Viet Minh and cause pain even to the anti-Communist Vietnamese. . . . The spirit of patriotism among the peasants is very high. They are not informed about world history or ideological struggles; what they see is a large force of white Westerners doing their best to kill their fellow countrymen, many of whom previously fought against the French. The peasants do not see the victims of the American military effort as dead Communists, but as dead patriots.[37]

From Nhat Hanh's perspective, it was quite impossible for America to win the war, since every short-term American "success"—killing Vietnamese Communists—alienated the Vietnamese masses and thus promised long-term defeat for America. He wrote, "I know it is a hard fact for Americans to face, but it is a fact that the more Vietnamese their troops succeed in killing, and the larger the force they introduce into Vietnam, the more surely they destroy the very thing that they are trying to build."[38]

Of course, opposition to the American war effort did not constitute the full Buddhist position, the uniqueness of which lay in its refusal to side with either the North or the South, with communism or capitalism. Nhat Hanh wrote:

> The majority of the peasants take little or no interest in the problems of communism or anti-communism. They are direct victims of the war, and consequently they welcome every effort in the direction of ending the war. . . . The more the war is escalated, the more they are its victims, since

> both sides threaten their lives and property. Since early 1964 I have frequented the remote villages of Vietnam. . . . Peasants in these villages hated both sides. The Viet Cong ordered them to dig caves as shelters from the possible bombing, while government troops warned them that if they dug caves, the Viet Cong would use them for resistance against the government. They were warned that if they refused to dig the caves, they would suffer the consequences from the Viet Cong, and they were warned by the government that if they did dig the caves they would be beaten by the government troops. We talked with some peasants . . . and when we had established confidence between ourselves I asked them the question: 'Whom would you follow: the government of South Vietnam or the National Liberation Front?' They replied: 'We do not follow either. We follow the one who can end the war and guarantee that we can live.'[39]

The desire to put an end to the suffering of the powerless was the deepest motivation of the Buddhist antiwar activists. Since both the NLF and the American-backed Saigon government were propagating the war, the Buddhists sided with neither, but with their shared victims: the Vietnamese masses.

In January 1965, when the United States allocated funds to expand the South Vietnamese armed forces from 560,000 to 660,000 men, with a concomitant increase in the draft, Buddhist and student opposition exploded.[40] Huge demonstrations took place in Saigon, Dalat, Nhatrang, Hue, and Danang. The demonstrators were anti-American as well as antiwar and attacked the United States Information Service buildings in Saigon and Hue.

At this juncture, CIA analysis declared that the Buddhists were now "strong enough to make unworkable any set of political arrangements their leaders care to oppose."[41] Ambassador Taylor declared that the Buddhists were "in a position of 'increased prestige and influence in [the] country,' whereby they 'could create an atmosphere conducive to pressures for a negotiated settlement.' "[42] In early 1965, South Vietnamese military weakness, political factionalism, and dramatic growth in the Buddhist movement combined to convince many American leaders that a neutralist government in South Vietnam was immanent.[43] Khanh, souring on the U.S. role in Vietnam, reached an agreement with Buddhist leaders to oust the prime minister they fiercely opposed as too much under the control of American influence. He also began a covert dialogue with the NLF. This was too much for American officials and a number of South Vietnamese generals and Khanh was soon removed from power.

As the war expanded with more and more U.S. ground troops, large numbers of civilians in South Vietnam were being killed in the effort to eliminate Viet Cong. An American Congressional hawk admitted in early 1966 that "an average of two civilians were killed for every Viet Cong, and . . . in some recent search-and-find missions against the VC the ratio has been six civilians to one enemy soldier."[44] This resulted in huge numbers of refugees within South Vietnam and, as Nhat Hanh pointed out, the continued strengthening of antiwar sentiment, channeled by the Buddhists.

Reluctant to directly confront the United States and forbidden to speak of neutralism or negotiations, the Buddhist leadership focused antiwar sentiment on a demand for elections. The Saigon government felt forced by public opinion to promise elections but kept the promise vague and indefinite. The Buddhists continued to press this point. However, elections were strenuously opposed by the U.S. mission who believed that "if any elected assembly sits in Saigon, it will be on the phone negotiating with Hanoi within one week."[45]

In mid-March in Danang, Hue, and Saigon, mass rallies called for the military government to step down and allow free elections. Troops in northern South Vietnam (especially the Danang and Hue areas) were very sympathetic to these demands. Generals in that region refused to use military force against the movement as demanded by the Saigon regime. To buy time, the Saigon government made conciliatory promises to Buddhist leaders Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau that they soon broke. Demonstrations broke out again in Hue and in Saigon, the latter joined by leaders of the South Vietnamese Catholic community. The movement used explicitly anti-American language.

Things came to a head as the Saigon regime lost control of northern South Vietnam. "On April 2 [President] Johnson was advised that in Hue and Danang 'the police, civil servants, and large elements of the local 1st Division [troops] are in total sympathy with the [Buddhist-led] "struggle" group' and that 'anti-American themes have been increasing.' "[46] With American urging, planning, and assistance, the Saigon junta brought Saigon military forces headed by General Ky himself into Danang to crush the opposition, using a U.S. base as a staging ground. However, the local commander, General Nguyen Van Chuan, would not permit the Saigon forces to leave the base. Another general, headquartered in Hue, also declared for the Struggle Movement. Ky was forced to back down. Publicly, concessions were made to the Buddhists and Ky promised to withdraw his troops from Danang. Privately, Ky left his troops out of sight on the American base and organized a larger build-up. Ky promised elections for a constituent assembly to be held within three to five months, the resignation of the military government immediately after the elections and a political, rather than a military, solution in the area of the uprisings. "On the basis of these promises, which they understood [Ambassador] Lodge had concurred in," Tri Quang and other Buddhist leaders called off the demonstrations, with Tri Quang himself making a personal appeal in Hue.[47]

During a few weeks of calm, the Saigon government prepared their assault. In early May, Ky announced that the government would break most of the promises it had made to the Buddhists. On May 15 the military crackdown on Danang was begun. Using American arms, tanks, and bases, and moving at a time when local troops supportive of the Struggle Movement had been lured away, the junta crushed the opposition. Thousands of Buddhist families placed their sacred family altars in the streets to block the tanks' passage, to no avail. After two days "of bitter fighting . . . Ky's forces had captured the Struggle Movement's strongholds, including one pagoda compound described by [the *New York Times*'s Neil] Sheehan as looking like 'a charnel house.' The 700 local troops who backed the Struggle Movement surrendered, along with the monks, Buddhist boy scouts, students, and other civilians aligned with them."[48] On the heels of these events, Thich Nhat Hanh narrowly escaped an assassination attempt and left Vietnam on May 22, invited by the Fellowship of Reconciliation to represent the Buddhist cause before the American people. This became the international tour that ended in his exile.

In Vietnam, "Ky moved quickly against the Buddhists in Saigon, his troops using fixed bayonets and tear gas to drive some two thousand monks, nuns, and others into a pagoda compound, and arrested twenty leaders at the Buddhist Youth headquarters along with several labor leaders."[49] When "student supporters of the Struggle Movement in Hue . . . burned the U.S. consulate and USIS library there," Ky moved against Hue. "By June 19 his troops were in control of all Hue, and soon arrested Tri Quang and several hundred other Buddhist monks and university and high-school students."[50] Tri Quang was quickly released, but many other monks "were still in prison nine years later when the Saigon government fell."[51] Shortly thereafter, the crackdown on the Saigon Buddhist movement was completed. On June 25, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge "publicly praised Ky's regime for its stand in putting down the Struggle Movement, referring to this as 'a solid political victory.' "[52]

This was the end of the last major challenge the Buddhist movement posed to the South Vietnamese government and the United States. Although Buddhist struggle and protest continued with massive popular support and many successful peace campaigns, it never regained momentum sufficient to bring down a government or change the course of the war. The two main reasons for this were: first, the Thieu-Ky regime in Saigon stayed in step with American expectations and thus enjoyed firm political and military backing from the latter; and second, the Buddhist movement was fiercely suppressed by the Saigon government from the May 1966 crackdown until the end of the war. As an illustration, the U.B.C. obtained documents in 1968 showing that of 1,870 prisoners in Chi Hoa Prison, Saigon, 1,665 were listed on the daily census as "Buddhists," fifty as "Communists."[53]

Forms of Buddhist Engagement

As noted previously, the beginning of Buddhist engagement in Vietnam was the struggle to protect the practice of Buddhism. The goal of the movement steadily widened, however, to a struggle against political oppression and for peace. In the following we briefly consider some of the forms that the Struggle Movement took during the war. Nhat Hanh lists many such actions in *Love in Action,* of which I can mention only a few.[54] Note that the following were variously participated in by clergy and laity.

