

Letters

Various Authors

1968

Editor's Note: The following letter was written by an American serviceman in Vietnam. It was sent to one of our readers, who in turn forwarded it to us with permission to print it in our letters column. The writer's name has been omitted for his own protection.

Dear Bob,

This is a place of horror, and I am frankly unequipped for it. I can perform my duty; cleaning the jungle mud from gaping wounds, folding a man's near-severed lower leg up against the intact part and binding them together, or swathing a head in bandages to keep the brain from falling out, as much as any other purpose. I can carry a shapeless bundle from a helicopter and assist in opening it to find inside little more than a jumble of severed limbs, intestines, and chunks of charred muscle. I can even fish a blood-soaked envelope from the bundle and fill out a tag for the body from its address, noticing that the same name, plus, "mrs." is repeated in the return address.

Yes, I can do all this, but I can't do it 24 hours a day. I have to spend some of my time waiting for the next tragedy to be carried through the door. Some of it I spend showering, wondering what my legs would look like after I stepped on a mine. And part of my time I must spend trying to sleep, but thinking instead of the mangled humanity that I have seen today and surely will see tomorrow. And of the young wife. If I were busy 24 hours a day, I couldn't think of such things.

We are truly no more than a pestilence, an oozing sore on the face of the earth, but mercifully a self-cleansing one. Like poisonous bacteria we have struggled for a foothold, then thrived and gradually multiplied, feeding on each other and ravaging our host, the earth. But, like the bacteria, we will flood our environment with so much of our wastes and poisons that we will smother ourselves, and bless the earth with our extinction. The sore will heal, and only ugly scars will remain to memorialize the achievements of humanity: the superior life form; the only one capable of feeling love—and hate; the philosopher and moralist; the grand alterer of his environment.

I am a human being, an individual member of a pestilent race, and I carry the stench of death and bright fresh blood on my hands. Forever recorded in my mind is the agony and despair which I have helped to create—through my passivity if not my action. I am comforted not in the least by human creativity, compassion, intelligence, rationality or emotion; because these only temper, rather than control, human action.

I am not distressed by Communism, nor by Capitalism, sadism, religion, or militancy. No, it is men who distress me. Their institutions are only symptoms of humanity, and those who would cure humanity by treating the symptoms will succeed only in masking the disease. We blame each other, and we blame the environment, but we never look inward. perhaps because of subconscious fear. We are creators of evil, and we unwittingly will be our own cure for it.

Troubled men wish death upon themselves, and here troubled humanity does the same, and with the successfulness that all our inventive minds and roaring factories could only produce. We have made fantastic advances in the time-honored traditions of suffering and death, but not since Cain killed Abel in a most unsophisticated and backward manner has an advance been made in easing the anguish created by death among those left living.

It is a shame that so many redeeming values of mankind are so greatly overshadowed by its negative aspects. Most people will prefer to chronicle our achievements and overmagnify our position in the universe. I can't. I'm in Vietnam.

* * *

To the Editors:

Suddenly the television, newspapers, and all the mass media's means of communication has begun telling everyone that we are living in a sick society. About time they took notice, isn't it? I mean, this is something that we have known for quite a while, but when we tried to form our own society and live our own way of life we were branded as hippies and put down as rebels.

What possessed them to finally wise up as to the state of things? It wasn't the discrimination of races in our society, it wasn't the senseless killing of people in a senseless war, it wasn't the unfairness of the draft, it wasn't the fact that people were starving while their neighbors were gorging themselves.

According to them we are a sick society because of the assassination of 3 great men by 3 sick men. Isn't it ironic that they judge the so-called "Great American Society" by the acts of 3 men and yet tend to overlook the other things which are so much more important? They state the truth but not the reasons.

Peace

Gail Calloway

Dear F.E.,

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! HEAR YE! (Please?)

"I am he as you are he as you are me as we are all together."

Bearing this truth in mind and being aware that all things are relative, we would like to introduce you to Onnow.

Onnow is a unique commune and religion capable of harmoniously blending the idealistic and realistic levels of living as well as the spiritualistic and materialistic levels.

This world endeavor has been realized by a minority group (of course) on the West Coast for over two years and is being actualized this month in Berkeley, California.

We have 22 affiliates surrounding that area already. Soon, we will be ready to expand further still.

Those of you who can help us grow are the people seriously concerned with attaining the higher, finer degrees of absolute living—people who are enlightened (or would like to be) and aware of their Oneness with the Universe who will strive for their personal improvement and the general betterment of all.

If you are interested, contact us as soon as possible and share in this purposeful and most beneficial way of life.

ONNOW

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