

# Correspondence

## Human Rights in Vietnam

To the Editors: ...I have read all three articles by Messrs. James Finn, Theodore Jacqueney, and Richard John Neuhaus in the April issue on violation of human rights in Vietnam by the Hanoi Government. May I add the following comments.

1. If there is anyone who still thinks, as Mr. David Dellinger does, that the repression of human rights in Vietnam is just "a remotely credible rumor," let him interview the Vietnamese refugee families residing in the United States: Almost every single one of them has at least two or three relatives incarcerated in the "reeducation" camps. If he just makes, by extrapolation, an estimate of the presently imprisoned relatives of these refugee families, he can easily come up with a figure of about 80,000 prisoners. And these are only relatives of families that managed to escape from South Vietnam in April, 1975, i.e., who came mainly from the Saigon area or the coastal provinces of Vung Tau or Rach Gia. If we count all the 43 provinces of what was formerly South Vietnam, the figure would be much higher than the 200,000 prisoners the Vietnamese Communists themselves announced last spring.

2. Nor is it true that "only about 50,000" continue to be detained, as Communist Vietnam's ambassador to Paris stated early this year, or that only 5 per cent of the "utterly deprived" elements of the former Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Armed Forces and administration are still in the camps, as Hanoi radio recently announced in a broadcast quoting an article by Mrs. Ngo Ba Thanh (former opposition agitator in South Vietnam and presently a deputy in the unified Vietnam's National Assembly).

If you ask any refugee who recently fled Vietnam by sea or a refugee in the U.S. who has received news from his family in Vietnam, it would be clear that not only the "utterly deprived" elements (such as the former RVN marines, rangers, paratroopers, policemen..., as enumerated by Mrs. Ngo Ba Thanh), but innocent and useful people too—doctors, pharmacists,

engineers—are still imprisoned after nearly two years in the camps. For example, I know a family of five brothers, all of whom are pharmacists or medical doctors; all but one are still in prison, and the one who is not imprisoned had only recently graduated from the University of Saigon and had not served in the armed forces or administration. These brothers are in their thirties. They had grown up in South Vietnam and were then drafted into the armed forces to serve as medical personnel. What have they done that was "deprived" enough to deserve continued imprisonment? These people, as well as tens of thousands of other young men who were captains, lieutenants, or second lieutenants in the former RVN armed forces, were just children of five or six when the Republic of Vietnam was founded in 1954. These victims of the struggle between the big powers, these pawns of the governments of South Vietnam since 1954, who were drafted, put into machinery of war beyond their control and ordered to serve, deserve a better treatment than prolonged imprisonment.

3. Most of the Vietnamese living abroad (especially those in the U.S.) would not dare to agitate publicly for respect of human rights in Vietnam because they fear their relatives still in Vietnam would be subject to reprisal. They are thankful for the American friends who have enough integrity and honesty to demand the Vietnamese Communist authorities to abide by their declaration during the war, to promote and respect the rights of the common citizens.

4. At the present time respect of human rights is the dominant theme in American foreign policy, not only advanced by the Executive branch but also actively supported by the U.S. Congress. We Vietnamese hope the majority of the American people would extend a helping hand to their former friends who were asked to stand on their side and fight to defend "the bastion of the Free World in Southeast Asia" and who are now under cruel mistreatment by the Vietnamese Communist authorities.

Although many mistakes were made during the Vietnam war, the Americans came to South Vietnam with the best of intentions, i.e., to help the struggle for freedom waged by half of the Viet-

(Continued on p. 56)

## WORLDVIEW

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of *Worldview* is to place public policies, particularly in international affairs, under close ethical scrutiny. The Council on Religion and International Affairs, which sponsors the journal, was founded in 1914 by religious and civic leaders brought together by Andrew Carnegie. It was mandated to work toward ending the barbarity of war, to encourage international cooperation, and to promote justice. The Council is independent and nonsectarian. *Worldview* is an important part of the Council's wide-ranging program in pursuit of these goals.

