

stop. It would be even better if the Soviet Union were to stop too, but it is for our own actions, not theirs, that we bear immediate and direct moral responsibility. We may hope that if the call is heard and we do stop—or at least slow down—our contributions to the arms race, others, including our prospective opponents, might follow our lead for economic if not moral reasons. But even if they don't, we should recognize the moral obligation to act. Should the worst come to pass and our nation's security rest upon faith rather than the murderous potential of modern wars, even that should not be regarded as too unthinkable a situation from a religious perspective.

Richard Neuhaus Responds:

Contra Deats, in the January Excursus and elsewhere I have spelled out my "basic concern" for disarmament and have proposed ways to enlist a larger political constituency in that cause. One such way is that the advocates of disarmament be scrupulously accurate in their statements lest the cause be dismissed as partisan propaganda. Another is to restrain the impulse to identify ourselves too closely with Hosea and other worthies or to confuse our prudential judgments with the Word of God. Contra Deats and Zahn, I do not believe that the rightness and urgency of the cause, or our primary responsibility for the policies of the U.S. rather than the USSR, excuse distortion of the facts. In 1964 most of us rejected one version of the false and, not so incidentally, losing proposition that extremism in the defense of one's favored cause is no vice and moderation in its pursuit no virtue. I see no reason to revise that judgment now.

[The following signers of the pastoral letter in question were invited to discuss in these pages their reasons for approving the document but declined the invitation: Bishop James Armstrong (Methodist), Bishop Joseph A. Francis (Roman Catholic), Archbishop Raymond G. Hunthausen (Roman Catholic), Dr. Jorge Lara-Braud (National Council of Churches), Rabbi Steven S. Schwarzschild, Rabbi Marc H. Tannenbaum, Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler (Roman Catholic)—The Editors.].

Reader's Response II

Human Rights in China

Robert W. Barnett

Worldview has published a number of articles contending that human rights, if they are to be meaningful, must be based upon universal values. Herewith an alternative view by a distinguished scholar of Asian affairs.—The Editors

We are putting before ourselves a practical question. Should we make Peking's record in handling what Americans call the human rights of the Chinese people an obstacle to normalizing diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China? In my opinion we should not.

I go farther. We should seek a better understanding of the moral content implicit in why and how Peking has sustained the legitimacy of its authority through rhetorical and operational means that are alien to the political experience of the Western world.

The psychic and philosophical premises upon which the Chinese system operates differ from other countries in the world, whether or not they are Marxist, affluent, or developing. But we should hesitate to condemn them as less moral merely because they differ from those of other societies. In fact China may be giving clues to a perception of moral necessities that we—not to mention particular countries like India, Indonesia, Brazil, and so forth—may be obliged to recognize, if we begin to believe we cannot continue to heal our economic and social dissatisfactions merely by perpetual opening up of new resource frontiers, geographical and technological; that is, if we heed intimations of doom expressed by the Club of

Rome, by Robert Heilbrunner, and by H.F. Schumacher.

Let me hasten to say that I do not take delight in the China model. I was in the People's Republic of China in 1976. During my fifteen days there I did not have so much as fifteen minutes of conversation with my Chinese hosts that had anything like the human or intellectual content of conversations I had just six months before while traveling through several "authoritarian" countries of Southeast Asia. Having known China quite well before World War II, and acquainted with many Chinese overseas—in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere—a part of me was outraged by what Chinese leaders seem to have done to deprive its people of a capacity to laugh, to share in tragic despair, and to reveal to friends their gifts of verve and creativity, individuality, competitive compulsion, and personal warmth and loyalty. However, against that apparent loss there was a balancing perception before which I stood in awe. I recalled Ernest Hemingway's aphorism, "d'abord il faut durer"; that was the miracle of the People's Republic of China.

It is this, I think, that has awed almost all visitors to China. They see achievement in the face of obstacles that totally demoralized Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters. What there is now to see sobers leaders from other parts of the developing world, who identify mechanics but cannot imagine infusing their own people with the moral devotion upon which the Chinese system appears to be built.

Peking's obstacles were rooted in 150 years of humiliation and catastrophe visited on China by nature, by a steadily rising population, by dislocation of its

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traditional economic practices, by military assaults and incursions of Western European countries and of Japan, and by the bewilderment and conservatism of a government apparatus in the grip of an obsolete educational system. Prior to 1931 the restraints imperial powers placed upon each other, rather than any capability of the Chinese political system itself, spared the proud realm of China from outright colonization. After World War II Chiang Kai-shek was supported by friends at home and abroad in an effort to restore pride and effectiveness to the Chinese system. But the tragic fallacy in his leadership was that its legitimacy and moral sanction had stronger roots abroad than within his own Chinese environment. The leaders of the People's Republic of China won a civil war against him because their authority was based upon strictly Chinese military, economic, intellectual, and moral resources. These leaders were determined to achieve total national self-reliance, and to do this through mobilization of the moral support of a population committed in rhetoric, in appearance, and in day-by-day activity to egalitarianism. Devotion to this purpose was reinforced by the shock of a worldwide embargo mounted against China by the United Nations during the Korean War and, perhaps even more traumatically, by withdrawal of Soviet aid, advisors, and industrial facilities in 1961.

