

In recent years the United States has convinced itself that somehow strategic arms limitation is more advantageous to the Soviets than to ourselves, and hence should be conceded only if the Soviets toe the line in other areas, notably human rights. This idea that the avoidance of nuclear holocaust is of greater benefit

to one party than another could be dismissed as simply absurd if the potential consequences were not so grave. Such confusion is not without historical precedent. Foreign policy trends show frightening parallels with policies of enthusiastic sects such as the Circumcellians.

In the fourth century A.D. the Circumcellians, an extremist Christian sect, terrorized North Africa. Seeking martyrdom, they accosted travellers on the highway and, threatening them with wooden clubs, demanded that the travellers kill them or be killed. For the Circumcellians and their victims, the distinctions between religious fervor, glorification of martyrdom, and suicide had disappeared.

The Circumcellians represent a form of religious expression known as "enthusiasm." Today the word enthusiasm carries positive connotations, but until recent years "enthusiasts" were regarded as a danger to society and its institutions. Enthusiasts are egocentric; it is the soul of the enthusiast himself that is the object of interest, not improvement of worldly existence or heavenly rewards for mankind at large. Enthusiasts take one aspect of religious life or doctrine, such as martyrdom in the case of the Circumcellians, and emphasize it out of proportion to all others. Unlike established churches, which have to co-exist with human weakness insofar as they claim jurisdiction over entire populations, enthusiasm has no tolerance for human frailty. It seeks to perfect man, to raise him to a worthy state by rigorous discipline, sharply drawing lines between good and evil.

Enthusiasm takes on a variety of forms as delineated by Max Weber. The mystic ignores the world, either by withdrawing from it or remaining within it but denying it any importance. Other enthusiasts, those whom Weber termed the ascetics, are more active, seeing themselves as the instruments of God. Other-worldly ascetics mortify their own flesh and passions, seeking to drive out all but the godly elements. But the type which most interested Weber, and the type which corresponds to the Circumcellians, were the inner-worldly ascetics. The inner-worldly ascetic sees the world as an arena in which to prove

## Enthusiasm: The Threat to SALT II

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his religiosity, at whatever cost to himself or others. "The world is presented to the religious virtuoso as his responsibility . . . it becomes a challenge for the demonstration of the ascetic temper and for the strongest possible attack against the world's sin."

The analogy that can be drawn between enthusiasm, especially the inner-worldly type, and the Carter Administration's espousal of human rights is disturbing. The Carter-Brzezinski approach to the Soviet Union is that of the enthusiast to a mere human being: a concern with avoiding contamination of the purity of the moral condition of the United States, a disproportionate emphasis on a single virtue among many, and a 'holier-than-thou' attitude, which is both appropriate to enthusiasm and useful for domestic consumption. Of course, as Solzhenitsyn has recently pointed out, the American people may lack the discipline to support all this moral certainty, but they understandably respond to the appeal of a "You are good and they are bad and therefore to be avoided or chastened" line.

Enthusiasm conditions action; the inner-worldly ascetic takes on the world, not for its sake of course, but for his own. The U.S. obsession with voicing disapproval of the Soviet dissident trials, trials which violate our conceptions of human rights, are constantly threatening to derail the strategic arms negotiations, despite the efforts of Cyrus Vance to keep these issues separate. Such Byzantine questions as the appropriateness of the U.S. imposing its values on the internal affairs of (some) other nations or the possible role of the C.I.A. in the Shcharansky case are left undisturbed, for the logic of the enthusiast is simpler and politically attractive: I am good. You, the Soviet Union, are bad. Therefore, I am reluctant to compromise my goodness by sitting and talking with you, unless you mend your ways and become good. Like me.

The human rights controversy is ancient. In fact, the Circumcellians were part of a larger sect, the Donatists, which had broken with the Church over a human rights issue. The Roman authorities had ordered all Bibles confiscated and burned. Some church members turned over their Bibles to the Romans; some handed over other, non-religious texts to the illiterate or indifferent soldiers. The Bishop of Carthage, unable to prevent what was happening, permitted the church members to submit to the Romans, taking the pragmatic position that it was better to preserve the Christians than the Christians' books. The Donatists thought otherwise; they accused the Bishop and ecclesiastical leaders of treason, of compromising with evil rather than encouraging the Christians to maintain, and die for, their purity. The Donatists broke off into their own sect, which itself was soon divided by the endless business of trying to be holier than one's neighbor.

Linkages. "You turned over your Bible to the Romans (well, even if it was not a Bible, it looked like one); therefore I am no longer going to have anything to do with you. You are holding rigged trials and denying emigration

permits for unfair reasons; therefore I am not going to sit down with you and discuss how we can keep from incinerating the earth. For after all, even if the worst happens, my martyrdom will just prove my holiness." So runs the logic of the enthusiast.

International negotiations such as SALT cannot be conducted from the position of enthusiasm, for the goal of such talks is radically different: the enthusiast aims at the salvation of his own soul, while the objective of SALT is the preservation of the world at large. In sharp contrast to the outlook of an enthusiast, strategic arms negotiation requires breadth of vision, concern for the welfare of the human species as a whole. This does not mean benignly accepting the Soviet violation of human rights, but rather tolerantly refraining from inappropriately linking opposition to the fate of SALT II. It is no contradiction to be for human rights and to be for a successful conclusion of SALT. Only an enthusiast would demand holiness in all spheres as a prerequisite to negotiation.

If the recent manifestations of enthusiasm on the part of the Carter Administration and some members of Congress reflect actual commitment to a set of values regarding human rights, they nonetheless could result in the death of millions of people who do not happen to share the enthusiasts fondness for martyrdom. If all of the moral posturing is merely a card being played for domestic political advantage, this demonstrates a cynicism even a non-enthusiast would find repellent.