1. The works of "anti-war writers, composers, poets and artists"[55] were used to inspire and educate people on the popular level. Antiwar songs in particular spread quickly and were an effective vehicle for education, for promoting solidarity within the movement, and for holding attention on a given issue. A number of Nhat Hanh's poems were used in this way.

> A peace song based on a poem of Thich Nhat Hanh's was one of several widely used in every province of South Vietnam as teams travelled to explain and sing about "Do Not Shoot Your Brother":
>
> Our enemy has the name of hatred
> Our enemy has the name of inhumanity
> Our enemy has the name of anger
> Our enemy has the name of ideology
> Our enemy wears the mask of freedom
> Our enemy is dressed in lies
> Our enemy bears empty words
> Our enemy is the effort to divide us.
> Our enemy is not man.
> If we kill man, with whom shall we live?[56]

2. Fasting was engaged in by individuals and by large and small groups. "One fasts to pray, to purify one's heart and strengthen the will—or to arouse the latent awareness and compassion of the population."[57]

3. Family altars were placed in the street in the path of approaching tanks. In the context of traditional Vietnamese values, this was a drastic action. Placing the family altar before an approaching tank, one symbolically placed one's ancestors, the embodiment of the family, before the tank. In other words, one risked everything.

4. Some shaved their heads in protest against the government. In shaving one's head one took on the appearance of a Buddhist monk or nun, reminding government officials of Buddhist values and showing one's support of them. A foreign minister and a senator took this act in protest against government policies.

5. Noncooperation with the government was broadly adopted. Noncooperation included strikes, the return of government licenses, mass resignations of university professors and administrators, the boycott of classes by students, and the refusal to participate in the war. "All of these have been met with atrocious reprisals."[58]

6. The aid and protection of deserters and draft resisters was crucial. Buddhist activities formed an underground network to help hide those who refused to serve in the government army. Both deserters and those who hid them were imprisoned upon discovery. "In cases where a draft resister has been found hidden in a family's home, the entire family—including children—has been arrested."[59]

7. The most drastic act was self-immolation by Buddhist clergy and laypersons for the sake of awakening and educating the people.[60] This subject requires extra attention. Although this was a very powerful form of the Buddhist antiwar struggle, Nhat Hanh emphasized that it should not be conceived as violent. It was a manifestation of the individual's inability to bear the suffering of the people and a powerful attempt by the individual to reach the hearts of others. By demonstrating in this way the suffering of war, the self-immolator hoped that those who supported or perpetuated the war would likewise become unable to bear the pain of war and stop the actions that allowed it to continue.

Although these acts were associated with the U.B.C. and the Buddhist antiwar struggle, they were not sanctioned by these groups. Nhat Hanh writes, "Self-immolation usually occurs at a most unexpected moment and is not included in the program of action. No one has the courage to arrange for someone else's self-immolation. Whenever a person has declared his intention to burn himself the Buddhist Church has appealed to preclude the tragic act. But once such an important decision has come to a man, the authority of the Church is no longer important."[61] And again:

> We do not intend to say that self-immolation is good, or that it is bad. It is neither good nor bad. When you say something is good, you say that you *should* do that. But nobody can urge another to do such a thing. So such a discussion is not pursued in order to decide whether self-immolation is a good tactic in the nonviolent struggle or not. It is apart from all that. It is done to wake us up.[62]

Neither is the act a suicide. Nhat Hanh personally knew at least two of those who immolated themselves: Thich Quang Duc, a monk, and Nhat Chi Mai, a student. Nhat Hanh wrote, "It was because of life that they acted, not because of death."[63] Before her death, Nhat Chi Mai happily devoted herself to her parents for a month. Then she baked a cake and brought it to the Buddhist community, wearing a beautiful dress. "We had never seen her in that dress before, and many thought that she was going to marry and that was why she had deserted the community for one month. She brought a banana cake that she had made at home. She divided it up and gave it to every one of us. And how she laughed! Many suspected that she was going to get married. She was so joyful. And then two days later they heard the news."[64]

Nhat Chi Mai wrote Nhat Hanh "a simple letter": "Tomorrow I go to burn myself for peace; please don't worry, peace will come soon."[65] As she died, Chi Mai embodied reconciliation, kneeling in a position of worship before statutes of the Virgin Mary and the Bodhisattva of Compassion Quan Am (Kuan Yin, Kannon) that she had placed before her.

In addition to these struggle actions, the Buddhist movement led, organized, and inspired many kinds of action for relief, healing, and reconstruction, which should also be mentioned.[66]

1. Perhaps best known was the Buddhist role in evacuating villagers caught in the cross fire or lying before the approaching line of battle. In such cases, Buddhist monks and nuns dressed in their yellow robes and carrying the Buddhist flag for visibility would form a double column and walk the villagers out of immediate danger. As a rule, neither of the battling sides would fire on such Buddhist phalanxes, though without the yellow robes in evidence, they would surely have been targeted.

2. Sometimes monks helped establish cease-fire lines outside of villages by approaching both sides, at considerable risk, and convincing them to retreat to lines outside the villages.

3. Buddhist social workers worked to reconstruct villages destroyed in battle. This meant doing everything from rebuilding buildings, to mending the social fabric and healing psychological wounds. They sometimes had to return to rebuild the same village time and again.

4. Buddhist social workers worked actively on behalf of war orphans. Their programs were diverse. They built and operated familylike orphanages, sometimes staffed partially "with 'grandparents'—old people who had lost their families in the war." Based on the old tradition of relatives taking in a parentless child, they raised money with their "orphans-in-families" program to make it possible for desperately impoverished relatives to take in an orphan. Their "school-home" program provided a place for fatherless children, "half orphans," to go during the day and be cared for by social workers while the mother worked.[67]

5. Even during the war, Buddhist social workers were actively engaged in working to renew Vietnamese society, especially in the countryside. They worked to educate, to teach new agricultural methods, basic medicine, sanitation, and so on. This was conceived as a "rice-roots" effort in which "Buddhist social workers see themselves as catalysts for the common discussions where people themselves have to take a stand with regard to what should be done and how."[68]

Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Buddhist Ethics

When Diem fell, the activist Buddhists of Vietnam found themselves virtually overnight in a position of tremendous power and prominence. The eyes of the people of Vietnam, as well as of all the global parties to the conflict, were upon them. What should they do next? Completely unprepared, they needed to understand their role both in the light of their immediate situation and in the context of Buddhist values.

Events moved too fast, with crisis following crisis, and time was too short for anything like an adequate consideration of the issues. Yet the issues were there, were wrestled with, and continue to be wrestled with. Prominent among Buddhist activists publicly contemplating the principled foundation of Buddhist social activism was and is Thich Nhat Hanh. In his works written during the war and since, we see one creative attempt to come to Buddhist terms with the imperative posed by the "lotus in a sea of fire": Vietnam.

What kind of ethical principles are embodied in the engaged Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh? We can open this by examining one of his poems.

Please Call Me By My True Names

Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.