It is against this background of harsh national necessity that China's leaders considered the "human rights" of their people. The first right was to survive—*"il faut durer."* Leaders of other societies, radically different in tradition and religion, philosophy, or ideology, have made the same judgment in time of war or emergency. With a population growing annually at a rate of fifteen to twenty million, the challenge of necessity to Chinese humanity has been pervasive and profound. Response, both voluntary and shaped from Peking, has been rooted in an age-long Chinese tradition of subordinating individual liberty to collective obligation, a reversal of the stress in the freedom/duty matrix upon which Western democratic traditions are built. The Confucian heritage is conservative, authoritarian, and hierarchical. Its beneficiaries in Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, as well as in China, see nothing abusive, and much that is utterly natural, in

subordination of the individual to collective interest—for example, to the family. China's dynastic histories were always written by Confucian moralists, who assigned praise and blame according to conduct that elevated or diminished social harmony. In these histories there is the record, often glorified, of Taoist nonconformist rebels, poets, and artists; they could and did exist. However, for over two thousand years social judgments were Confucian. So here may be the clue to what in the imagination of Chinese everywhere is their equivalent to the human rights that Americans believe are sanctified by the Holy Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights in our Constitution.

Those of us engaged in disputes over the status of women, blacks, our unborn children, income disparities, and so forth would consider it preposterous for President Carter or members of his cabinet to cite the advice of counselors in London, Paris, Stockholm, Rome, or Moscow in laying down the rights and duties of American citizens. These will emerge from compulsions and the fluctuating vocabularies unique to a dynamic American setting. What is striking about the People's Republic of China is the continuity of commitment to the concepts of self-reliance and egalitarianism, from the days when China's leaders lived in the Yen-an caves to the establishment of national authority in Peking, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the arrest of the "Gang of Four," and the reemergence of the twice-humiliated Teng Hsiao-ping. China is not a democracy in our sense of the word. But it has been a society experiencing profound change within the frame of its basic national commitments and necessities, and at the height of the Cultural Revolution there was a move toward populism—if not actual anarchy—such as no Western democracy has ever experienced. China's compulsions and fluctuating vocabularies are unique to a dynamic Chinese setting. The unshackling of the Chinese woman, the barefoot doctor, the mass participatory harnessing of China's rampant rivers, and what *The Economist's* deputy editor, Norman Macrae, perceives as the exciting promise of China's present-day rural Keynesianism have been Chinese accommodations to Chinese necessity.

I believe that Washington and Peking

should enter into normal diplomatic relations, because doing so serves the self-interest, in security terms and otherwise, of both countries, and not because either entertains the expectation that it can reform the other. We can be bored, disgusted, or even outraged by the way the other system deals with its people, and still recognize its right to be different. Recognition of that difference does not mean we should extend aid or even that we must engage in normal economic and cultural relationships unless we choose to do so. But we expose ourselves to charges of self-righteousness and demagoguery, and possibly even of imperial intent, if we try to apply to other societies our own standards of rectitude. This is particularly true inasmuch as many of our present moral preoccupations are made possible by an affluence beyond the imagining of most other societies. And in all frankness, much of the American rhetoric of morality has a hollow sound to those who read and see on film frequent and gross disparities between what Americans say are their rules for personal and national conduct and what Americans actually do to each other and to others around the world.

The most recent upheavals in the Chinese political system were the result of strictly internal compulsions and necessities. The newly apparent or emerging personalities, procedures, and semantics sprang from Chinese origins. And one consequence of recent change is the greater readiness of Chinese to expose themselves to contact with other countries and to deal with others more forthrightly. As Chinese now experiment with new methods to achieve self-reliance for their egalitarian society, Washington should hasten—with both respect and genuine curiosity—toward establishing normal diplomatic relations with Peking, thus easing those exchanges of ideas, people, and goods from which the two countries can mutually benefit, bilaterally and in their relations with other countries of the world community. Though "reform" should on neither side be the intent of such relations, it is not too much to expect improved understanding and some greater possibility that "Taoist" nonconformists, to which historic China has always been so deeply indebted, will begin to share with us the fruits of their individual genius.