*Worldview* is open to diverse viewpoints and encourages dialogue and debate on issues of public significance. It is edited in the belief that large political questions cannot be considered adequately apart from ethical and religious reflection. The opinions expressed in *Worldview* do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Council. Through *Worldview* the Council aims to advance the national and international exchange without which our understanding will be dangerously limited.

Philip A. Johnson, *Publisher*

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tionary thought, on the other, is that revolution today is more an end in itself, is less amenable to being checked by any notion of the ideal society. The book uses generous quotations throughout; indeed, it is really a reader of stunning diversity and comprehension. It will be valued less as a theoretical statement than as an anthology. As an anthology, it is uncommonly valuable.

## Erratum

An unfortunate error crept into A. James McAdams's response to Neil McCaffrey in the May issue. The skewed sentence correctly reads: "But if AH manages to sell ten thousand, even five thousand, of its books (at hardcover prices) every month. I'd say it wasn't doing badly at all." —Ed.

## Correspondence

[from p. 2]

namese population. The cycle of violence did not begin with the American entrance in force into the Indochinese peninsula in 1954. In 1945-46 Vo Nguyen Giap, then Minister of the Interior, liquidated many Vietnamese nationalists. Later this systematic murder policy was applied even to those who were willing to cooperate with the Communists to fight against the French (such as Huynh Phu So, leader of the Hoa Hao Buddhists, who was killed at a meeting to which the Communists invited him). Concentration camps, such as the infamous Ly Ba So camp in North Vietnam, dated back to the very beginning of the first Indochina war. All this happened before any great power involvement in Vietnam and prior to any "collaboration" of the nationalists with the French and the Americans. Later similar camps were set up to imprison those who never collaborated with foreigners and whose only crime was being a landowner. I will give the names and addresses (in the U.S.) of some former victims of these earliest concentration camps to whomever wishes to interview them for fact-finding purposes.

To those Americans who do not dare to defend the unjustly punished Vietnamese because they are Americans, we would like to send this message: "You

should avoid publicizing your failure of nerve. If you continue in this failure, the peace you have advocated for your country is a peace with dishonor indeed."

Nguyen Ngoc Huy

Cambridge, Mass.

To the Editors: I have hesitated to make any response to "Fighting Among the Doves," knowing that making a response puts one in a position to receive one of several labels that seem to be thrown around so readily these days. How much better if we could simply relate our various experiences to each other as Christian brothers and sisters rather than feeling it necessary to try to destroy those we disagree with.

I am one of those people who had the experience of living in Vietnam under the old and the new authorities, and who also had the opportunity to return to Vietnam for a visit in January of this year. When we visited Vietnam, we went with the knowledge that we would probably be given a tour that would not allow us to see absolutely everything the new situation had created. We attempted to interpret our experiences in that light. I trust that those who are listening for the negative side of the situation remember that they too can be given a tour through the situation that is just as misleading and false. One might keep in mind that the 4 per cent of the Americans who fled America after the 1776 revolution probably wrote an account of that revolution that would make one shudder with horror.

The article mentions a letter written to Jim Forest by a longtime pacifist who now lives in Hong Kong. I too have read that letter, and feel that the quote mentioned in the article is rather taken out of context. As I understand what this particular pacifist is trying to say, unless we are seriously trying to clean up the mess we left in someone's house, our criticisms of the mess they *might* be creating in their house rings rather hollow and could seem downright ridiculous. The question of human rights is a very serious one, and one the Christian cannot ignore. But unless we accept the fact that we too are violating human rights in Vietnam and strive to correct that, we lose our basis for speaking about others' possible violation of human rights. It is a well-known fact that when America withdrew from Vietnam, it left behind thousands of tons of

unexploded munitions. These mines, grenades, bombs, etc. continue to kill and maim Vietnamese who are trying to return to their land to farm. Is it not the right of a human being to be able to return to his/her farm and till the soil without the threat of being blown to bits by an M-79 grenade or a Claymore mine?

An elderly member of a small congregation I occasionally attended returned to his farm after many years of living as a refugee. He had only begun to turn over the fallow soil when his hoe hit an M-79 grenade and he was instantly killed. We heard many reports of similar deaths. If we produced the munitions and put them there, do we not have a moral responsibility to take them out so the farmers can live? It is not only the Vietnamese who are saying "If you really believe in human rights, then give our farmers the right to farm."

