

Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

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IRD Honors Archbishop Obando y Bravo of Nicaragua

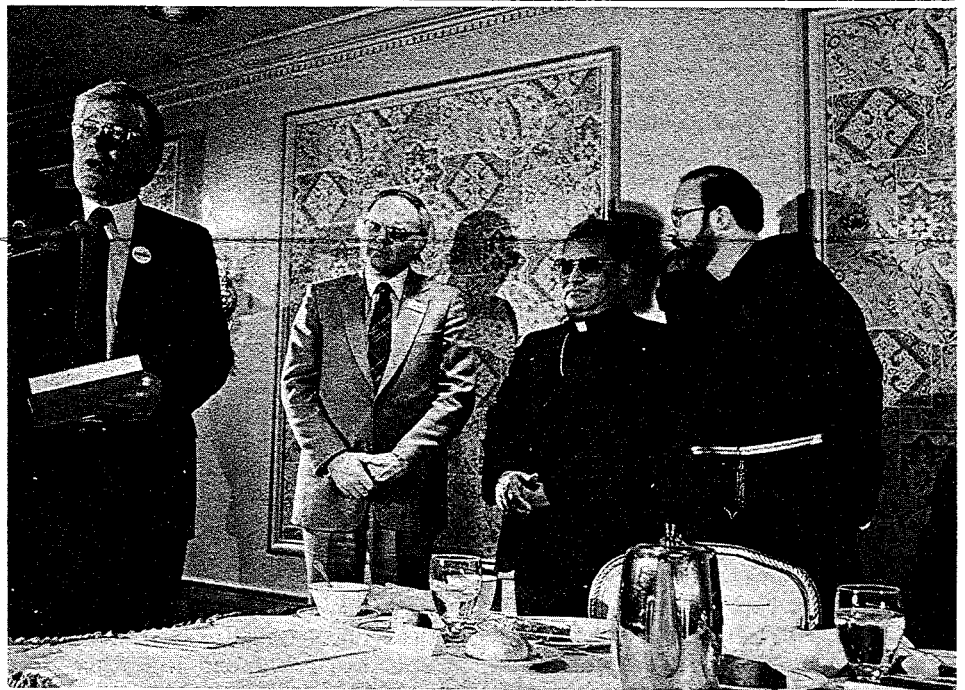
Some 200 leaders from religious life, public affairs and the media came together in Washington on January 8th for a luncheon organized by the Institute on Religion and Democracy in tribute to Archbishop Obando y Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua.

The Archbishop was introduced by Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, D.C., and was presented with an award from the Institute for his long and brave struggle for democracy in Nicaragua, which today is being challenged anew by the governing left-wing Sandinista junta.

Archbishop Hickey described Obando y Bravo as "a hero of the modern church." He continued: "During the long dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza the Archbishop proved himself a fearless defender of human rights. Now he fights for the rights of the Church and its peoples to make a contribution to and participate in the choices that will lead to a new Nicaragua. It is a fight for a free press, for free unions, for free choices in the type of education that parents can choose for their children."

In his luncheon address Archbishop Obando y Bravo, though perhaps mindful of a new Nicaraguan law that severely penalizes any Nicaraguan who criticizes the regime while abroad, left no doubt about the Sandinista challenge to liberty and the determination of his church to carry on its struggle. "We don't want our revolution to be a copy of another revolution," he said. "We want a revolution that is authentically Nicaraguan...."

"The hierarchy of Nicaragua is united in struggle for human rights and democratic ideals, without adopting any ideological position. As a church we are experts on humanity, not on politics. We only wish that our people and all peoples will be able to express themselves with authentic liberty -- a freedom that



Edmund Robb, Chairman of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, presents the IRD's Religion and Democracy Award to Archbishop Obando y Bravo of Nicaragua (third from left). The IRD's Michael Novak, is at the Archbishop's left; Father Sean O'Malley of the Diocese of Washington, D.C. at his right.

will permit them to be sons and daughters of a common father, in justice and in peace."

The Archbishop warned that "there is no doubt that right now there are many Cubans who occupy important positions in Nicaragua." He also voiced concern about the recently announced sales of arms by the French Government to the Sandinistas, saying that this is not the kind of aid that Nicaragua needs.

While he acknowledged that the clergy and the church have some role to play in political life, in its broad meaning, the Archbishop explained that, "We feel it is not right for priests to participate in partisan politics. By becoming involved in a party he can divide his own community."



Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, who introduced Archbishop Obando y Bravo at the IRD's luncheon, with him after the award ceremony.

Briefs

In a pastoral letter to the Catholic chaplains of the U.S. armed forces, Terrence Cardinal Cooke added a welcome voice to the Christian debate about disarmament. Cardinal Cooke called for efforts to end the arms race "not unilaterally indeed but at an equal rate on all sides, on the basis of agreements and backed up by genuine and effective guarantees." The Cardinal also defended the traditional Catholic teaching that "a government has both the right and the duty to protect its people against unjust aggression." He added that "This means that it is legitimate to develop and maintain weapons systems to try to prevent war by 'detering' another nation from attacking." The Cardinal further asserted that "a nation may have an obligation to protect other nations, just as we have the obligation to go to the defense of a neighbor, even though a stranger, being attacked." Cardinal Cooke's stand has been hailed by a number of clergy for giving balance to a religious dialogue about disarmament that was becoming dangerously one-sided.

Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., for many years head of research of the Presbyterian Church-US, offers a penetrating analysis of the decline of mainline Protestant churches in his new book, Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals. Mainline memberships, he says, do not now care less about evangelism, missions, or works of mercy in meeting human needs. They do, however, lack confidence in mainline church leaderships and are therefore channeling their dollars and energies into evangelical parachurch organizations which are, as a result, growing rapidly. Hutcheson's proposed cure for mainline doldrums parallels the IRD's call for an "open church" that is responsive to the variety of visions to be found among the Christian people. We agree with James McCord of Princeton Theological Seminary: "This is a book to be read and pondered by ministers and lay persons interested in the health of the church today." The book is published by the John Knox Press and sells in the paperback edition for \$8.95.

The IRD recently hosted three Protestant ministers from the part of Angola controlled by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). These ministers were visiting the United States to extend their thanks to American denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, which continue to aid them in mission work. However the Angolans claimed that some U.S. churches only aid churches within the area controlled by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). The MPLA, despite the assistance of Cuban troops and Soviet and East German military and police advisors, has failed in its bid to "unify" Angola under its rule.

The Summer, 1981, issue of Common Ground, a newsletter of the United Methodist Voluntary Service of the church's General Board of Global Ministries, features an article on "Cuba: Land of Contrasts". It might surprise some Methodists. The author, Rusty Davenport, asserts that "Cuba represents a vision of the future shared by many poor and working people in the U.S. today." Davenport was in a delegation of "community activists" that visited Cuba. He announced that this group "...learned about the narrow (and incorrect) perspective we have been taught about democracy—that because we have a 'two party' system no other can be democratic." Such are the lessons of the one-party state.

Americans, even New Yorkers themselves, often think of New York City as cynical, sinful and, of course, irreligious. Hence the surprise at the New York Times -- and the resulting page one coverage -- when its pollsters discovered that some 40% of New Yorkers attend religious services every week and 7 out of 10 New Yorkers say they may pray every week. These figures correspond to those of the country at large.

A new IRD pamphlet on the struggle of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua against the drift toward totalitarianism— "Nicaragua: A Revolution Against the Church?", by Kerry

Ptacek—recounts the continuing struggle of Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo and the Nicaraguan Conference of Catholic Bishops against dictatorship of the left and the right. The pamphlet pays particular attention to the growing conflict between the Bishops and the Sandinist junta—a story of great importance to America's churches. The pamphlet can be ordered from the IRD office for \$1.50.

The following literature on the role of the churches in society is available from the IRD:

1) **Christianity and Democracy** - \$1.50

The guiding statement of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, which sets forward the theological and social argument for a stronger Christian commitment to democratic values.

2) **The Catholic Church in El Salvador** - \$1.50

A definitive description of the position of the Salvadoran Church, which clearly establishes the Church's opposition to violence and repression -- including that of the Marxist-Leninist left.

3) **Must Walls Confuse?** - \$1.50

A critical review of the 1981 Summer mission text of the National Council of Churches, which argues that American churches should be more critical of religious repression in the Soviet bloc.

4) **Nicaragua: A Revolution Against the Church?** - \$1.50

A review of the growing assault on liberty by Nicaragua's Sandinistas, and the courageous role of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church.

To order any of these materials, please send the appropriate amount to the IRD at the address below.

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The American Churches and the Polish Crisis: Food for the Body, but What for the Soul?

America's liberal Protestant churches continue to make substantial shipments of food to Poland since the declaration of martial law, but have issued no statements condemning the Polish government for its assault on human rights.

This contrasts sharply to the response of the Catholic leadership. Archbishop John R. Roach, President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops, took only until December 14th to express opposition to a possible Soviet invasion, and since then many Catholic Bishops have pressed their concern for Polish human rights.

Most Protestant bodies argue that they have not had adequate time to prepare and adopt positions on the Polish crisis. But a number of important meetings are planned for next month. Church leaders might consider the demands advocated by the AFL-CIO and the Committee in Support of Solidarity, an organization of Polish Solidarity members and their U.S. supporters:

- 1) The U.S. Government should impose across the board economic sanctions on all Warsaw Pact nations, including the embargo on U.S. grain sales to the Soviets.
- 2) The U.S. and its allies should immediately recall all outstanding Polish debts.
- 3) Polish abuses of human rights should be brought before the U.S. Security Council, the U.N. Human Rights Commission, and the Conference on European Cooperation and Security in Madrid. International observer delegations should be sent to Poland to demand full access to the camps.
- 4) The U.S. Government should make public pertinent intelligence information, including satellite photographs, of the scope of the Polish resistance and the size and condition of the concentration camps.

For more detailed information on the situation in Poland and U.S. efforts to aid Solidarity, contact The Committee in Support of Solidarity, 275 7th Avenue, 25th Floor, New York, NY 10001. Telephone 212/989-6966.

