

Religion & Democracy

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Church Officials' Grenada Protest Misfires

Grenada Council of Churches Applauds U.S. Role

News that U.S. forces had joined Caribbean democracies in an action on the island of Grenada provoked instant reaction from many U.S. church leaders. Scores of denunciations were fired off and protest actions planned. But as the smoke lifted it became apparent that U.S. church leaders had shot themselves in the foot.

The conduct of church leaders also raised questions about what influences and views actually do shape U.S. church policies toward the Caribbean. The Grenadian rescue invasion, according to all major polls, was supported at least by two-thirds of the American people. A CBS News poll on the island found that the action was supported by 91% of the Grenadian people. (An AP dispatch from Grenada on Monday, November 14, reported that "thousands of Grenadians filled churches Sunday in a national day of thanksgiving for the U.S.-led invasion...")

The U.S. intervention was endorsed by the Council of Churches of Barbados, the Methodist Church of the South Caribbean, and most

strikingly, by the Council of Churches of Grenada itself.

Members of the Council of Churches of Grenada (CCG) are known to have been troubled for some time by the growing influence of Marxism-Leninism on their island. On November 7, soon after the international military force was established on Grenada, the Caribbean News Agency reported that an official delegation of CCG leaders told visiting U.S. congressmen, "We were in favor of the American troops on the island. We felt that the danger of a protracted presence of the Americans is not really unacceptable to us."

The Barbados Christian Council, which represents the major religious denominations on that island, issued a statement on October 27 declaring that "the American and Caribbean commonwealth forces acted appropriately in landing and taking possession of key installations."

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Thugs on the Left, Thugs on the Right:

Central American Churches Face New Threats

The Roman Catholic Church in Central America is again besieged on both sides by the enemies of democracy.

In El Salvador, Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez and Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas have recently been threatened by people claiming to represent the Maximiliano Hernandez Brigade, an extreme right-wing group which has carried out many murders. Rosa Chavez's father was unaccountably detained for a day by government security forces. These events appear to be part of a resurgence of extreme right-wing activity, which has included public denunciations of union leaders by the ominous President of the Constitutional Assembly, Roberto d'Aubuisson.

According to a recent Wall Street Journal analysis from El Salvador by Benton R.

Schlender, this is explained by the prospect that the far right may lose out in next spring's national election. Schlender writes:

The political muscle of the more moderate political parties and labor unions has been growing stronger at a time when right-wing parties seem to be losing clout. The changing fortunes are most visible in the current constitutional debate over the future of economic reforms -- chiefly land distribution.

In Nicaragua, a large number of churches and clergy have been attacked by government backed mobs -- "turbas." Masses were interrupted, and

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Cuban-Grenada "Religious" Pact

A secret accord between the Grenadan New Jewel government and the Cuban Communist Party was made public by the U.S. Department of State on Nov. 14. The agreement, signed in Cuba in July 1983, provides that during the coming year the Cuban Party will receive "two comrades linked to the work on religion for exchanging experiences and coordinating regional and international work." In return, the New Jewel movement would receive a Cuban Communist "specialist in work with religious people...." (A resolution of this same Cuban Communist Party adopted in April 1971 declares that the Party must work "...to free the masses from religious dogmas and superstitions....")

The Methodist Church in the South Caribbean, which includes the Methodist Church in Grenada, rebuked a British Methodist aid official who had spoken out against the intervention for "insensitivity" to the suffering of the Grenadian people. "The immediate need was to rescue the people," the Caribbean Methodists declared. Other local church bodies which have endorsed the intervention include the Christian Councils of Antigua and St. Vincent.

Although these church bodies indisputably speak for poor and third world Christians in the immediate region, their opinions were ignored by U.S. churches.