Look deeply: I arrive in every second
to be a bud on a spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
in order to fear and to hope,
the rhythm of my heart is the birth and
death of all that are alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the
surface of the river,
and I am the bird which, when spring comes,
arrives in time to eat the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the
clear water of a pond,
and I am also the grass-snake who
approaching in silence,
feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly
weapons to Uganda.

I am the 12-year-old girl, refugee
on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean after
being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo, with
plenty of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his
"debt of blood" to my people,
dying slowly in a forced labor camp.

My joy is like spring, so warm it makes
flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it
fills up the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and my laughs
at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion.[69]

This poem locates ordinary human morality in the same realm as animal and even plant behavior. He says "I" am a bud, a tiny bird, a caterpillar. This reflects traditional Buddhist ideas about the nature of human being: we humans are not a special class, different in our essential nature from other forms of life. We are beings who live many lives, and in the endless round of birth after birth, we are born sometimes in the form of human beings, sometimes in animal forms, sometimes as gods, sometimes as hell beings, sometimes in other mythological forms. Given this idea, it is natural to locate human behavior and even human morality in the same realm as that of other life forms.

How, then, do animals behave? The mayfly metamorphoses; the bird eats the mayfly. The frog swims happily, the grass-snake eats the frog. Is there good and evil here? Is there right and wrong? We certainly do not

ordinarily think so. As the Taoists say, "The Tao is not humane"; in other words, Mother Nature does not operate by our standards of right and wrong; morality does not apply in the nonhuman world of nature.

Nhat Hanh goes on to create a parallel between the snake eating the frog and the arms merchant selling deadly weapons to Uganda, to the detriment of the starving Ugandan child. Again, he parallels these with the sea pirate who rapes a 12-year-old Vietnamese boat-girl, who in her anguish throws herself into the sea. Is there not right and wrong here? Are these not great evils being committed against innocent children? Any moral system would surely recognize the unequivocal wrong of such acts. How can Nhat Hanh suggest that the sea pirate and the arms merchant are in any way like the blameless bird or the snake?

In Nhat Hanh's view, the sea pirate and the arms merchant are indeed like the bird and the snake. All are driven in their actions by the same forces: hunger seeks satiation, fear seeks to avoid what is feared, revulsion seeks to avoid the repulsive, desire seeks to attain the desired, power seeks to exercise dominance. Human ideas of good and bad are meaningless in this context, as Nhat Hanh reveals by his repeated use of the word "I." I am the frog and I am the snake: if I were born a frog I would enjoy swimming in the pond; if I were born a snake, I would seek a frog for dinner. Likewise, Nhat Hanh says, "if I had been born in the village of the pirate and raised in the same conditions as he was, I am now the pirate."[70] It is important to recall that in the Buddhist view there is no soul or self that could be in its essence good or bad. While we live in samsara—the world of birth after birth after birth, the world of confusion and ignorant passions—we are conditioned beings. What I am is the product of my karma, my past actions in this life and previous lives. But if my karma causes me to be born in conditions of abject poverty, ignorance, and hopelessness, the person I become in this life will be the product of these conditions. So just as the snake behaves as it does on the basis of the conditions of its birth and its experiences in this life, so do human beings.

Two implications follow from this perspective. First, there is of course sorrow for the starving Ugandan child and the Vietnamese boat-girl; they also are the victims of the conditions of their birth. The first principle of Buddhism is suffering. The entire point of Buddhism from beginning to end is to eradicate suffering; this is the goal of each and every sincere Buddhist. So this is by no means a heartless view, despite the parallel drawn between the mayfly and frog on the one hand and the Ugandan and Vietnamese children on the other.

If the first principle of Buddhism is suffering, the second principle is the necessity of looking carefully at suffering, not turning one's face from it, seeing it clearly and understanding its roots. And part of seeing suffering

clearly is feeling strongly that suffering; Nhat Hanh says I am the Ugandan child, I am the Vietnamese boat-girl. He not only feels sorry for them, he indicates that it is possible and necessary to feel complete empathy with the victims of hardship. Nhat Hanh says, "I feel the hunger, the misery, the despair that those children feel; the identical feelings that are in their hearts are in mine; there is no separation between us." This is surely the very opposite of heartlessness, and in fact suggests a degree of emotional commitment more intense than that usually expected in our Western ideas of pity.

Second, there is no judgment called for with respect to the sea pirate or the arms merchant, any more than there is for the snake and the bird. If you or I had been born under those conditions, you or I would be the sea pirate or arms merchant and as Nhat Hanh puts it, "I cannot condemn myself so easily." Furthermore, "If you take a gun and shoot the pirate," he says, "you shoot all of us," not only because that could and would be me if I were born under such circumstances but also "because all of us are to some extent responsible for this state of affairs."[71] This reflects Nhat Hanh's emphasis upon the interconnections that constitute conditioned origination, *pratitya-samutpada*. Everything that exists comes into being as a result of certain causes and conditions. These causes and conditions, in turn, are all interlocking and interdependent in an endlessly complex way. Therefore, in this view, everything that happens is related, albeit distantly for the most part, to everything else that happens. In that sense, I am, and each one of you is, partially responsible for the arms merchant's and the sea pirate's actions. In that sense, there is clearly no place for one person to sit in judgment upon another here.

Does it follow that morality is to be ignored altogether? By no means; we have already seen the morality implicit in Nhat Hanh's identification with both victim and victimizer. The end of his poem suggests the hoped-for state of morality. "Please call me by my true names" says Nhat Hanh. I am the joy and the sorrow; I am the killer and the killed. We cannot simply identify with the boat-girl and affirm her suffering while negating the sea pirate as "bad." Through identifying with both, we can overcome such a dualistic attitude toward the complexities of suffering. Through this identification with both good and bad, through meditative discovery of the impulses behind one's own "goodness" and "badness" one can finally put aside these categories and "wake up," opening one's heart to compassion.

We may take the compassion of which Nhat Hanh speaks as a reference to Buddha nature. Buddha nature is our "true self," our true identity, whose nature is constituted by wisdom and compassion. In Mahayana thought, Buddha nature is absolutely differentiated from ego personality. The latter lives in and is conditioned by the samsaric world of ethical judgment.

Buddha nature has no relation to that world, but is naturally and spontaneously compassionate, selfless, and altruistic. Thus there is a "goodness," called "compassion," beyond dualistic, judgmental good and evil.[72] This is the hoped-for moral condition.

In sum, this poem expresses an affirmation of a naturally compassionate Buddha nature as well as experiential identification with both victim and victimizer. In the context of an imperative to eliminate suffering, this produces Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhism.

Regarding the means for making this vision a reality, all of Nhat Hanh's writings on socially engaged Buddhism emphasize the necessity of meditative and/or mindfulness practice. That this must be so follows directly from what was just stated. Both experiential identification with victim and victimizer and actualization of Buddha nature ordinarily are not attained without meditative practice. Both require self-knowledge beyond the level of ego personality as well as the ability to act in a way free of ego involvement. These are fruits of meditative practice. Consequently, an emphasis upon the necessity of meditative practice for the social activist is probably the most fundamental of Nhat Hanh's teachings. His work, *The Miracle of Mindfulness,* was written during the war years for the sake of students of the School of Youth for Social Service. Its message was the integration of meditation into their social work; its content was instruction in mindfulness practices that could be used in the context of wartime service to others. *Being Peace,* written for Western peace activists, has the same message: in order to make peace, one must "be peace"—that is, by practicing mindfulness in the midst of all one's activities.

From Theory to Action

What principles for action can we see in Nhat Hanh's thought—specifically, what principles for action in wartime? I perceive two core principles of action in Nhat Hanh's words and deeds. These also can be discerned, in my view, as the larger outlines of action of the Buddhist Struggle Movement as a whole.

1. The first principle of action is always to stop all killing and acute suffering as quickly as possible and to ameliorate suffering when stopping it is impossible. During the war, this meant first and foremost unswerving efforts to end U.S. bombing and to bring about a cease-fire. No other principles, allegiances, concern about subsequent consequences, or other considerations were allowed to compromise this most basic principle. On this principle, Nhat Hanh and the Buddhist Struggle Movement both were unbending.