Similar things can be said about the food and medical situation in Vietnam. The South was extremely dependent on the U.S. for food and medical supplies. Since the U.S. has refused to give any kind of aid to the Vietnamese people, the people must suffer serious shortages of these commodities. An unknown number of houses, schools, hospitals, factories, and churches were destroyed by bombings. I was told on several occasions by young Vietnamese students that it is common knowledge that those who destroy something have a responsibility at least to help rebuild it. Is it not the right of the Vietnamese to be able to have homes to live in, hospitals to receive care in, and schools to send their children to? If we helped destroy those structures, are we not violating the rights of the Vietnamese people if we refuse to help them rebuild those structures?

It seems to me that a constructive appeal for human rights requires many things. One is looking seriously for one's own involvement in the violation of human rights. Another is to know clearly that there is, in fact, a violation of human rights to make an appeal about. A third, perhaps, is to recognize that no government is 100 per cent good, but neither is any government 100 per cent bad. We can gain a lot of respect if we seek out, affirm, and lend support to those positive aspects of a people or a government. Not only might this encourage that people or government to strive for more positive actions

and policies, but it also makes one's criticism of negative policies much more powerful. I would simply like to mention a few of those positive things I witnessed in Vietnam.

During our visit to North and Central Vietnam this past January we were told by church leaders and lay people that the past Christmas was one of the happiest Christmas celebrations in many years. The government had helped the churches purchase the items they needed to make the Christmas season as joyous as possible. As we visited churches we saw evidence from the decorations still up that indeed a lot of time, effort, and resources had gone into the celebration.

We were also informed by pastors, priests, and Buddhist monks that the government was assisting in the rebuilding of destroyed religious structures. One such Protestant church is the Que Son church in Quang Nam province, which was completed and dedicated on Christmas day. This church received a direct hit from an American bomber in 1971, which resulted in the death of eighty Christians who had taken refuge there.

We also saw programs set up to help former prostitutes and drug addicts receive training so that they could reenter society as productive members of that society rather than as outcasts.

We visited a Buddhist seminary that has recently opened in Hanoi and that not only trains monks for service in the numerous pagodas throughout the country, but also is working at translating the Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Vietnamese so that it will be available to all Vietnamese. This seminary is operating with the full approval of the government.

We visited a rural area in Central Vietnam where the government is putting in a large irrigation system so that the farmers there will no longer lose their crops to drought and can, in fact, increase their harvest from two to three crops a year.

During my stay in Saigon after the war ended I saw serious efforts being made to reunite family members separated for as long as twenty years because of the war. Close friends of ours would bring by for a visit uncles and aunts they had not seen since 1954, and even brothers.

I met several old friends who, because they were officers in the old army,

spent nine months in reeducation camps. They made no mention of torture or mistreatment. Rather, they talked about learning how to work with their hands in the gardens and how they spent time learning about the new economic and social system they were living under. One young doctor, after completing his reeducation course, was made director of a drug rehabilitation center near Saigon.

In conclusion, I think we as Christians need to be very aware of what is going on in Vietnam. We need to be sensitive about our own failure to offer human rights to all people, and we need to be ready to admit our failures and seek ways to correct them. We need to be willing to take the time to try to understand the many complexities of this situation. And above all we need to try to listen to each other without trying to destroy those whose ideas are different from our own. Otherwise our witness is one of disorder and hatred rather than a serious search for human dignity and unity.

Max Ediger

*Liberal, Kansas*

To the Editors: The three articles in your April issue regarding human rights in Vietnam (and the controversy occasioned by the appeal from antiwar activists asking Hanoi to allow an impartial investigation of charges) deserves applause.

As one of those intimately involved in the preparation and submission of the appeal to the Vietnamese Government, I would offer two comments that might be of use to your readers.

