

Religion & Democracy

DECEMBER 1981

IRD statement released at press conference in N.Y.C.

On November 10 the Executive Committee of the Institute on Religion and Democracy held a news conference in New York City to make public a general statement of the Institute's philosophical and theological purpose. The statement, titled "Christianity and Democracy," was also endorsed by a list of distinguished leaders from church life and the intellectual world.

Pastor Richard John Neuhaus, the statement's author, addressed the members of the press, together with IRD Executive Committee Chairman Edmund W. Robb and James Finn of Freedom House.

The statement outlines the theological imperative for Christians to support democratic values, on the grounds that democracy recognizes man's imperfection and holds open the possibility for human discovery and progress.

The statement also criticizes various "arguments for oppression" which imply that persons in developing nations confronted with political upheaval "do not feel about their human rights as keenly as we feel about ours."

Though Neuhaus acknowledged at the conference that the statement takes issue with some current policies and practices of mainline denominations, he cautioned that any subsequent dialogue should not be construed as a battle between the "children of light and the children of darkness."

"This statement and the Institute is not an attack," said Neuhaus. "It is an invitation to Christian leadership in this country to consider the Christian stake and the Christian warrant for democratic government."

Rev. Robb announced that the Institute was launching a drive for individual endorsements to the statement by local and national church leaders. He stated that most of the IRD Advisory Board had already signed it.

"Christianity and Democracy" is intended to provide a positive philosophical foundation for the work of the Institute, which was formed in April by a group which includes Christian theologians, laymen, educators, and pastors concerned about a lack of vigorous support in mainline Christian churches for democratic values and causes.

"Church agencies often defend their controversial political involvement by arguing that political freedoms must sometimes be sacrificed in order to further the goals of economic justice," the Institute

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Excerpts from Christianity and Democracy

The first political task of the Church is to be the Church. Because Christ is Lord, Caesar is not Lord. By humbling all secular claims to sovereignty, the Church makes its most important political contribution by being, fully and unapologetically, the Church.

While our first allegiance is to the community of faith and its mission in the world, Christians do not withdraw from participation in other communities.

In this century of Hitler and Stalin and their lesser imitators the most urgent truth to be told about secular politics is the threat of totalitarianism.

The religious term for totalitarianism is idolatry. There is a deep human hunger for a monistic world, for authority, control and definitive meaning which can cut through the ambiguities and uncertainties of our existence. From this hunger emerges the totalitarian impulse. This hunger is essentially religious in character and is dangerously misplaced when it seeks satisfaction in the politics of the present time.

An alternative to totalitarianism is democracy. Democratic government understands itself to be accountable to values and to truth which transcend any regime or party. Thus in the United States of America we declare ours to be a nation "under God," which

means, first of all, a nation under judgment. In addition, limited government means that a clear distinction is made between the state and the society. Because it cherishes criticism and change, democracy is a progressive movement invoking the promise of the future. Totalitarianism, which would freeze and consolidate power relations, is essentially reactive and fearful.

Human rights are not established by the state. The most fundamental of all human rights is the freedom of religious faith and practice. Where religious freedom is violated, all other human rights are assaulted at their source.

The United States of America is the primary bearer of the democratic possibility in the world today. The Soviet Union is the primary bearer of the totalitarian alternative.

The victims of freedom's denial already number in the many millions. And we do know that one day, before the judgment throne of God, those who were voiceless will ask what we said on their behalf. What we say or do may seem to be of little moment. But in the face of every discouragement we will persist in hope because finally, as we said at the start, Jesus Christ is Lord.

Briefs

Archbishop Obando y Bravo, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua, stated in June, "After two years of hope, our revolution is drifting toward Marxism according to the Cuban model." Since then repression against the business, the free trade unions, the democratic parties and the free press has escalated. In November, before the Latin American Conference of Bishops, the Archbishop asserted that key positions in the Nicaraguan government are now occupied by Cubans. The Institute on Religion and Democracy has just published a pamphlet entitled, "Nicaragua: Liberation Theology, Totalitarian Reality" (\$1.50).

South Africa's churches are moving today toward responsible opposition to their government's policy of apartheid. The Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, long associated with the legitimization of apartheid in that country, has declared that "the Bible offers no justification, nor even a vague indication, that biological factors can serve as a basis either for ordering or judging human relationships, or for the award of rights, privileges and responsibilities of all people."

A program recently broadcast by the Public Broadcasting Service entitled "Protestant Protest" includes a lengthy interview with Rev. Ed Robb, the Chairman of IRD's Executive Committee. The film also includes interviews with Dr. Claire Randall, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Nora Boots, of the World Division of the United Methodist Church, and Rev. Philip Wheaton, the Executive Director of E.P.I.C.A., a church sponsored Latin America aid project. The subject of the program, a part of the "Ben Wattenberg-At-Large" series, is church support for Leftist causes that church members might find unpopular.

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The Bolivian Conference of Catholic Bishops has called on that country's government fully to respect human rights. Specifically, the Conference of Bishops requested authorization to reopen two Catholic radio stations that were closed after the July 17, 1980 coup. The call was issued October 22, at the conclusion of a preparatory meeting for the general assembly to be held at the end of November. The Bishops also argued that such measures would help the Bolivian government regain U.S. diplomatic recognition.