As Nhat Hanh said, "I always put peace and human life above everything."[73] In one conversation, he made clear that peace in Vietnam was more important than the survival of Buddhism, and the survival of the Vietnamese people was more important than the survival of the Vietnamese nation.[74]

In Nhat Hanh's Buddhism, as I see it, there *are* some absolutes and these follow very much in the spirit of the Four Noble Truths. All of Buddhism is founded upon the First Noble Truth and its practical implication: there is suffering and it is a problem. All of Buddhism amounts to no more than the determined effort to eliminate suffering (truths Two, Three, and Four). This absolute withstands even the *Heart Sutra*'s emptying of the Four Noble Truths. Without recognition of the problematic nature of suffering and the determination to eliminate it, there is no Buddhism. Although Mahayanists empty the Noble truths, in practice the Four Vows of the Mahayana practitioner reinstate the absolute status of the imperative to eliminate suffering.

In fact, even the emptying of the Four Noble Truths can be seen as reinforcing this imperative, to the extent that emptying the Four Noble Truths guards against dogmatism and idolatry, agents of ignorance and suffering. Nhat Hanh makes this plain in his commentary on the first precept of the Tiep Hien Order, the "Order of Interbeing" that he founded during the war, which reads: "Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth." His commentary states, "In the name of ideologies and doctrines, people kill and are killed. . . . This precept includes the precept of not killing in its deepest sense."[75]

Arguably, certain forms of suffering, for example, mild humiliation, rejection, disappointment, loss, and so on may be a necessary part of a practitioner's path and may even be engendered by his or her teacher (Nhat Hanh himself burned down a monk's hut to deliver a lesson in impermanence). But such things are in a totally different category from the kinds of suffering endured by the peasants of Vietnam during the war (death, torture, dismemberment, persistent mortal terror, starvation, orphanhood), perpetrated upon them by strangers with no concern for their well-being. These are simply evils.

Perhaps the word "evil" here evokes the wrong connotations, a Christian worldview of negative judgment upon evil. That kind of judgment does not play a role here. It is not that the Buddhist observes the suffering of the innocent from outside (from a God-like position of removal, or a scientific neutrality), makes a judgment that what she or he sees is wrong and then determines to take action. Rather, the scenario, as described by Nhat Hanh, is one in which the Buddhist identifies with those who are suffering in the sense that he or she experiences that suffering as his or her own and on

that basis acts to remove the suffering. Nhat Hanh said during the war that being "on the spot," the suffering caused by bombing and oppression "hurts us too much. We have to react." In Cambodia also, he said, the bombing "hurt" so much that the monks went out to demonstrate.[76] Monks and nuns were pained by the suffering that they took as their own and acted out of that pain to try to remove the cause of pain. Nhat Hanh describes this in terms of the Buddhist elimination of the isolated ego, resulting in the end of an experiential sense of an absolute separation between self and other, and an ability to experience the "other" as in some sense "self." Here he discusses the relevance of this manner of experiencing for "social work":

> When reality is perceived in its nature of ultimate perfection, the practitioner has reached a level of wisdom called non-discrimination mind—a wondrous communion in which there is no longer any distinction made between subject and object. . . . I have a pile of orphan applications for sponsorship on my desk. I translate a few each day. Before I begin to translate a sheet, I look into the eyes of the child in the photograph, and look at the child's expression and features closely. I feel a deep link between myself and each child, which allows me to enter a special communion with them. . . . [This is] a kind of non-discrimination mind. I no longer see an "I" who translates the sheets to help each child, I no longer see a child who received love and help. The child and I are one: no one pities; no one asks for help; no one helps. There is no task, no social work to be done, no compassion, no special wisdom. These are moments of non-discrimination mind.[77]

There is also in this activist Buddhist response to suffering an echo of the Mencian "heart that can't bear" suffering. Nhat Hanh says of Thich Quang Duc and Nhat Chi Mai, two of the Vietnamese Buddhists who immolated themselves during the war and whom he knew well, "Both have left very lucid poetry and letters. When you read them, you sense their desire to live. But they could not bear the sufferings of others. They wanted to do something or to be something for others."[78]

The principle of absolute opposition to the suffering occasioned by war is articulated in the twelfth precept of the Tiep Hien Order. It states: "Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and to prevent war."[79]

2. The second principle of action that I perceive in Nhat Hanh and, to an extent, in the Struggle Movement, is nonseparation from all parties involved in conflict. This involves both a refusal to take sides with one party against another and a commitment to work toward reconciliation and healing. Certainly, no victory of any side or party against any other is envisioned. Success is the overcoming of distrust, antipathy, blame, and so on

and the creation of harmonious community in which the former enemies all participate. In practice for both Nhat Hanh and the Struggle Movement, this meant the Buddhist refusal to take side with either the North or the South, with the NLF or with the Saigon government, with the U.S. or with "Communism."

Action to bring about reconciliation is based upon sympathy for and identification with all parties engaged in a conflict and, in Nhat Hanh's case, reflects the nondualism and nonjudgmental quality of his ethics. These values are expressed in the following mindfulness exercise, which Nhat Hanh recommends to Buddhist social activists.

> [T]ake the situation of a country suffering war or any other situation of injustice. Try to see that every person involved in the conflict is a victim. . . . See that the situation is possible because of the clinging to ideologies and to an unjust world economic system which is upheld by every person through ignorance or through lack of resolve to change it. See that two sides in a conflict are not really opposing, but two aspects of the same reality. See that the most essential thing is life and that killing or oppressing one another will not solve anything. Remember the Sutra's words:
>
> In the time of war
> Raise in yourself the Mind of Compassion
> Help living beings
> Abandon the will to fight
> Wherever there is furious battle
> Use all your might
> To keep both sides' strength equal
> And then step into the conflict to reconcile.
>
> *Vimalakirti Nirdesa*[80]

The practice of nonseparation from all parties engaged in a conflict is less straightforward than the practice of acting to end suffering. The element of complexity seems to lie in the practice of identification with both the oppressed and the oppressor. Nhat Hanh has said,

> . . . If nonviolence is a *stand,* then it would be an attack on violence. But the most visible form of violence is revolutionary and liberational violence. So if you stand for nonviolence, you automatically stand against actual revolution and liberation. Quite distressing! No! we are not against revolution and liberation. We are against the other side, the side of the institutions, the side of the oppressors. The violence of the system is much more destructive, much more harmful, although it is well-hidden and not so visible. We call it institutional violence. By calling ourselves nonviolent

> we are against all violence, but we are first against the *institutional* violence.[81]

Contrast this with the poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names." There we saw Nhat Hanh say "I am" the frog and the snake, the Ugandan child and the arms merchant, oppressor and oppressed. Here, on the other hand, is language of siding with one side against another, standing with the oppressed against the oppressors. And while it is true that during the war the Buddhist Struggle Movement sided with neither North nor South (and the difficulty of this neutrality in time of war is not to be minimalized), is it not the case that the Buddhist Church and Nhat Hanh as well sided with the Vietnamese people against the foreign perpetrators of the war, the United States? How are we to understand this? This is not an idle question; the question at stake is how it might be possible to reconcile Mahayana nondualism (here, unity with oppressed and oppressor) with concrete social action.