First of all, though I say this with the sympathy of an editor well acquainted with the surgeries required by space limitations, I wish you could have found the extra inches to print the entire appeal. The signers went to considerable pains in coming up with a text that would put our human rights concern in a very special context. I realize Jim Finn made reference in his essay to the emphasis in the appeal on reconstruction aid and the normalization of ties with Vietnam, but the partial text reads very differently without these and other elements. You might consider publishing, in the correspondence column, some of these missing paragraphs. [*The missing paragraphs appear on p. 59.—Eds.*] Readers wishing the full text could write

to the International League for Human Rights (777 U.N. Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017) and request a copy.

Second, it is worth mentioning that public circulation of the appeal was undertaken very reluctantly. Throughout the appeal's drafting process I regularly wrote to Vietnam's observer to the United Nations, sending him the appeal in draft form as well as the documentation that was pushing us toward an appeal. In every letter I expressed our hope that a quiet meeting might take place at which some sharing of views might occur. Our concern was to influence the Vietnamese Government, not to be an occasion of embarrassment or an excuse for a hardening of attitudes on the part of the U.S. Government.

Unfortunately, Dinh Ba Thi, the U.N. observer, never replied. When Dan Berrigan, Robert Ellsberg, and I tried to visit without an appointment, all we were able to do was slip a note under the door—as Jim Finn recounts. This was after the appeal had been formally submitted and, incredibly, returned with its documentation—but minus acknowledgment or response.

It was the unwillingness of the Vietnamese authorities to respond in any way—plus a news story in the *Washington Star*—that prompted the International League for Human Rights to adopt the appeal as part of a project and to make it public. (It appears the *Star* had obtained the appeal, ironically enough, from a source hostile to its text, and it published a story on the controversy that made little reference to those elements in the appeal on which both sides in the controversy agreed.)

Nat Hentoff's essay, "Is It Any of Our Business?" in *The Village Voice*, February 28, would be of interest to many *Worldview* readers—an extraordinary piece of reportage.

Meanwhile, the human rights crisis appears to be continuing in Vietnam. Five leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam were reportedly arrested the night of April 6-7. One is reminded of earlier collisions between Church and State—whether between Diem and the same Buddhists more than a decade ago or further back, with such troublesome individuals as Thomas More.

James H. Forest

*Hof van Sonoy  
Veerstraat 1  
Alkmaar, Holland*

To the Editors: I read the April issue of *Worldview* with double interest: as a Vietnamese and as a daughter of lawyer Tran Van Tuyen, a political detainee mentioned in "They Are Us, Were We Vietnamese" by Theodore Jacqueney.

My grief is so very much deeper since not only such a great number of Vietnamese people are being detained unjustly, but also among them are members of my own family: my father, confined under very inhuman conditions since June, 1975, without a single word on his whereabouts from the Hanoi Government; my brother, now in a labor camp somewhere in North Vietnam, according to some sources; my brother-in-law and a cousin (my father's nephew) in "reeducation" camps still awaiting their "graduation" after twenty months.

The response from the Hanoi officials to the Forest appeal (discussed in "Fighting Among the Doves" by James Finn in the same issue of *Worldview*) with regard to violations of human rights in Vietnam is both a lie and an insult to the civilized world. If we have not seen the bloodbath it is because the Vietnamese Communists have a better means of killing: starvation, mental torture, and physical exhaustion.

I sincerely hope the two articles on Vietnam in *Worldview* will wake up those who still believe in the sweet language and promises of the Communists.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and my gratitude to Ted Jacqueney, James Finn, and Richard Neuhaus and to all the people concerned about those who have suffered and are still suffering under the oppressive and undemocratic regimes in Vietnam.

Tran Thi Dam-Phuong  
Haworth, N.J.

To the Editors: James Finn ("Fighting Among the Doves," April, 1977) seems unaware that we have American dissidents—thousands of them, mainly in Canada. They do not have the right to come into the USA even to visit their parents. Why is he so disregardful of their civil rights while sympathizing with dissidents in Communist countries?

Conditions in some of our veterans' hospitals are not good.

Moreover, we have more than

200,000 people imprisoned in the U.S., and our own prison conditions are bad. If we restored civil rights to our own dissidents in Canada and Sweden and reformed our prisons, our good example might be catching—and *the human race would be safer.*

Alice Franklin Bryant  
Seattle, Wash.

