

# Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

May 1983

## Cracks in the Stonewall? <sup>3/4 max</sup>

### The Debate Widens <sup>22</sup>

Official NCC policy has been to pretend that questions raised about church support to the extreme Left are nothing but falsehood and delusions. But evidence grows that, despite the stonewalling, the questions are not fading away. As the dust settles after reports by The Reader's Digest and "60 Minutes," the ranks of the critics seem to be growing. Among them are publications and individuals who reacted with dismay and disbelief when the IRD first raised these questions a year and more ago.

The Rev. James Wall, editor of the liberal Christian Century, last month advised an NCC public relations committee that the best response to critics the NCCers could make would be to "clean up their act." Dr. Wall criticized the IRD for using "a hatchet rather than a scalpel" to make its points, but added that "average church members have been genuinely concerned about the leftist bent of the churches and were just waiting for someone to articulate their concerns."

Wall further contended that NCC staffers are prone to "romantic, revolutionary rhetoric of the Left," and that "there are too many places where staff are able to manipulate resolutions and get them passed." A reporter who attended the meeting commented -- with what may have been understatement -- that Dr. Wall's remarks "drew spirited responses."

Perhaps the most impressive new entry in the NCC controversy is the six-page special supplement on the NCC published early in April by the United Methodist Reporter (UMR), the largest Protestant weekly newspaper in the United States. The UMR describes this publication as "the most extensive and intensive investigative effort in our paper's history."

The UMR survey finds good in some aspects of NCC work and makes some criticism of the IRD. But its conclusions give powerful confirmation that something is seriously amiss at 475 Riverside Drive, and that it will take fundamental structural changes to set it right.

The UMR studied five years' worth of NCC statements and publications and "discovered that the NCC has devoted at least four times more effort to addressing abuses by dictatorial rightist regimes (such as South Korea) than to those by

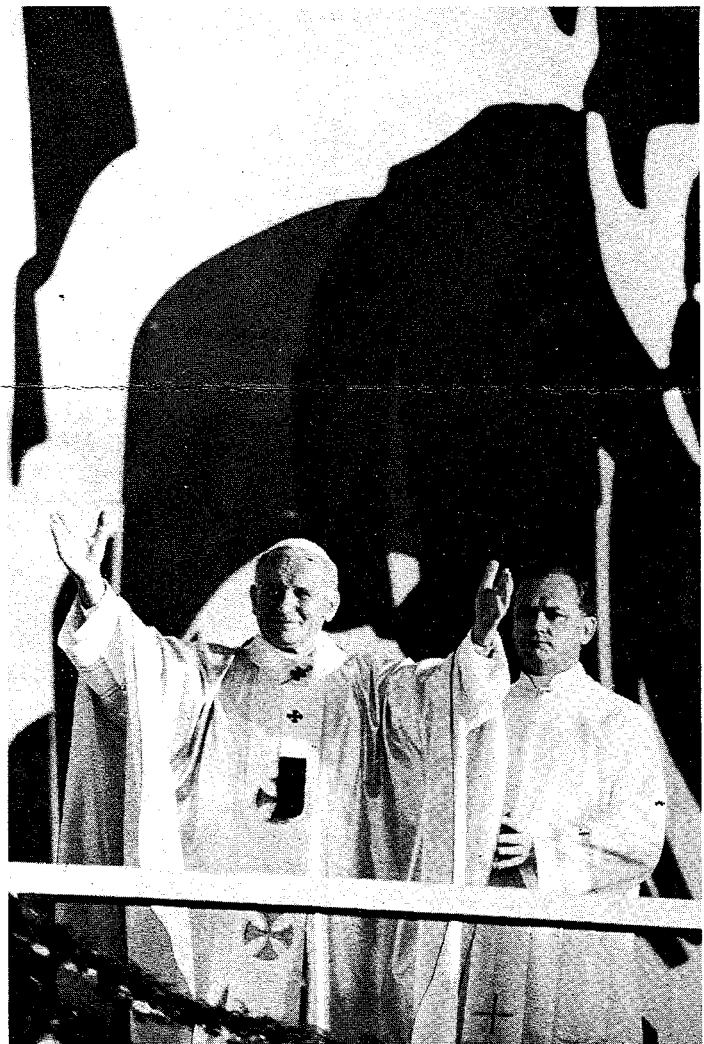


Photo by Black Star

## Pope Commits "Sacrilege" in Nicaragua

How did it happen that government security forces and pro-government demonstrators disrupted a papal mass and committed other indignities during Pope John Paul II's recent visit to revolutionary Nicaragua? The answer, according to a significant portion of the U.S. church press, is that the pope wrongfully provoked them by failing to pay homage to the Sandinista revolution.