As I see it, it is entirely correct to say that the Buddhists sided with the Vietnamese people, but not entirely correct to say that they took sides against the United States. In the first place, siding with Vietnamese people meant adhering to principle #1, working to end suffering. Again, in this ethic, opposition to suffering is a noncompromisable absolute to which all other concerns are subordinate. Who was suffering the most during the war? The Vietnamese people. Hence the necessity of taking their side. Moreover, in this particular conflict, taking the side of the Vietnamese people already entailed siding with neither North nor South. We have already seen how the peasants were victimized by both powers. In that situation, as Nhat Hanh put it, "Peasants may give rice as tribute to the NLF, have a son in the government army—and demonstrate with the Buddhists"[82]

Second, what does it mean to "oppose the United States?" The Buddhist movement obviously never opposed the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam in the sense of perpetrating or advocating any harm to them. They saw Vietnamese and American soldiers alike as victims of more powerful forces that created a confluence of events in which these people were caused to kill and be killed. As Nhat Hanh put it earlier, "See that two sides in a conflict are not really opposing, but two aspects of the same reality." The single reality of which all were victims was a fearful world divided into American and Soviet camps. Seeing the American soldiers as victims in the same way that the Vietnamese soldiers were victims, they were not the target to be opposed. In opposing the United States, the Buddhists were opposing the underlying cause of the suffering of all involved, Vietnamese peasant and soldier as well as American soldier. During the war, Nhat Hanh in particular saw the underlying cause of suffering to be the policies emanating from Washington. It was this that he opposed. Others in the Struggle Movement leadership came progressively to share this view, especially after the crushing of the movement in Danang and Hue in 1966.

An incident that occurred during Nhat Hanh's wartime tour of the United States illustrates this. After Nhat Hanh addressed an audience in St. Louis, a man rose during the question period to scornfully ask Nhat Hanh why he was there, in the United States, if he cared so much for his people and their suffering. Nhat Hanh's reply was, "If you want the tree to grow, it won't help to water the leaves. You have to water the roots. Many of the roots of the war are here, in your country. To help the people who are to be bombed, to try to protect them from this suffering, I have to come here."[83] Note that the answer refers back to principle #1 and to the Four Noble Truths: to put an end to suffering is the motive and goal; to attain the goal one must determine the cause of suffering and remove that cause. It was the cause of suffering that Nhat Hanh and the Struggle Movement opposed.

It is important to recognize that in opposing American policies, the Buddhists were not in actual opposition to any living persons. Should we say that they were in opposition to the American president? I have heard Nhat Hanh speak of the extent to which our presidents are the product of forces outside of themselves and that their actions are largely controlled by their perception of the American public's views, political constraints, and the like. The same would apply to the small circle of men surrounding the president and filling his ear. Examining the situation, Nhat Hanh sees conditioned origination, nonseparation, or to use his own word, interbeing. As a consequence, an individual president or powerful policymaker cannot be singled out for personal blame. His actions are inextricably interconnected with a vast network of conditions, including the American public's views, the American political system, global economics, Cold War ideology, and so on. These interconnections make it impossible to target a particular individual for personal blame or scorn. They do not, however, freeze the Buddhist movement into inaction. The imperative to put an end to suffering impels them to act, while the web of interbeing prevents one-sided blaming.

> I believe with all my heart . . . that the monks who burned themselves did not aim at the death of the oppressors but only at a change in their policy. Their enemies are not man, they are intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship, cupidity, hatred and discrimination which lie within the heart of man. . . . If we kill man, with whom shall we live?[84]

Note how much this resembles Gandhi's principle of opposing the deed, but not the doer. In both cases, social action is forwarded by opposing

deeds that cause suffering while adhering strictly to nonviolence in an atmosphere ideally characterized by a freedom from personal animosity with an ultimate goal of reconciliation. This similarity is particularly striking, given the difference in underlying beliefs. Gandhi's principle is based upon reverence for the eternal Atman within each individual, Nhat Hanh's upon the very absence of such a thing, that is, the emptiness of self manifested in the web of interbeing.

Thus far we have considered the issue of taking sides with or against oppressor and oppressed on the large geographic scale of nations and regions and the large time scale of a war of many years duration. Now we must briefly consider the small scale in which questions arise of supporting or opposing particular individuals, their policies, and their actions on a day-by-day basis; here I refer to the actions of the U.B.C., rather than Nhat Hanh. We have seen the complexity and the urgency of such judgments in my summary of the influential role played by the Unified Buddhist Church during the war. Prime ministers and cabinet members rose and fell with the support of or withdrawal of support by the U.B.C. The Buddhist struggle movement made specific demands regarding such things as elections, constitutions, and the military draft. They mobilized tens of thousands of people to voice their demands in mass demonstrations. Here is clear siding for and against both policies and individuals. How shall we understand these actions in the context of the second core principle entailing the avoidance of siding with one party against another?

As I see it, the determination to proceed with such acts as demanding elections or calling for the removal of an official is based upon a process we have already identified. The Buddhist leadership decided to take a particular move when they judged that that move would help to attain the larger goal of removing the cause of suffering. The Buddhist leadership and the members of the movement as a whole met frequently, especially during crises, to analyze the situation and decide upon effective action.[85] Tactical and pragmatic considerations played a major role in these deliberations: Did they have sufficient popular backing to make this move? What were its chances of success? Was it too risky, given the likely response of the Americans or any of the powerful Vietnamese groups? Was the time right for this? Did they have the necessary resources? Did they have any allies for this move?

Whereas I have argued that considerations such as these were not allowed to compromise the core principle of working to end suffering, such tactical and pragmatic matters did and clearly *had to* influence decisions about particular moves under particular conditions. Given the absolute adherence to principle #1, the imperative to end the suffering, they could not risk failing in the larger aim of stopping the war for the sake of some lesser goal, such as demanding the ouster of a particular prime minister, which was conceived as leading to that larger goal. On the level of practical action in a prolonged struggle, means-ends considerations are inescapable; this requires the careful study of detailed information, brainstorming (conceiving of alternative possible actions), weighing alternative actions, judging which action will be most effective in the light of the countless interconnections of the web of interbeing, and deciding upon a course of action and implementing it.

Moreover, while the particular actions taken by the U.B.C. frequently did involve opposing powerful government individuals, in a sense, the Gandhian principle of opposing the action of the individual, but not the individual himself, was still in place. That is, clearly no individuals were opposed in the sense that any physical harm was done to them, and members of the Buddhist movement did struggle not to wish ill to any individuals personally. This was not always easy. After members of the movement were killed, students of the School of Youth for Social Service "declared that they couldn't hate those who killed their friends." Sister Phuong, Nhat Hanh's close associate, admits though, "For myself . . . I must confess that sometimes I find it very difficult not to hate."[86]

In sum, principle #1, the imperative to stop suffering, takes the engaged Buddhist out of a frozen position and demands action. Principle #2, nonseparation from all parties, requires that that action accord with Mahayana nondualism. However, principle #2, nonseparation from all parties, is less straightforward in practice and opens up difficult theoretical and practical issues.

I must reemphasize that Nhat Hanh himself did not engage in, or necessarily support, all the particular acts of the Buddhist Struggle Movement. I see three main reasons for this. First was temperament: as a human being he was and is more of a philosopher than the kind of activist who takes to the street. He did not, however, by any means negatively judge those who did take to the streets and in fact very much supported them. As we have seen, he composed some of the most effective slogans and songs used by those in the streets. He spoke of Thich Tri Quang as, "a man of action, and of courage and intelligence, whose life is good."[87]

Secondly, Nhat Hanh had an aversion to politics and political machination, to strategy and tactics. This comes out repeatedly in his writings. "Out of love and the willingness to act, strategies and tactics will be created naturally from the circumstances of the struggle. Thus, the problems of strategy and tactics are of secondary importance. They should be posed, but not at the beginning."[88] He hoped for a movement motivated by love and compassion; questions of political power muddied the waters. Of that most political of the activist monks, he wrote:

> *Only love and sacrifice can engender love and sacrifice.* This chain reaction is essential to the nonviolent struggle. Thich Tri Quang did not make strategy: he fasted 100 days. And everyone who passed by the Duy Tan clinic at that time had to hold his breath.[89]

Nhat Hanh's own contributions to the movement were of a nature that attempted to keep the focus on bringing about peace, ending suffering, recognizing that my enemy is not man, that I should not "shoot my brother." He spent much of his time in the countryside, working for the peasants in an atmosphere far less politicized than that of the urban centers. Thomas Merton said of Nhat Hanh, "He represents the least 'political' of all the movements in Viet Nam."[90]