James Finn Responds:

Ms. Bryant seems unaware that pages 28-29 of the April issue deal with American dissidents. Of course, there are remediable faults in this country. But must we rehearse that list each time we criticize massive abuses abroad? A dreary prospect.

## Good and Bad Dictatorships?

To the Editors: I read with great interest "Christianity and Communism: The Dilemma of Dialogue," "Two Ways to Forget Vietnam," and "Latin America and the U.S.—That Special Relationship" in the April issue of *Worldview*. All those articles treat very up-to-date subjects, such as relations between developed and underdeveloped countries, perspectives on the increase of population tensions, disrespect for the rights, liberties, and guarantees stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a Social Democrat, I consider these problems of major importance, since they are conditions for the via to a humanistic socialism by means of reforms and, therefore, in democracy and in freedom.

It is not fair to condemn the absence of democratic liberties in Latin America and to omit the disrespect for the more elementary rights of the human being in the Eastern countries, in Cambodia or in Ethiopia. In fact, there can be no division into good or bad dictatorships. All of them must be openly condemned by all democrats, who have the responsibility of contributing to man's liberation from every kind of oppression, wherever it exists and whatever might be the veil thrown over injustices, inequalities of opportunity, and every form of man's manipulation.

Within this point of view I cannot help expressing my total accordance with President Jimmy Carter's new foreign policy, which stands for funda-

mental rights, liberties, and guarantees. President Carter has been proving that he has a more progressive and a wiser character than his predecessors, his policy being truly appreciated in Portugal and, more widely speaking, all over Western Europe.

António Rebelo de Sousa  
Member of Parliament  
Social Democratic Party  
Lisbon, Portugal

## AFSC

To the Editors: The American Friends Service Committee has been taking a beating of late in the pages of *Worldview*. I am of the opinion also that criticism is in order; that the AFSC has not, in regard to Vietnam, lived up to the Quaker tradition of "speaking Truth to Power." However, I draw the line on the type of criticism in Abraham Martin Murray's "More on Updated Pacifism" ("A View of the World," April).

As all but a few realize, the Middle East conflict is an extremely complex problem and there is no individual or organization that can be credited with coming up with a perfectly satisfactory analysis of the problem and scenario for change. What is the terrible compromise of pacifist principles that the AFSC is guilty of? Urging Israel to *negotiate* with the PLO! Yet who else is there but the PLO if negotiations are to be at all meaningful and fruitful? Certainly *no* party in the Middle East can claim that its hands are not bloody. Perhaps if the AFSC had suggested that Israel *bomb* the PLO, the American Jewish Committee would not have been nearly as indignant about compromising of principles.

Their analogy of the Middle East conflict to the NAACP's confrontations with the Ku Klux Klan is but another example of the puerile tendency of Americans to simplify everything in terms of our domestic issues, as if the world is but our mirror image. Fair-minded objectivity is not a hallmark of the American Jewish Congress, as I am sure most of your readers are aware. They are more than eager to practice the double standard in relation to Israel. You won't find them out beating the bushes about human rights violations in Israel, where they are known to occur, as in many other countries of the world. If the Palestinians silently vanished, the

AJC. would probably be quite happy about it. Fortunately, President Carter does not seem to be of such mind.

Joseph D. McCarty  
Milwaukee, Wis.

## Mennonite & Quaker Visits to Vietnam

To the Editors: The May, 1977, issue of *Worldview* has a short, one-paragraph item on page 34 that is factually incorrect. It states that the group sponsored by the Mennonites and the American Friends Service Committee returned in mid-March from Vietnam. There was a

joint MCC-AFSC visit to Vietnam in November, 1975, but that is the only joint visit that has occurred. Mennonite Central Committee had another visit in June, 1976, and then again in January, 1977.

Every time a Mennonite delegation has gone to Vietnam human rights issues were very high on the agenda. We asked frank, penetrating questions and expressed concerns. The statement you make in the May issue of *Worldview* does not apply to Mennonite visitors to Vietnam.

Vern Preheim

Secretary for Asia  
Mennonite Central Committee  
Akron, Pa.