For several years, reports of Sandinista abuses of religion -- both against Roman Catholics and

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Protestant evangelicals -- have been scoffed at by many U.S. church agencies and publications. But these reports suddenly became credible when the world press reported how Sandinista partisans packed papal events, heckled and chanted during mass, and even tapped into a sound system on the altar to drown out the pope's prayers with chants of "power to the people."

A March 14 report of the events in L'Osservatore Romano, the official Vatican newspaper, stated flatly that "the protagonists were Sandinista militants" who, in the words of the President of the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America, committed an "unheard of abuse and indescribable lack of respect committed against the person of his Holiness...."

~~Evidently, no comparable indignation has been felt in U.S. church circles -- Protestant or Roman Catholic. Most U.S. religious leaders have been awkwardly silent about what happened. But the journals of the religious Left, for the most part, have been clear about who is to blame.~~

An editorial in the March 25 issue of the National Catholic Reporter, an independent Catholic weekly, put it this way:

...the pope did not offer what the people needed most. He did not console, he did not lift their spirits...what was required was a pastoral homily, what was delivered was an attack on the ideology of Sandinista revolution...

Margaret D. Wilde, writing in the March 23 Christian Century, an ecumenical weekly, found some of the behavior of the Sandinistas to be in poor taste. But her strongest criticism is directed at the pope:

~~To a people hungry for compassionate leadership, he was preaching authority; to a church, confused and divided by their bishops political feud with the Sandinista government, he was bringing a message almost certainly calculated to deepen the division."~~

Steven F. De Mott, in the April 18 Christianity and Crisis, did recognize that the pope never once spoke against the Sandinista revolution. But there are sins of omission:

Although his public remarks in Nicaragua did not so much criticize the three-and-a-half-year old Sandinista revolution as ignore it, the end result was the same.... Christians who support the Sandinistas say they felt "betrayed" by the pontiff's lack of concern for the achievements and sacrifices of the revolution.

One symbolic incident during the pope's visit

was his admonition to Father Ernesto Cardenal, the Sandinista Minister of Cultural Affairs, to "straighten out his relationship with his church." Cardenal is one of those priests the pope and the Salvadoran Bishops have insisted must choose between a revolutionary and a priestly vocation, but these priests have refused. The pope was so offended to find that Cardenal had slipped into a receiving line in order to be photographed kissing his ring that he withdrew his hand. Harvey Cox, in the April 4 Christianity and Crisis, describes this as a "lapse in judgment", although he allows that "the pope himself probably regretted it later."

Father Vincent T. Giese, writing in the Catholic magazine Our Sunday Visitor (March 20); offers a more understanding view of the Pope's predicament in Nicaragua. But he too concludes that "It seemed to be an unhappy, belligerent pope who took on the crowds.... Some Church observers in Nicaragua felt the papal address might have been more appropriately delivered in a closed session between Bishops and government officials...."

Not all the liberal church press, however, has apologized for the Sandinistas. An editorial in the March 22 issue of Commonweal denounces the affronts of the Nicaraguan government and defends the pope for his efforts "to keep the church from falling back into accommodation with oligarchies or from being co-opted by Marxist-Leninists." A later issue of Commonweal (April 22) includes several unusually frank articles by left-of-center writers on the fate of democracy in Nicaragua.

The Jesuit magazine America also carried an editorial which, despite strong opposition to the Reagan Administration's Central American policy, bluntly condemned the way the pope was treated in Managua. But such candor has not been the rule: more often than not, the religious press has blamed the pope for the ugliness that marred his pilgrimage. It comes close to saying that the revolution is more holy than the pope.