Finally, Nhat Hanh was as active as anyone during the war, but the acts in which he engaged were different from those of most activist Buddhists. Nhat Hanh was the single most prominent expatriate Vietnamese Buddhist activist. He chose/was asked to fill this role partially because of his Western expertise and partially because of his conviction that the roots of the war were found in the United States. He saw himself as working on the root of the problem in his talks with Western leaders and his missions to the United Nations and to the Paris Peace Talks. He wrote:

> . . . Thich Tri Quang believes that we may attain peace indirectly by means of political maneuvering and through elections. . . . I doubt myself that much will be gained by indirect political maneuvering against the government and the Catholics, so long as the United States is determined to continue the war. Underlying the struggle with the government in Danang and other cities is the unstated question whether the war will go on; and this the United States will decide. . . . Only America can stop this war which is destroying not only our lives, but our culture and everything of human value in our country.[91]

This was written during the suppression of the Struggle Movement in Danang. I believe history shows that while Tri Quang and his followers owned the headlines, Nhat Hanh's judgment regarding what was needed to end the war was finally correct. This by no means reduces the importance of the Struggle Movement in the streets: this remains an example of the deepest courage in attempting to invent Buddhist direct action literally under the gun.

Engaged Buddhism and Christian Liberation Theology

A few comparative notes on Nhat Hanh's Buddhism and Christian Liberation Theology will be instructive. One prominent similarity between

the two is the close ties of both with the poor. As we have seen, while seeking funds for the establishment of Van Hanh University, Nhat Hanh stressed the importance of relying upon many small contributions from the poor. In his view, the poor were "the strength" of the Buddhist movement and, moreover, could be relied upon. Again, during the war, while the more political Buddhist activists worked energetically in the cities with urban dwellers and especially with students, Nhat Hanh's group was particularly effective and had a natural closeness with the peasants, mostly living subsistence lives, in the countryside. The Buddhists' extensive rural network was based upon the social work of students from Nhat Hanh's School of Youth for Social Service, which involved living in peasant villages and knowing them and their needs on a first-hand, individual basis.

Second, as with the Catholic Church in Latin America, in Vietnam the Buddhist Church was really the only institution available to the people for work on a national basis outside the government (in fact, the government of Vietnam during the war years was a poor second to the Buddhist Church in this regard). Moreover, in both churches there is respect for traditional authority to encourage approval from the mature and tradition-minded population combined with the excitement of a new form of idealism to inspire the young and free-thinkers. Perhaps most important, there is an organization that actively demonstrates its helpfulness to the desperate.

An anecdote points to another similarity between the engaged Buddhism movement and Liberation Theology: justification of new principles in terms of reinterpreted traditional language. Nhat Hanh tells of a boy named An at the School of Youth for Social Service who worked with the villagers showing them a modern way to raise chickens. They assumed he was paid by the government for this work and when they found that he was not, they asked him why, in that case, he was working so hard. He replied: "Well, we are performing merits. . . . In times like this when people suffer so much, the Bodhisattvas don't stay in the temple; they are out here. That's why we are not winning merits in the temple; we are winning them here."[92] In other words, the traditional practice of earning merit by such actions as meditation, chanting, and the like was replaced in time of crisis by actions of service to the people that also won merit. Nhat Hanh comments, "It was a kind of popular theology. Nobody taught him to say that; it just came from his own heart and understanding. That created a kind of immediate understanding, and afterwards the peasants accepted our workers."[93] The peasants understood winning merits; they did not, initially understand activists monks. When the latter was explained in terms of the former, engaged Buddhism found acceptance.

One important point of contrast between the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam and Liberation Theology should be noted. "Uniquely, the Unified

Buddhist Church is not a prophetic minority group opposing both social injustice and the complicity of the churches. It is the country's [Vietnam's] principal religious body."[94]

Politics

The Christian and the Buddhist forms of engaged spirituality share a similar problem: divided opinions and a basic lack of clarity regarding the proper relationship between the church, its clergy, and the holding of political power. This is a difficult and controversial matter which deeply divided the Buddhist Church in Vietnam during the war. Let us open this up with the following words of Nhat Hanh taken from a conversation with Daniel Berrigan that took place during the war.

> Since the success of 1963, at least one million people have come and said, 'We need a Buddhist political party. If you are not organized politically, you cannot succeed.' Everyone has been saying that. There are politicians now who want the support of the Buddhist bloc. They call themselves Buddhist politicians and they compete with Christian politicians. The trust we had in each other in 1963 had disappeared.
>
> Then, after the signing of the Paris accords, we made another effort. We said, 'Now let us disassociate ourselves from any political party, including people who call themselves Buddhist politicians. We don't need a political party. Let's act as a religious community only, doing work of reconciliation and healing.' I was one of the members who strongly advocated that. . . .
>
> After we had adopted that attitude, we began to be attacked by politicians—Buddhist politicians as well—because of our determination to return to a purely religious stance. But we made the right decision. . . .
>
> We monks know that our strength is not as a political group; our strength is as a religious group. . . .
>
> The vocation of a priest is quite different from the vocation of a politician.[95]

As I see it, there is widespread agreement in both Christian and Buddhist circles that it is inappropriate and ultimately self-defeating for a priest or monk (or, potentially, a nun) to hold elected political office. Nhat Hanh cites as particularly problematic in this regard the inability of such a person to be free of either the appearance or the reality of self-interested action (i.e., acting on the basis of desire). "In Vietnam today, most people would not consider a monk as a serious monk if he ran for public office."[96]

This appears to be a sensible and clear principle, but even this is not so simple. The journalist Takashi Oka, in arguing for the necessity of a

Buddhist political party, pointed out that the Buddhist "lay leaders did recognize the political reality, but could do nothing without the bonzes [monks]—for the Buddhist masses still responded to their bonzes rather than to their lay leaders."[97] In other words, in the view of Buddhist lay leaders, it was not enough to say that a political movement should be led by the laity, since the people by and large would not respond to a lay movement but ultimately trusted only the monastics. In practice, of course, this was a catch-22 inasmuch as a monk running for office would no longer be considered a true monk. This, moreover, would be the rule in any traditional, un-Westernized Buddhist country.

Nhat Hanh advocated separating the Buddhist movement from public support of any political party or candidate, including Buddhists. This clearly is in line with his principle of nonalignment with any party against another. With the ultimate goal of reconciling all parties, Nhat Hanh and those associated with him were loath to set themselves up as yet another "side" interested in gaining power for itself and thus alienating it from all other parties. Nhat Hanh also argued against supporting a political entity because of his observation that when the Buddhist Church had supported "Buddhist politicians" they found that such politicians were only eager to use the Buddhist name for the support and votes that it produced, but then "deceived" the movement, failed to embody its principles and failed to join in the actions undertaken by the movement.[98] As a consequence, the image and integrity of the Buddhist movement itself was corrupted.

Yet we have seen during the war that support of and removal of support from individuals was an effective force regularly used by the Buddhist Struggle Movement. The "one million people" who wanted to see a Buddhist political party emerge sought a vehicle to channel the political expression of the principles embodied in the Buddhist Struggle Movement. Given the deep involvement in politics of the Buddhist Struggle Movement, and the claim of the latter to represent the wishes of the masses of South Vietnamese people, was this not a natural expectation?

