

# A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

WOW, WOW, WOW--as the pope said, responding to the cheers of the teenagers who filled Madison Square Garden to greet him. And that's *our* initial reaction to the visit of John Paul II to these United States. He clearly took New York and much of the rest of the country by storm. We're sure that the editors of this journal will soon bring their heavy analytical guns to bear on the meaning of the pope's visit. However, writing these brief notes shortly after he addressed the U.N., we're content to make some immediate if superficial comments on his address, which was billed as a major statement on human rights.

The address itself was powerful, dense, with a lot that needs careful unpacking. What is immediately discernible, however, is that in this address to the U.N., John Paul II transcended many of the simplistic slogans and intellectual guidelines that have structured and sometimes skewed debates on social and political issues. One such slogan, for example, is that "The world should set the agenda for the Church." Without overlooking or bypassing the things that most threaten and trouble people around the world--armaments, poverty, gross inequalities--John Paul II showed how, based upon its vision of the person and the inherent dignity of each person, the Church can establish its own agenda for worldly action. And the agenda, as the pope outlined it, looks somewhat different from a number that have emerged from religious communities in this country.

The pope also put into a new perspective the relation between those rights most frequently labeled social and economic and those labeled civil and political. His comments run counter to arguments that would not only distinguish but separate these rights and elevate one set at the expense of the other. And this perspective on human rights is provided by and flows from the Church's vision of what it means to be human. It

is that vision which organizes and informs the entire address John Paul delivered at the U.N. to all the people of the world. It is a vision that none of the U.N. representatives, in his or her official capacity, could have provided, since it both engages and transcends the issues it is their function to consider. With the pope back in Rome, this vision will remain ours to contemplate.

THE DALAI LAMA. The visit of John Paul II has dominated the headlines and almost all commentary on things religious. But we were privileged to participate in two lesser but, to us, enlightening and enjoyable events that preceded the visit of the pope, events that have their own resonance. Both events took place in Merrill House, the home of the Council on Religion and International Affairs (CRIA), publisher of *Worldview*. The day after His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV arrived in this country, the Office of Tibet, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and CRIA invited a small group of religious leaders of New York City to meet with him. Almost all who met the Dalai Lama commented on his openness, his remarkable simplicity, his warmth, and his own religious vision. Acting as host, James Finn read from an issue of *Worldview* in which the Dalai Lama was quoted. Religion and politics, he had said, must be joined because they are concerned with the welfare of people. And religion has something to say about how people should live their lives. Without making specific political observations, which he also avoided in all subsequent talks, the Dalai Lama reiterated and developed these points.

Both then, and later that evening when an enthusiastic crowd of more than five thousand attended a welcoming service at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, His Holiness communicated a message that far exceeded the apparent simplicity of his words.

AND ALEXANDER GINSBURG. The next meeting we attended at Merrill House was sponsored by Freedom of Faith (FOF), an ecumenical organization of Christians working for religious freedom. Although, as its charter says, it seeks to draw strength "from the symbols and resources of the Christian tradition," it extends its concern to people of all faiths. On this occasion the Reverend Joseph O'Hare, S.J., a president of FOF and a trustee of CRIA, introduced to a small group Alexander Ginsburg. Mr. Ginsburg, a noted and much-publicized dissident, was--how to say it without sounding sappy and sentimental?--a sweet and winning person. He forced one to ask how it is possible for anyone who was imprisoned for nine and a half years to emerge with no trace of bitterness, with so much understanding even of those who might be regarded as his enemies and persecutors. For it was clear that he was such a person.

One thing gave a clue. Those who were most able to remain unbowed--to use his idiom--were believers. They drew on a strength, he suggested, that their beliefs and their religious communities provided. And he spoke most movingly of the deprivations, the repression, and the real if limited victories that are the lot of many believers in the USSR today. A most impressive person. His own story and what he told of others made one appreciate the task FOF has undertaken.

NAME CALLING. Olga Carlisle, writer and painter, attacks the nationalist emphasis upon "Russity" current among some Russian intellectuals ("Reviving Myths of Holy Russia," *New York Times Magazine*, September 16). She charges that "anti-Semitism is clearly an element of the new wave--seemingly a natural companion of the thrust toward the old era of church and czar." She cites Solzhenitsyn as evidence. In *Lenin in Zurich*, she notes, the evil genius who "seduces" Lenin into taking German aid for his return to Russia is a Jew. In a BBC interview earlier this year Solzhenitsyn, who never wanted to leave Russia, expressed misgivings about so many émigrés leaving in recent years, "at the very time when opportunities for action emerged in our country and when forces were most needed there." Ms. Car-

lisle observes ominously: "The majority of those émigrés are Jewish." Wanting also Jews to stay and help share the future of Russia is anti-Semitism? It is Ms. Carlisle's privilege and the *New York Times*' bad judgment to publish her view that criticism of Marxism is "right wing" and that Russian religion and patriotism rest upon "atavistic beliefs." In slandering one of the few moral giants of our time and in trivializing the awesome charge of anti-Semitism, however, the author exhibits a desperation appropriate to her perverse argument.

CHINA, HUNGER, THE *New York Times*, *Worldview*, HONESTY IN JOURNALISM, ETC. When the U.S. and the People's Republic of China normalized relations and Western visitors were admitted to China, there was an initial burst of euphoria. That fine first frenzy cooled after a time, but some of the misconceptions that were planted then continue to flourish. For example, "Whatever else you can say about Mao, at least everyone in China now gets enough food."

When Ivan and Miriam London documented the untruth of that statement in these pages, their findings were generally criticized when they were not ignored. Major newspapers continued to editorialize on a romantic rather than a factual basis. However, as the PRC gradually exposed more of its recent past, the accuracy of the Londons' work was gradually confirmed. Now their conclusions are being supported by the highest authorities. On Sunday, October 7, the *Times* published on page 18 a UPI story out of Peking. One sentence from that story should suffice: "Millions of Chinese went hungry during the rule of Chairman Mao Zedong because of his government's mistakes and political instability, the Chinese Communist party said today." We presume that only diehard Maoists will wish to dispute that statement, although it may be some time before its essential truth percolates up into the editorials of, say, the *New York Times*.

*Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.*