**Yes -- this newsletter is late. We've been putting all our time and energy into publishing and distributing our recent study, "A Time for Candor." It has brought us a lot of new members, and, sad to say, we've neglected old ones.**

**If you are a member and would like a free copy of "A Time for Candor," which normally costs \$5.00, please let us know. And from here on, we're going to try to keep the newsletter on schedule.**

**If you have not yet joined the IRD, you may do so by filling out the coupon on page 5. You may also want to take this opportunity to order some of the new publications and tapes available through IRD.**  
-- the Editors

# Third World Ideology and First World Ethics

In February, IRD convened a conference on "Bread and Freedom" for Presbyterians concerned about hunger and economic progress. Dr. Peter Berger (right), professor of sociology at Boston College and member of the IRD Board of Advisors, offered the concluding address of the conference on "The Ideology of the Third World." He introduced his remarks by explaining that today we are confronted both in international forums and Western intellectual discourse with ideas which can broadly be designated as the "Third World ideology." "One should not assume," he said, "that this represents the actual values of the masses of people who live in the Third World — but that is another very complicated subject." Excerpts from his address follow:



Photo by Rebecca L. Hammel

In the United States and other Western countries, there seem to be two opposite responses to this so-called Third World ideology. On the one hand there is a violently negative reaction: in right-of-center circles in North America and Western Europe all you have to say is "Third World" and people get very angry and want to have none of it. On the other side -- and this is probably much more typical of the mainline Christian churches -- you have a sort of guilt-ridden assent to most of what this ideology represents. Sometimes this is carried to absurd lengths.

I would like to suggest that responsible and reflective individuals in Western countries should take a somewhat more nuanced stance. This entails neither violent rejection nor guilt-ridden agreement, but a position in which one balances those aspects of this ideology to which one can say "yes" against those aspects to which one must say "no." Let me begin with the "yesses."

I believe emphatically that one must say "yes" to the basic proposition that misery is a moral challenge. It is intolerable that there are people in the world who are starving to death.

Secondly, I think one must also say "yes" to the proposition that economic growth does not mean very much in moral and human terms unless it substantially benefits the masses of people, especially the poor. We have enormous growth rates in a number of countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia in which a very small proportion of the population has benefited greatly, while large masses of people either are as miserable as they were before or in some instances are even more miserable than they were before. This is not development in any positive sense.

Third, I think we can say "yes" to the proposition that the challenge of underdevelopment must involve not just individual actions or the actions of private citizens in the richer countries, but must also involve national policies and

the international community. One must say "yes" to this even though one might not always agree with the kind of policies that are being suggested. Those are the major points on the "yes" side of the ledger.

I am afraid that the "no" side is somewhat longer, because, in my opinion, much of the underpinning of Third World ideology is intellectually very weak indeed.

First is the notion that the development of the West is the result of the underdevelopment of the Third World. They believe that our wealth has been extracted from them through the exploitation of colonialism, imperialism, neo-imperialism, and so forth. Some things that the Marxists say are right, but this proposition is completely untenable historically, though it may apply to one or another country at a particular time.

Secondly, we should also reject the contemporary application of this theory: that we are relatively rich now because the Third World is poor. In order for North America and Western Europe to enjoy a high standard of living, some argue that it is necessary to keep the Third World in poverty. Economically, that is nonsense.

Next -- a related point -- there is the idea that it is impossible for any one individual or party or society to benefit economically without somebody else hurting. This is a very simplistic view of economics. There are indeed such relationships, such as relationships between masters and slaves. But in terms of modern international economic relations, these are rare.

There are two more points of such great importance that I am embarrassed to treat them so briefly. One troubles me very much, and I know it is also of central interest to the IRD: the Third World ideology is almost entirely

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indifferent to political democracy. There are degrees in this. There is the hard Marxist position which argues that political democracy is a bourgeois illusion and that "real" democracy is what you have in Marxist countries. Then there is the softer view that is much more widely represented in church circles: democracy is essentially a luxury, and political and civil rights mean very little unless people first have socio-economic rights. You've surely heard it said that a starving man has more important things to worry about than freedom of the press.

There is, of course, something in that which is true. If I were literally starving, I wouldn't be particularly concerned with my political and civil rights. But as soon as I was sure that I would survive even until next week, I think I would ~~become very concerned with my political and civil rights.~~

If you know anything about Third World countries you know that where there is a threat to democracy the rich usually manage somehow to live with the situation. They go somewhere else, or they send their money somewhere else, or they know how to fix things. It is the poor who are truly dependent upon such things as restraint upon the police, or the rights of reporters to inform the public about what is going on, or some countervailing power to the government which can prevent it from going off the deep end.