Further difficulties are raised by Nhat Hanh's stated desire for the movement to return to a "purely religious stance," that is, to separate politics and religion. He remained unshaken in his enthusiasm for combining social work and religion but wanted to draw a line somewhere between social work and politics. It is unclear to me, however, how such a line could be drawn, especially during times of political crisis. For example, during the war in Vietnam, the engaged Buddhist's nonpolitical aim may have been to protect the people from suffering, but when it was the political system itself that was largely responsible for that suffering, it was impossible to avoid engagement in politics. Moreover, as Oka emphasized throughout his newsletters, after the fall of Diem the Buddhists *had* political power, whether

they wanted it or not. The only real question was, how were they to respond to that reality in a responsible way?[99]

Does Nhat Hanh's position mean that an engaged Buddhist can only engage in political protest and opposition and that there is no constructive role that a Buddhist can play in politics, no contribution to the creation of a more just and humane political system? Perhaps such constructive work should be left to others, but in a case such as Vietnam's, when millions of people identified their vision with the Buddhists' (and this was by far the most popular view in the country, with which no politician or extant political party had any hope to compete) some way of identifying a political party with Buddhism was needed.[100] Should the line of prohibition be drawn between clergy and laity? Should a new category be found, something like the *anagarika* concept of Anagarika Dharmapala?[101] But even if one could name some such category of persons as eligible to participate in politics on the basis of Buddhist principles, or even if a purely lay Buddhist political party could be founded, would the imperfections and misjudgments that would inevitably emerge as these people engaged in active political life be received as an unacceptable corruption of the nonpolitical Buddhist life?

In Vietnam, all these questions remained moot. In fact, a Buddhist political party of sorts was founded in Vietnam, named the "Vietnamese Buddhist Force." The party was a lay-monastic amalgam. Thien Minh and a monk named Ho Giac were named chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, of the party; Tri Quang took no formal post, though he sat on the podium at the press conference while Thien Minh announced the existence of the new party. Prominent Buddhist laypersons served on the central committee. However, the party was never fully organized, much less put to the test, before it was suppressed. The theoretical questions in the background of a party such as this remain, however, and it is to be hoped that Buddhist activitists will contribute their further reflections on them.[102]

Conclusion

In the wake of all these questions, I will end on a positive note. Nhat Hanh's work breaks new ground for Buddhist thought and action. He has modernized Buddhism, making it "appropriate" to contemporary culture and conditions, while adhering to the "basic tenets" of Buddhism, which for him mean the Four Noble Truths, the vows of the *bodhisattva,* interbeing/emptiness, and compassion. He has significantly contributed to the forging of a way to bring Buddhism out of monastic seclusion to engage with and serve all aspects of ordinary life. Beyond the Buddhist context, his nondualism in action has made a major contribution to international discussions and programs of spiritually based social action. Thus his ideas, forged in the particular context of wartime Vietnam, have been taken up by a global

audience, and they address the major issues facing Buddhists today—modernization, lay-monk relations, social withdrawal versus social activism—as well as the major world issues of war and peace, spirituality and materialism, human community, and human well-being.

Of the Unified Buddhist Church and the Buddhist Struggle Movement it can only be said that theirs is one of the great examples of courage, altruism, and activist spirituality of all time. While they are in the company of Gandhi's *satyagraha* movement and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, civil rights movement, they differ significantly in that theirs was not a movement led by a single, outstanding, charismatic leader. The Buddhists who participated in the Struggle Movement, who worked in the countryside to help peasants survive, who immolated themselves for peace—these people were moved, in fact, by the ideals of their Buddhist faith.

Nhat Hanh's own retrospective views on the Struggle Movement are characteristic:

> Despite the results—many years of war followed by years of oppression and human rights abuse—I cannot say that our struggle was a failure. The conditions for success in terms of a political victory were not present. But the success of a nonviolent struggle can be measured only in terms of the love and nonviolence attained, not whether a political victory was achieved. In our struggle in Vietnam, we did our best to remain true to our principles. We never lost sight that the essence of our struggle was love itself, and that was a real contribution to humanity.[103]

Epilogue

Nhat Hanh and the activist Buddhists in Vietnam were optimistic at the end of the war that they would quickly enter into a cooperative relationship with the new regime that would be of benefit to the entire country. After all, "the UBC had been responsible for a mass movement of opposition to the Saigon regimes and American intervention"[104] and had a well-established rice-roots network in place throughout the countryside ready to offer social service to the peasants. The Buddhists hoped and expected that they could offer their services to the new government to help repair the war damage and heal the psychological and social wounds of the people. To demonstrate good will, the U.B.C. organized 20,000 Buddhists to celebrate Ho Chi Minh's birthday.[105] Tragically, these hopes, and this potential source of healing, were quickly crushed.

> [R]eports quickly began reaching the UBC . . . of brutal treatment of Buddhist workers and clergy: orphanages confiscated, social service centers closed, pagodas seized or destroyed, religious statues smashed, the same

Buddhist flag that Diem had attempted to ban once again prohibited.

The School of Youth for Social Service, so many of whose staff and volunteers died in opposition to the war, was confiscated, its director imprisoned, his monk-assistant badly beaten.[106]

The help and healing that the Buddhists offered was utterly cast aside. Once again, Buddhist monks and nuns were detained, tortured, imprisoned, forbidden to leave their pagodas, forbidden to meet in large groups, forbidden to perform any but the most traditional Buddhist functions. The new regime's fear of the power—the political power—of the Buddhists was plainly evident. Once again, though they may not have wanted it and did not acknowledge it, the Buddhists were recognized by the government as possessing massive political power. The government was afraid of a group that could amass 20,000 people at will. They were afraid of a group that had a better network than they in the countryside. This group had to be suppressed and strictly controlled. Thus the government, spurning Buddhist assistance, proceeded on its own to utterly botch the reconstruction of the country, leading to further misery, especially in the forms of devastating poverty and hunger, on the part of the long-suffering Vietnamese people.

At this writing, the U.B.C. is still suppressed and strictly controlled. There are still prisoners of conscience, including Buddhists, in prison.[107] Others have died in jail. Virtually the entire leadership has had its movements restricted with house arrest or internal exile. As this goes to press in January 1995, the top two monks of the U.B.C., Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, have just been arrested two days after Thich Huyen Quang began a hunger strike to protest the arrest of several other monks (the movements of both leaders had been restricted for years). This is a struggle that is still not over. Still, Vietnam, like many other Communist countries, is tolerating carefully measured liberalization outside of the political arena. Buddhists associated with Nhat Hanh, still hopeful despite everything, look forward to the day when they can return to the service of the Vietnamese people to work for reconciliation and healing.

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Notes

1. Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The Struggle for Humanity: Agents of Nonviolent Change in a Violent World,* Ch. 6 "The Third Way: Thich Nhat Hanh and Cao Ngoc Phuong." (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 193; and "Biography of Thich Nhat Hanh" available from the Unified Buddhist Church at Plum Village, France. The following biography of Nhat Hanh relies primarily on the latter. Other sources are as cited.

2. Theravada and Mahayana formally united during the war, forming the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam.

3. Nhat Hanh's own teachings emphasize mindfulness and *gatha* practices, while his philosophy is a blend of Theravada and Mahayana.

4. Mobi Ho, conversation with the author, July 25, 1990.

5. Hope and Young, p. 193. This entire paragraph is summarized from Hope and Young.

6. Ibid., p. 194.

7. Ibid.

8. The following synopsis is taken from Thich Nhat Hanh's words in his conversation with Daniel Berrigan in Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward a Buddhist/Christian Awareness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 93–94.

9. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Commentaries on the Tiep Hien Precepts.* Edited, with an Introduction by Fred Eppsteiner. (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1987), pp. 17–18.

10. The following is taken from the "Biography of Thich Nhat Hanh" and from Hope and Young, pp. 195–196. The quoted material is from the latter.

11. Thomas Merton, "A Statement Concerning Thich Nhat Hanh," *Fellowship* 32 (7) (July 1966), p. 22.

12. Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, July 1, 1971, quoted by Bo Wirmark, *The Buddhists in Vietnam: An Alternative View of the War.* Introduction by Daniel Berrigan. Edited by Joseph Gerson. (Brussels, Belgium: War Resisters' International, 1975), p. 32.

13. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire,* with a Foreword by Thomas Merton and an Afterword by Alfred Hassler (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

14. "Biography of Thich Nhat Hanh."