The Editors Respond:

Our apologies. The quotation from an AFSC (not Mennonite) leader appeared in a March news report that gave the impression that an AFSC-Mennonite group had just recently visited Vietnam. Perhaps the leader who was quoted to the effect that Americans have no right to ask about human rights in Vietnam was speaking on the basis of the earlier visit mentioned by Mr. Preheim. Perhaps he had not been to Vietnam at all. On this one we just know what we read in the papers. In any case, we are pleased to learn that the Mennonites have pressed the question of human rights when visiting Vietnam. We hope they will continue in that good work.

## Appeal to the Government of Vietnam

*Portions Omitted From the Text Published in the April issue of Worldview.* We the undersigned were actively engaged in opposition to the war suffered at America's hands by the Vietnamese people. Some of our efforts are well known to you. We fought for the end of America's intervention in Vietnam and lived in grief for the horrors suffered beneath America's bombers. We realize, of course, that our resistance to that war can bring none of the dead back to life nor restore maimed bodies, nor purge America of its immense burden of responsibility. Thus we are now involved in encouraging the U.S. government to welcome Vietnam into the United Nations, to provide massive reparations for the destruction it wrought in your homeland. At the same time we are involved in private efforts to relieve sufferings caused by the war and to contribute to the process of reconciliation between American and Vietnamese people.

In fidelity to the same values that led us to these commitments, however, we find ourselves obliged in conscience to speak on behalf of those Vietnamese who reportedly are being denied fundamental human rights.

...  
...We could not in conscience keep silent when General Thieu filled the American-funded prisons with thousands upon thousands of innocent people. We cannot be silent now, even though America's intervention is ended. We voice our protest in the hope that your government can avoid repetition of the tragic historical pattern in which liberators gain power only to impose a new oppression.

...  
...We recall with immense gratitude

the sacrifices made by Buddhists and Christians to end the war, to assist its victims, and to reunite the country—a witness which helped build world support for peace in Vietnam. We appeal to you to reassess your policies regarding religious bodies, not to limit the definition of religious freedom merely to cull practice, and to welcome and encourage the social contributions of Buddhist, Christian and humanitarian agencies of the Vietnamese people.

In addition, we express a concern motivated by caring for families living in endless uncertainty about the fate of lost relatives who were among the forces that invaded your country. We ask you to make public any unreleased information you may possess regarding Americans who died or were imprisoned in Vietnam. While we have no knowledge that you possess unreleased information, we are concerned at the cynical way in which the United States government has exploited this issue and used it as an excuse for withholding economic assistance and to veto Vietnam's admission into the United Nations. At the same time, we express our grief for those Vietnamese families who lost children, parents and grandparents in the war and who, in many thousands of cases, know nothing of the fate of those victims of America's war and for whom no compassion has been expressed by the United States government.

We continue to feel a deep friendship toward the people of Vietnam and to nourish the hope that you who are entrusted with the government will do everything in your power to encourage the conditions of a better life in peace, justice and tolerance. We pledge our continuing readiness to do all we can to be of help.

In our criticisms, which cannot be separated from our friendship, we do not wish to single out your government unfairly. We are familiar with the double-standard of various states, including our own, in the human rights area. There are client states of the U.S. government (Chile, Brazil and Iran among them) in which reliance on imprisonment and torture is routine. We are also aware of the many socialist states in which suppression of human rights has been widely accepted.

We are also painfully aware of the violence and injustice of the United States in its domestic and foreign policies, the abyss that separates American profession from American practice. Many of us have viewed this society from within court rooms, prison walls and slum neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, the history of the last two decades has made Vietnam a place of special concern and hope for millions of people throughout the world—in its crises and hopes our own lives have been bound up,

To you who are Vietnam's leaders, we say: Invasion, imperialism and civil war for years made your country's name synonymous with the worst horrors of violence and brutal repression. With the end of the war and of the Saigon regime, many hoped that the name of Vietnam might be transfigured into a symbol of that liberation from fear and terror which we desire for ourselves and for all people. As you repair the physical devastation of your land, we appeal to you to create a society of tolerance and compassion worthy of the hopes and sacrifices of all those Vietnamese who died, and which inspired the sympathy and support of millions throughout the world.