Now let me make an important distinction in human terms. If I were to represent some sort of despotism I would try to find some way of justifying that despotism, and one has to be understanding of this. When I'm at Geneva and the U.N. I always think: look at these people. Who knows, next week the government may change and someone may shoot them. So they have to be careful what they say, and one has to be tolerant on the human level. But there is no ~~such excuse for people in the West.~~ The glorification of repressive and dictatorial regimes in the name of alleged economic development by church leaders, intellectuals, academics and so forth in western countries has to be one of the more repellent aspects of our current intellectual life.

Finally, it is important to note that in this ideology there is a general bias against market economies. I think to call this bias socialist is perhaps too precise. There are sympathies of a vaguely socialist character, but the overriding spirit is an antagonism to capitalism, to free enterprise, to the market. I'm not talking here about the hard Marxist supporters of this ideology. I'm talking here about a softer element which really is not Marxist, but is much hazier. These are people who acknowledge that bad things can happen in socialist societies. They'll even insist that they're not saying that socialism is always good. It's just that in principle social-

ism is better. There is something fundamentally wrong with capitalistic economies. What one should always strive for is some sort of more humane socialism.

Well, it seems to me that it is important to remember that we know amazingly little about how to overcome certain types of misery in the world. If we look around the Third World today we have very few exciting success stories. But the success stories we do have are almost without exception capitalistic success stories. This is an important point one has to deal with in a completely non-doctrinaire examination of the matter.

Let me say that when I started out being interested in this subject I was anything but enthusiastic about capitalism. I wasn't a socialist, but I had no great enthusiasm about market economies. ~~I worked mostly in Latin America at the time, and it was easy in the late Sixties and early Seventies not to be enthusiastic about market economies in Latin America.~~ Since then I discovered eastern Asia. If you look at the problems of development from the perspective say of Taiwan, Singapore, or Southeast Asia, not to mention Japan, you get a very different notion of what is successful development from what you see when you look at Guatemala or even Brazil.

Now I cannot here seriously consider the fascinating question why some people in the West, who are by and large the beneficiaries of both democracy and capitalism, find such an attraction in an ideology that is strongly anti-capitalist and increasingly non-democratic. This is a discussion of intellectual pathology of the western world, but there is no time for that.

With regard to the aspects of Third World ideology to which I have said "no," I would make the point that I have reached my conclusions as a social scientist. I don't have any particular doctrinal views on this matter. In terms of my ~~religious and moral belief I would find it possible~~ to live with the opposite conclusions. The weight of evidence by itself has led me to the viewpoint that I now hold on the issue of development.

But let me also say that this is not just a matter of intellectual clarity. It is also a moral issue precisely because of what I said one has to say "yes" to in Third World ideology. The first thing I agreed with in this ideology is that misery is indeed a challenge to our humanity and our morality. If there is one thing we know about socialism with almost apodictic certainty it is that it is going to make a mess of the economy. More specifically, it is going to make a terrible mess of agriculture. There is not a case in the world of successful socialist agriculture. Agriculture feeds people, and if one is concerned with hunger, then the rejection of certain aspects of the Third World ideology is not just an intellectual issue. For Christians, it should be a moral issue.

# RESOURCES

## A TIME FOR CANDOR

Are the charges about church involvement with the extreme Left really all just innuendo? Look at the facts for yourself. Church leaders and radical publications tell the story in their own words.

This new documentary study of mainline church involvement with opponents of democracy on the radical Left makes a case church officials have refused to answer. It consists of 100 pages, 126 reference footnotes, and 10 original source documents. Order now from the IRD -- just \$5.00.

## PEACE AND FREEDOM: The Christian Faith, Democracy and the Problem of War

Coming soon from the IRD: a book length essay by George Weigel offering a brief and clear survey of Christian teaching on the problem of war, with its application to today's often confused debates about nuclear arms. For both clergy and lay readers -- especially useful for church study groups.

"George Weigel's excellent pamphlet gets the nuclear arms debate back to a theological basis -- where it belongs." -- **Richard John Neuhaus**

"George Weigel is a young theologian who really cares about peace. This is what makes his critique of the recent peace movement so telling -- and what enables him to offer a serious alter-

native for those who share his intense concern about the danger of nuclear war."

— **Michael Novak**

"I'm going to take this into every local church I preach in. It's a necessary counterweight to the one-sided and unrealistic peace literature that is flooding our churches. It presents the Christian way. It is not a disguised political tract."

— **Edmund W. Robb**

Order now at the pre-publication price: \$5.00.