The Salvation Army, known over the world as a charity but in reality a full-fledged church, has pulled out of the World Council of Churches in protest against the Council's Program to Combat Racism, specifically a 1978 grant to the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe. Salvation Army officials suspected that Patriotic Front guerrillas, just before receiving aid from the controversial W.C.C. fund, were responsible for the deaths of two Salvation Army workers during that country's civil war. The Army had suspended its membership in the W.C.C. in 1978.

Iran's persecution of members of the minority Baha'i religion has widened to include harassment of women and children. Recently 26 Baha'is, including women and children, were summarily arrested in Urumiyeh, a village in Iran's Azirbayjan province. With the opening of Iran's elementary and secondary schools this fall, school authorities are carefully scrutinizing the students' religion and are refusing to register Baha'i children for classes, in an attempt to force them to recant their faith.

Ethiopian government officials backed by soldiers confiscated the headquarters of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church, the country's largest Protestant body, on November 16. No reason was given for the seizure. Some diplomats speculated that the Marxist junta simply needed more office space. But the confiscation is another move in a long-term harassment campaign directed against Christian activity in the country, which has included imprisonment of pastors, closing of churches, and seizures of communications equipment.

The United Methodist Reporter, one of America's foremost independent religious weeklies, recently bumped its head on the beehive of the religious left. In its October 30th issue the Reporter carried a report about a church-supported "Conference in Solidarity with the Liberation Struggles of Southern Africa," held on October 9 - 11 in New York City. A Reporter correspondent was somewhat surprised to learn that:

* The Coordinator of the Conference was Carl Bloice of the U.S. Peace Council, a group which even the official United Methodist newsweekly, Newscope, once characterized as "consistently pro-Soviet."

* Almost half of the 31 members of the Conference Steering Committee were connected to groups which can reasonably be described as pro-Soviet.

* Conference resolutions (only 29 of them!) included a program "to counteract anti-Soviet propaganda", an attack on the reporting of such western-based news agencies as AP and UPI, and a call to repeal U.S. laws banning imports of Cuban propaganda materials.

The Reporter noted that thousands of dollars of church funds were spent on this event, that it was organized almost entirely by church staff, and that almost all its literature carried the return address of the United Methodist Office for the U.N.

The Institute on Religion and Democracy has sent out over a thousand of its El Salvador packets to church leaders across the nation. The packet is in response to a "massive letter campaign" launched by the National Council of Churches which uses materials urging support for the Leftist guerrillas in that country. More recently, the Institute published a new report on The Catholic Church in El Salvador. The report explains that, contrary to certain claims, the Church in El Salvador opposes the guerrilla movement. It can be ordered from the Institute office for \$1.50. The entire El Salvador packet is also available at \$2.50.

You are warmly invited to become a member of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. The cost is \$25.00 a year. Contributions in any amount from those who wish to encourage our work are much needed.

National Council Materials Criticized

In response to what he termed the "politically slanted mission study materials on Europe" being used this year in several denominations, the Chairman of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Edmund Robb, announced on September 10 the release of a Supplementary European Mission Studies Packet for use in local church study groups.

Robb was especially critical of a book by Professor James Will, entitled Must Walls Divide? "This book speaks favorably about the Christian Peace Conference, a group whose leaders recently signed a statement justifying the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan," said Robb. "Yet it largely ignores the growing number of courageous Eastern European religious activists who are asserting their independence from state authority."

According to Robb, Must Walls Divide? criticizes Western Christians for identifying too closely with national interests, while praising Eastern European Church involvement in international "peace" activities supported by their governments.

"The Will book contains a similar double standard regarding the news media," said Robb. The book criticizes media "forces that interpret and manage" western societies because they "fail to give an adequate interpretation of Marxism. Will does not discuss the forces that 'interpret and manage' the Eastern European news media," said Robb.

"The danger we face in following Professor Will's advice," according to Robb, "is that we may cut ourselves off from the truly remarkable religious revival that is currently underway in much of Eastern Europe.

"The official studies materials provide no real understanding of how Eastern bloc governments attempt to suppress religions within the population while at the same time trying to utilize certain religious institutions' instruments of state propaganda," said Robb. The supplementary packet is designed to provide this missing information.

Robb stated that "This book depicts Soviet-style Communism and

Christianity as approximately equal moral forces when it favorably quotes Roger Garaudy, a academic participant in Christian-Marxist dialogue, as saying, 'it is an incontestable fact of our age that the future of man cannot be constructed either against religious believers or without them. Neither can it be constructed against the Communists or without them!'"

Will's book is the principle text on Europe utilized by some 30,000 United Methodists who attend week-long seminars in over 75 locations around the country during the summer months. The book is published by the National Council of Churches' Friendship Press, which produces a large number of mission studies materials for use in several mainline denominations. According to a spokesman for Friendship Press, the book is also being widely distributed by the United Presbyterians and Disciples of Christ.