15. This and the following are taken from Hope and Young, pp. 212–215.

16. Ibid.

17. Cao Ngoc Phuong, quoted in Ibid., p. 214.

18. Cao Ngoc Phuong in Ibid., p. 215.

19. Part of the 10th Annual Common Boundary Conference, "Compassionate Living," November 16–18, 1990, Crystal City, Virginia.

20. Don Luce, telephone conversation with the author, June 26, 1992.

21. In my account of the Buddhist Struggle Movement, I have relied most heavily upon the following. (1) George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). Kahin's account is one of the few histories of the war to give substantial coverage of the role of the Buddhist movement in Vietnam from 1963 to 1966 and draws upon recently declassified U.S. government documents. (2) Takashi Oka, "Buddhism as a Political Force" I–VI. Institute of Current World Affairs, *Newsletter,* TO 24–27 and TO 34–35 (July 17, 1966, July 21, 1966, July 29, 1966, August 4, 1966, May 29, 1967, May 30, 1967). Oka, a Japanese-American, was one of very few Western journalists who took the Buddhist movement seriously and maintained ties with them; he knew Thich Tri Quang well. (3) I also rely heavily on both the account and the chronology given in James H. Forest, *The Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam: Fifteen Years for Reconciliation* (International Fellowship of Reconciliation, published by Hof van Sonoy, the Netherlands, 1978).

22. This account is summarized from Oka, TO-25 (July 21, 1966), p. 5ff.

23. Kahin p. 149.

24. Jan Yun-hua discusses this point in his "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China" *History of Religions* 4 (1964–1965), pp. 243–269, esp. pp. 252–255.

25. See Oka, TO-25 (July 21, 1966) and Kahin, Ch. 6.

26. Kahin, p. 152.

27. Ibid., pp. 152–181.

28. Thich Nhat Hanh in Berrigan and Hanh, pp. 80–81.

29. Cited in Kahin, p. 184. Kahin found the speech in a cable from Mavin L. Manfull, Counsellor of Embassy for Political Affairs, American Embassy, Saigon to the Department of State, "Recent Buddhist Developments," March 26, 1964.

30. Ibid., pp. 198–202.

31. Ibid., p. 208. Kahin quotes a cablegram from Johnson to Lodge, March 20, 1964, published in the *Pentagon Papers as Published by "The New York Times,"* by Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, E. W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield (Bantam Books, 1971), p. 285.

32. The following is summarized from Ibid., pp. 227–235.

33. Ibid., p. 228. And see Oka, TO-26 (July 29, 1966), p. 11.

34. Westmoreland quotation cited in Ibid., p. 228 taken from "Resume of Questions and Answers Telecon with General Westmoreland," August 25, 1964, p. 2; plus addendum.

35. CIA Memorandum, "Tri Quang and the Buddhist-Catholic Discord in South Vietnam," September 19, 1964, cited in Ibid., p. 234.

36. Ibid.,, p. 238.

37. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Lotus,* pp. 63–68.

38. Ibid., p. 68.

39. Ibid., pp. 64–65.

40. Kahin, p. 267f.

41. Ibid., taken from CIA, Memorandum for the national Intelligence Board, SNIE 53–65, "Short Term Prospects in South Vietnam," February 2, 1965.

42. Ibid., p. 271 cables from Taylor to State, January 29, and 31, 1965.

43. Ibid., p. 272.

44. Representative Clement Zablocki quoted in the *New York Times* March 17, 1966, and cited in Kahin, p. 403.

45. Quote attributed to a "most authoritative spokesman for U.S. policy in Saigon," believed in Kahin to be Ambassador Lodge, quoted by Emmet John Hughes in *Newsweek,* May 30, 1966, p. 23; cited by Kahin, p. 416.

46. Memorandum for the President from Dean Rusk, "Political Situation in South Vietnam," April 2, 1966, cited in Ibid., p. 421.

47. Ibid., p. 425. Also see Oka TO-34 (May 29, 1967) on the suppression of the Struggle Movement.

48. Ibid., p. 429. Sheehan quote from *New York Times* May 21, 22, 23, or 25, 1966.

49. Ibid., p. 430.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Lodge quote from the *New York Times,* June 25, 1966; cited in Ibid., p. 431.

53. Forest, p. 34.

54. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: The Nonviolent Struggle for Peace in Vietnam* (Paris: Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, n.d.); cited in Wirmark, pp. 22–24. See also Thich Nhat Hanh, "Love in Action: The Nonviolent Struggle for Peace in Vietnam," *Fellowship* 36 (1) (January, 1970), pp. 23–25.

55. Thich Nhat Hanh, "Love in Action," p. 25.

56. Forest, p. 12.

57. Ibid.

58. Wirmark, p. 23.

59. Ibid., p. 24.

60. It is less well known that some Americans did the same. See Daniel Berrigan's comments in Berrigan and Hanh, pp. 59 and 62.

61. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action,* pp. 11–12; cited in Wirmark, p. 23.

62. Berrigan and Hanh, p. 62.

63. Ibid., p. 61.

64. Ibid., p. 63.

65. Ibid., p. 43.

66. This list is composed from information found in Wirmark, Hope and Young and *The Mindfulness Bell* (newsletter produced by friends and students of Thich Nhat Hanh, c/o Parallax Press), as well as conversation with Mobi Ho.

67. Cao Ngoc Phuong in Hope and Young, pp. 215–216.

68. Wirmark, p. 24.

69. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* edited by Arnold Kotler (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1987), pp. 63–64.

70. Ibid., p. 62.

71. Ibid.

72. Winston King makes a similar distinction in "Motivated Goodness and Unmotivated Perfection in Buddhist Ethics," *Anglican Theological Review* 71 (2), pp. 143–152.

73. Berrigan and Hanh, p. 20.

74. Ibid.

75. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* p. 89.

76. Berrigan and Hanh, p. 99.

77. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation,* Revised Edition, Translated and with a Preface by Mobi Ho, Afterword by James Forest (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975, 1987), p. 57.

78. Berrigan and Hanh, p. 60.

79. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* p. 98; also see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing,* pp. 54–55.

80. Nhat Hanh, *Miracle,* p. 95.

81. Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation, December 1, 1973, p. 7, cited in Wirmark, p. 19.

82. Hope and Young, p. 211.

83. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Miracle,* p. 103.

84. Thich Nhat Hanh quoted in "Visit from a Buddhist Monk," *Fellowship: The Magazine of the Fellowship of Reconciliation* 32 (7) July 1966, p. 3.

85. Mobi Ho, conversation with the author.

86. Hope and Young, p. 213.

87. Thich Nhat Hanh, "A Buddhist Poet in Vietnam," *New York Review of Books* June 9, 1966, pp. 4–5.

88. Thich Nhat Hanh, "Love in Action," p. 24.

89. Ibid.

90. Merton, p. 22.

91. Ibid.

92. Berrigan and Hanh, p. 43.

93. Ibid.

94. Forest, p. 17

95. Thich Nhat Hanh in Berrigan and Hanh, pp. 82–83.

96. Nhat Hanh in Ibid., p. 84.

97. Oka, TO-27, August 4, 1966, p. 8.

98. Nhat Hanh in Berrigan and Hanh, p. 83 and 85.

99. See, for example, TO-25, July 21, 1966, pp. 11–13.

100. "Two million South Vietnamese were the active corps—the monks, nuns and lay people whose lives centered on their commitment as Buddhists, many of them the shock troops of the resistance to Diem." Forest, p. 6.

101. An *anagarika* is in the world but not of it, keeps his hair but wears a white robe, obeys the ten *sila* of the monk, but takes as his task social and political service work. See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon," in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon,* AAR Studies in Religion Number Three (Chambersburg, Penn.: American Academy of Religion, 1972), pp. 68–73.

102. See Oka, TO-22, July 4, 1966, pp. 9–11 on this ephemeral party.

103. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1993), p. 47.

104. Forest, p. 13.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. See the annual reports on Vietnam by Amnesty International.

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