One regional church body did oppose the U.S. intervention: the Caribbean Conference of Churches, based in Barbados. The U.S. National Council of Churches and several other denominations have cited the Caribbean Council's position as justification for their own stands. On November 8, the IRD spoke by telephone to Anglican Bishop Drexel Gomez of Barbados, head of the pro-intervention Barbados Council of Churches, about the different stand taken by the Caribbean Council. "The Caribbean Council receives almost all of its funds from abroad," he explained, "and

has been severely criticized by member churches in the region for its often one-sided positions." Bishop Gomez also charged that the anti-intervention stand of the Caribbean Council was taken by staff, without proper consultation with the board.

Soon after the Grenada action began, Mr. Randy Singh, editor of the Caribbean Council's publication, Caribbean Contact, was ordered by the government to leave Barbados. Singh, a Guyanese who has written warmly about revolutionary movements and governments elsewhere in the Caribbean, had earlier been expelled from Trinidad-Tobago.

Despite the sentiments of free Caribbean Christians, many U.S. church leaders and church-financed organizations have launched protests against the Grenada action. A press conference organized by Esmeralda Brown of the UM Women's Division brought together some 40 groups in New York on Oct. 26th to hear protests from such NCC staff figures as Bishop Antonio Ramos of the Latin American and Caribbean Office and The Reverend Tyrone Pitts of the Division of Racial Justice. A statement was issued by this group which, among other things, declared that "U.S. Marines are sent to Grenada to inflict death on Grenadian people and on the international civilian personnel working in Grenada." (The latter phrase is not, one may assume, intended to refer to American businessmen on the island.) Signers of this declaration included Clergy and Laity Concerned, the Inter-Religious Task Force on El Salvador and Central America, the UM Office for the U.N., and the Venceremos Brigade.

An even larger number of church leaders and church-financed organizations endorsed a November 12 March on Washington whose call, published in the Nov. 8 New York Times, assails the U.S. action in Grenada for "stamping out a

peoples' right to determine its own future." The coalition which backed this demonstration ranged from such groups as the Communist Party, USA and the Committee in Solidarity with Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos to Church Women United, to The National Association of Women Religious, the National Office of Jesuit Social Ministries and a host of NCC, UM and UCC and other church officials.



Photos by Rebecca Hammett

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In the middle ages, when warring, lawless feudal bands drenched Europe in blood, the church sought to provide a place of physical sanctuary and asylum for those in danger.

Today many churches are being pressed to provide asylum for people from Central America who are being deported by U.S. immigration authorities as illegal aliens.

Churches being asked to offer such asylum might consider these questions:

- * Are the foreign visitors really refugees from political persecution, or immigrants seeking better economic opportunity? In either case, they deserve our compassion: but if churches abuse the concept of political asylum by stretching it too broadly, they may jeopardize the prospects of future refugees whose lives may be seriously endangered by repressive foreign governments.
- * Is it appropriate for a tradition of sanctuary which arose to provide recourse from blood-thirsty, arbitrary medieval rulers to be applied to problems involving the democratic and generally law-abiding government of the United States?
- * Is it proper for a movement which claims the tradition of ecclesiastical sanctuary in fact to have overriding political objectives? The publication of the sanctuary movement (Basta! The Sanctuary Organizers' Nuts and Bolts Supplement No. 1, published by the Chicago Religious Task Force) declares proudly that "In one year sanctuary has been transformed from an isolated prophetic witness into a significant national movement demanding an end to all U.S. intervention in Central America...." Is such a movement helping refugees -- or using them, and possibly helping to make more of them?

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The November 12 March was first conceived as a protest against U.S. policy in Central America. Grenada was added after October 25. A number of church activists gathered in Washington at the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service as a means of linking their political demand for an end to all U.S. involvement in Central America to their program of providing church sanctuary to illegal Salvadoran and Guatemalan aliens (see box).

Although it had been billed by its sponsors as "the largest demonstration ever to be held in Washington," this event attracted scanty crowds. While church leaders provided the respectability, the participants came largely from the extreme Left.