In an interview with Religious News Service, Professor Will responded that his book "is not written to be read in Europe." He said that he had made several visits to the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries at the

invitation of church groups and that "when I'm in Eastern Europe I make my witness against their management of the news."

He said Christians Associated for Relations with Eastern Europe, which he chairs, was concerned about the Christian Peace Conference stand on Afghanistan and issued a statement "highly critical" of the Soviet invasion.

While agreeing that "there are really human rights problems in the East," Professor Will asserted that "it is a very, very grave error to focus only on the dissidents" in discussing Eastern Europe.

"I don't want to demonize one society or the other," the seminary professor said.

In response to Professor Will, Robb said that the supplementary packet published by the Institute on Religion and Democracy "does not focus only on the dissidents, but rather presents detailed information about the plight of the official churches in Eastern Europe."

"It's a shame that our official mission studies materials don't do the same," he added.

IRD People in the News

The Rev. James V. Schall, S.J., a professor of Government at Georgetown University and an Institute Advisory Board member, has just published a new book, Christianity and Politics. Schall offers a thorough analysis of the present relationship between faith and politics from a Jesuit's perspective, centering in on the ultimate limits of politics. Schall states in his conclusion that because of a flawed theology, "We are very close in our politics to a very old type of idolatry." The book may be ordered from the publisher: Daughters of St. Paul, 50 St. Paul's Ave., Boston, MA 02130 (\$5.95, paper).

Institute Board member Michael Novak is a key founder of a new magazine entitled This World: A Journal of Religion in Society. Designed for the general reading public, This World will deal with human

values and public policy, with an emphasis on economics. It will be published by the Institute on Educational Affairs and the American Enterprise Institute, and edited by Michael Scully, formerly associate editor at The Public Interest. The subscription rate is \$16 per year and can be ordered at this address: 310 Madison Ave., Suite 1629, New York, NY 10017.

Institute Advisory Board members Richard Neuhaus, Paul Seabury, and David Jessup are among those quoted in an article, "Sanctifying Revolution," which traces the recent history of the involvement of mainline churches with the extreme Left. The article, written by Rael Jean and Erich Isaac, has been reprinted from The American Spectator by The Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1211 Connecticut Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, and can be ordered for \$1.00.

Press Conference Continued

charges in its brochure. "But the choice between bread and freedom is a false choice. Christian social action can and should foster both."

At the same time, the Institute argues, the churches have done little about religious persecution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This selective morality has caused thousands of people to leave their denominations and has created a situation in which the extreme Left and the extreme Right in American religion dominate the discussion.

The Institute is unique in several respects, its founders contend.

First is the diversity, both politically and theologically, of its Board of Advisors. They cannot be

characterized by the usual labels of "right" or "left", "liberals" or "conservatives", "evangelicals" or "social action advocates". For in fact, they include individuals from all these backgrounds.

Among the Institute's Advisors are sociologist Peter L. Berger, theologians Carl F. H. Henry, Michael Novak, and Richard J. Neuhaus, political scientist Paul Seabury, church historian Richard Lovelace, United Methodist pastors Ira Gallaway and L. D. Thomas, Catholic newspaper editor Francis X. Maier, and United Church of Christ laywomen Marion Hepburn Grant.

In addition to the Institute's diversity, a second unique feature is its grass-roots focus.

Many local church leaders have long objected to the extremist bent of their national agencies, but

they have lacked the information and staff assistance necessary to bring about a real debate on the issues.

The Institute hopes to work as a service organization for these concerned Christians by providing training sessions, research, and assistance in writing resolutions and preparing educational campaigns.

A third unique feature of the Institute is its focus on denominational behavior, including financial grants from churches to outside organizations.

The Institute plans to monitor such expenditures, and increase the level of understanding among churchgoers about how their money is being spent.

Copies of the statement on "Christianity and Democracy" are now available from the Institute office for \$1.50.

Evidence Grows on Chemical Warfare

The charge that the Soviet Union has supplied its ally, Vietnam, with chemical and biological weapons for use against the peoples of Laos and Cambodia has been shrugged off by some as just hollow Cold War propaganda. So far, discussion of this issue has centered on the actual physical evidence of these weapons, which, needless to say, is not easy to acquire.

But people who listen to the refugees from those remote and dangerous regions are more inclined to think there may indeed be something to these gruesome charges. After all, the refugees proved right when they told a disbelieving world about the holocaust in Cambodia a few years back. Maybe they are telling us something again.

Murray Hiebert, a Co-Director of the Indochina

Project -- a church-related organization in Washington not known for echoing U.S. foreign policy interests -- evidently seems to think so. Hiebert is a Mennonite who speaks several Indo-Chinese languages. On October 21 he testified before the Sub-Committee on Asian Pacific Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives about his recent travels to Southeast Asia. "Like many others," Hiebert related, "I have interviewed Hmong refugees and the sheer magnitude of their reports about "yellow rain" suggests substantial circumstantial evidence that some kind of chemical agents are being used."

Hiebert went on to note the difficulty of proving these charges with strictly scientific evidence. "Despite these questions," he concluded, "the large number of similar refugee reports are cause for grave concern and should prompt further investigation."

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