## TAPES FROM DALLAS CONFERENCE

A lively and informative debate about church witness in world affairs is available in new tapes from the April IRD conference in Dallas, Texas. Each session, consisting of two 60-minute tapes, sells for \$8.00; the entire set is \$15.00.

**Session I** -- "Christianity and Democracy: Renewing a Vital Link" by Richard John Neuhaus.

Pastor Neuhaus, Lutheran theologian, reviews the current debate on the churches' international policies, with special attention to the nature of official church response to criticism. An ecumenical panel offers vigorous rebuttal and response.

**Session II** -- "The Church Looks at War and Peace" by William V. O'Brien

A noted Catholic ethicist discusses the current arms policy debate from the classic Christian Just War perspective. A cross-section of options, currently offered within the U.S. churches, is reflected in the responding panel.

## Resources Available from the IRD

Mail this coupon with your check to the IRD, 1000 16th Street, N.W., Suite LL50, Washington, D.C. 20036.

	<u>quantity</u>	<u>price</u>		<u>quantity</u>	<u>price</u>
<b>Session I Tapes</b> by R. Neuhaus and panel (\$8.00 per set)	_____	_____	<b>Peace and Freedom</b> by George Weigel (\$5.00)	_____	_____
<b>Session II Tapes</b> by W. O'Brien and panel (\$8.00 per set)	_____	_____	<b>A Time for Candor</b> (\$5.00 each)	_____	_____
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Please reserve space for \_\_\_\_\_ at the July conference on "Religious Freedom East and West" and send me registration material as soon as it is available.

Please enroll me as a member of IRD. (The yearly membership fee includes a subscription to Religion and Democracy.) Enclosed is my check for \$25.00.

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dictatorial Leftist regimes (such as Vietnam). And when the NCC did respond to repression of persons living under governments with Marxist leaders, it did so with much less intensity...."

The UMR also found that "most NCC actions are decided by committees composed primarily of staff members from denominational general agencies. And those staff members, for the most part, serve not as representatives chosen by the denomination, but as individuals selected by the NCC unit they are called upon to guide...." (This finding challenges a defense frequently offered by NCC General Secretary Dr. Claire Randall: the NCC's faults should be overlooked because it is merely the "representative" of its member churches.)

Even NCC President Bishop James Armstrong, while earnestly defending the NCC from those he imagines to be unfriendly critics, has been heard to acknowledge some of their major criticisms in his less guarded moments. UMR reporters Roy Beck and Garlinda Burton recount that Bishop Armstrong recently conceded to them that now "the NCC must devote far more attention to the mistreatment of people by their left-wing governments."

In a sermon at Riverside Church just after the "60 Minutes" broadcast Bishop Armstrong allowed that "There were elitists in the religious community in Jesus day. There are those today. Some may be across the street at 475 Riverside Drive." (This statement did not appear in the NCC report on his sermon.)

All in all, the debate has moved to a new stage. Mail to the IRD office -- and the thousands of copies of our study, A Time for Candor, that have been ordered by local clergy and lay leaders -- support the judgment that the efforts of church bureaucrats to anathemize all criticisms have not succeeded.

## Religious Freedom Conference Set

Should international religious freedom be one of the highest priorities of America's churches? Sadly, it isn't. We think most Christians would agree it should be.

To that end, the **Institute on Religion and Democracy** (IRD) and the **National Association of Evangelicals** (NAE) will co-sponsor a conference this summer on the obstacles and threats to free religious expression in the world today. Distinguished theologians, denomination leaders, and authorities on international affairs will discuss how American religious bodies -- Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish -- can work responsibly and creatively to overcome these problems.

Speakers will include **Carl F.H. Henry**, lecturer-at-large, World Vision International; **Richard John Neuhaus**, editor, Lutheran Forum; **Father Ernest L. Fortin**, Boston College; **Ambassador Max M. Kampelman**, Chairman, American Delegation to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe; **Jane Ellis**, Keston College, England; **Josef Ton**, Romanian Missionary Society; and **Robert Dugan**, Director, Public Affairs, NAE.

### Religious Freedom East and West: The Human Rights Issue for the 80's

**Date:** Sunday, July 10, 1983, opening convocation, 7:00 p.m. through Tuesday, July 12, 4:00 p.m.

**Place:** Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.

Participation in this conference will be limited. To reserve a space, please notify the IRD at once (see coupon, page 5). Registration fee is \$50; after June 15, \$60 (fee includes the Monday night dinner).

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Address Correction Requested