For much of America's mainline church leadership, the end of Grenadian revolution was cause for another round of the same rhetoric that celebrated its beginning. But the pathos of Maurice Bishop is that if he had permitted democratic elections in Grenada, he might be alive today. Democratic processes might have permitted Grenada to make non-violent adjustments to changing circumstances and ideas -- adjustments that the authoritarian New Jewel movement was not capable of making. Violent conflict became the only recourse for settling disputes. The tragedy of Maurice Bishop might also remind us that the slogan "better red than dead" does not exhaust all the possibilities of the present world situation.

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both clergy and members of the congregations have been beaten. Several priests have also been expelled from the country. Observers suspect that this is no short-lived spasm but the beginning of a major crisis between Church and revolution. One important source of conflict is the Church's refusal to endorse the revolutionary Sandinista government's imposition of general military conscription.

The Nicaraguan Bishops -- whose differences with the Sandinistas have always been framed with cutting sophistication -- have explained that it is not the draft itself which Catholics oppose. It is simply that they cannot support conscription for a privately controlled army -- that of the Sandinista Front. Thus their opposition to the draft raises an even deeper question: the radically undemocratic nature of the Sandinista government.

A second -- and probably more basic -- cause of the crisis, according to Archbishop Obando y Bravo of Managua, is that the Marxists' attempt to create an "alternative church" -- a faction of clergy and laity under their control -- has evidently failed. No longer able to attack from within the church, the Sandinistas are reduced to attacking from without. The Archbishop says that church-state conflict has now "moved to a second plane, at which to restore dialogue it will be necessary to abolish the special laws of March, 1982, which suspended democracy." (Diario de Las Americas, Nov. 8.)

Martin Luther and the Democratic Idea

Numerous events around the world mark this year as the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. We asked IRD board member and Lutheran theologian Richard John Neuhaus about Luther's pertinence to some of the controversies embroiling our churches and our society today.

Q: For a group like IRD, which seeks to be thoroughly ecumenical, isn't Martin Luther an impossibly partisan figure?

A: Even after you've discounted for the rhetorical fashions of the 16th century, Luther remains an enormously contentious person. Think, for instance, of his outrageous polemics against Jews in the latter years of his life. Almost everyone who appreciates Luther's contributions deplores these outbursts. As a person, Luther is not and cannot be made an ecumenical figure. If, however, we distinguish the message from the person (a distinction Luther would endorse), his work is increasingly appreciated ecumenically. This is evident in the growing rapprochement between Lutherans and Roman Catholics, and has major ramifications for all who claim the Reformation heritage.

Q: What would Luther have to say about current debates over the social and political role of the churches?

A: I suspect he would be as outraged as he was more than four centuries ago, and for some of the same reasons. Luther was a radical realist about human nature. He railed against those who cried "peace, peace" when there is no peace, and he had no use for the sentimental fallacy that the world, short of the eschaton, could be ruled by the gospel. This was key to his understanding of the "two kingdoms," one ruled by law, the other by the gospel, one of sin and the other of grace, one under secular authority and the other addressed by the authority of the church.

Q: Would Luther then say that the church has no political responsibilities?

A: There is no doubt that, theologically speaking, he would emphasize the singularity of the church's mission. On the one hand, he accented the limitations of the church's competence. He condemned the medieval papacy because it presumed to represent the will of God in matters that he believed fell within the competence of political authorities. Equally presumptuous, he believed, were the so-called radical reformers such as Thomas Munzer who tried to set up theocracies on the basis of the gospel.



Q: Would Luther have had something to say about the various Marxist-Christian versions of "liberation theology"?

A: We don't have to imagine what he would say. He said it against the "schwarmer" of his day, some of the so-called radical reformers who were engaged in utopian "liberation struggles" against what Luther believed to be the orders and limits of a fallen humanity. Luther claimed that these radical reformers were not radical enough; they did not understand the radicality of human sinfulness and therefore could not understand the utter gratuitousness of God's gift of salvation.

Q: But didn't Luther himself address political issues?