The Poland Watch

A number of Protestant denominations have spoken out strongly -- sometimes with "prophetic" disregard for the niceties of procedure -- when condemning human rights abuses in places such as South Africa, El Salvador and Chile. In mid-January the IRD staff asked representatives of such denominations what, one month after the military crackdown, they have said about repression in Poland. Here are the responses:

United Presbyterian Church

Robert Stevenson, an Associate Stated Clerk, said that the UPC has in some measure dealt with the issue because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, of which it is a member, sent a statement to the Reformed Evangelical Church in Poland: "God's grace abounds even in times of darkness, difficulty, and trial."

United Church of Christ

Dr. David Stowe, Executive Vice-President of the Board of World Ministries, explained that they "have decided there is nothing very helpful we can say at this time."

Disciples of Christ

Robert Friedly, an information officer, told us, "Unfortunately, there isn't (a statement)." The Administrative Committee meets in February. Poland isn't on the docket, but someone might bring it up.

United Methodist Board of Global Ministries

Dr. Randolph Nugent, General Secretary, explained that no statement had yet been made, but that one is "under development."

United Methodist Board of Church and Society

Haviland Houston, General Secretary, acknowledged that no new statement had been made since the coup, but that a resolution supporting Solidarity had been adopted in February, 1981.

Lutheran Church in America

Pastor Ralph Eckard, Assistant to the Bishop, said, "It is very recent. We can't really be spontaneous to such a spontaneous crisis."

The Episcopal Church

Walter Boyd, a press officer, explained that no statement had been made, nor was one planned -- but that it could come up at a February Executive Council meeting.

The National Council of Churches

Harriet Ziegler, an information officer, said that there has been no statement yet. But General Secretary Claire Randall had sent a Christmas telegram to Polish Church leaders assuring them of the NCC's "sincere prayers and profound sense of unity in this season of celebration."

The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is asking church members and others to join in demonstrations on January 30th in support of freedom in Poland. Public events have already been planned for Chicago and Cleveland and arrangements are underway for protests in other American cities. These events will be filmed for a special television presentation in the United States and overseas by the U.S. International Communications Agency. For information about how you or your church can participate call your local Central Labor Council, or the IRD office (202/822-8627)

Institute Delegation Visits El Salvador

Two members of the IRD Executive Committee, Edmund Robb and Ira Gallaway, spent the week of December 6th in El Salvador, seeking firsthand information on the state of the crisis in that nation.

They visited a number of Salvadoran leaders, among them President Jose Napoleon Duarte, who heads the ruling junta, acting Archbishop Rivera y Damas, leader of the country's Catholics, and representatives of campesino organizations, relief agencies, and trade unions.

Robb and Gallaway returned from the trip distressed by the continuing violence in El Salvador but encouraged by the progress of the massive land reform program and the possibility of meaningfully free elections. Both men agreed that the true situation in El Salvador is significantly different from the picture that has been transmitted to the American public -- especially the churches.

"The violence of a determined and ruthless left," said Gallaway, "pulled by the illusionary promises of the Marxist dialectic, and by the pain and hopelessness of the landless peasantry, is being matched in part by the violent far right which seems determined to thwart any lasting and significant social or political change for the people of El Salvador."

Robb agreed that abuses of power by the military continue and

must stop. "The human rights violations, which are many, must cease," he said. "The U.S. Government must bring all possible pressure to ensure that this is done."

Both of the United Methodist ministers were pleased to observe the scope of the land reform program. Robb said the program "has broken the grip of oligarchs on the country's economic, social and political systems" He said that two-thirds of El Salvador's landless peasants have gained ownership through the program of over 40 percent of the country's cropland.

Gallaway noted that both the rightist and leftist extremists opposed the implementation of the land reforms. He said the radical right "are often irrational in their bitterness and determined in their resistance" to necessary reforms. The radical left, on the other hand, oppose the land reform "because it is seen as a probable block to their military efforts to win and control the land and the people."

The scheduled March elections seem to Robb and Gallaway to have crucial significance. "It is most revealing," commented Gallaway, "that though the left insists that it seeks a democratic solution for the people of El Salvador, it is opposed to the elections and is not willing to trust the democratic electoral

process."

Robb said it appears that the election commission "has integrity and will do everything possible to ensure fair and secret elections."

U.S. economic aid was seen by both men as being essential to preventing total economic collapse, which they believe would shortly lead to a takeover by the leftist guerillas.

Robb also stated, "I do not recommend the unilateral cutting off of military aid from the U.S. I recommend that the U.S. Government propose a cessation of military aid from all sources under international supervision and control."

Gallaway agreed, saying Salvadoran leaders, both in the Church and campesino organizations, told him that "if military aid is unilaterally withdrawn by the United States, that Marxism will triumph with the continued support both economically and militarily of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Russia."

"When questioned specifically concerning the results of unilateral withdrawal of economic and military aid by the U.S.," Gallaway reported, "Archbishop Rivera y Damas said that unilateral withdrawal of either economic or military aid would be fatal to El Salvador."

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