A: He once said he would rather be ruled by a wise Turk than by a foolish Christian. He always called upon rulers to fulfill their duties according to the order of creation and of the law. He never suggested that the gospel contained political answers. Christians, qua Christians, possessed no "special wisdom" in these matters. And, he insisted, when Christians forget this -- whether it be the pope or the "schwarmer" -- the gospel inevitably suffers.

Q: Doesn't this end up making Luther a very conservative influence in society?

A: Luther's words have been invoked for purposes both left and right. Nowhere, for example,

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is the Luther celebration so elaborate this year as in East Germany, where the regime has long tried to depict Luther as a proto-Marxist revolutionary. But he was finally uninterested in questions of "left" and "right" which, when the church becomes embroiled in politics, can only distort and trivialize the gospel. I have no doubt, for example, that he would have some harsh words today about some parties on the "new right" who think the Bible offers a blueprint for political action and the reconstruction of a "Christian society."

Q: Would Luther today be a champion of democracy?

A: As recently as the 19th century, Protestants conventionally credited Luther and the Reformation for everything from modern medicine to public schools to democratic government. We do Luther no favors by attributing to him positions that, in his historical moment, he had no possibility of considering. At the same time, Luther accented truths that have been key to the development of democratic thought and practice. For example, the notion of the two-fold rule of God makes necessary something like what we today call "separation of powers." Similarly, his radical understandings of human sinfulness suggests "checks and balances" and militates against any monolithic or uniform view of social authority. Finally, and perhaps most important,



Portrait of Martin Luther as a Monk, engraving by Lucas Cranach, 1520

he understood all orders -- secular and ecclesiastical -- to be under the judgment of God. Only in the light of this judgment, he tirelessly asserted, do we come to know the saving gospel of grace. So I think Luther today would be a vigorous opponent of authoritarianisms that claim to possess some kind of divine legitimacy and of totalitarian regimes that acknowledge no accountability to truth beyond their own power. And, of course, Luther would hasten to remind us that neither is democracy the answer to the deepest problems of the human condition. Luther was not modest in his manner, but he was exceedingly modest about panaceas, political and otherwise, which become the idols that obscure the only answer, which is the gospel.

Q: What is the relevance of his concept of "the priesthood of all believers" to the democratic idea?

A: That has been much discussed and much misunderstood. Luther did not mean that the office of ministry and church leadership had been

The world and the masses are and always will be unchristian, although they are baptized and nominally Christian. Hence a man who would venture to govern an entire community or the world with the gospel would be like a shepherd who should place in one fold wolves, lions, eagles, and sheep. The sheep would keep the peace, but they would not last long. The world cannot be ruled with a rosary.

— Martin Luther

abrogated under Rome. He did mean that every baptized Christian shares in the ministry of Christ, and that this has two important implications. First, every Christian has the right and the responsibility to speak and act in order to influence the church's witness in this world. Second, Luther emphasized that the "secular" occupation of the Christian is a sacred vocation. This is especially pertinent today when we see a new clericalism in which church leaders seek to take over in questions of political and economic judgment the responsibilities that chiefly belong to lay persons in those spheres of our common life.

Q: Would Luther approve of the 500th anniversary?

A: It may be just as well that he isn't around to speak for himself. He would likely insist that we're celebrating him for all the wrong reasons and thus end up spoiling the party.

BRIEFS

■ The winds of change are blowing in the Philippines. Unlike many Third World societies, the Philippines has a large well-organized democratic sector that has a real chance to end authoritarian rule. The leadership of the Catholic Church and particularly Cardinal Sin is notable in this regard.

Unfortunately, instead of aiding these genuine democratic movements in their quest for change, some church agencies are funding groups which advocate the imposition of a new kind of dictatorship.

For example, the UM-funded South East Asia Resource Center has clearly identified with the revolutionary Left in the Philippines. The Center's Southeast Asia Chronicle, in April 1982, pejoratively characterized the recently martyred Benigno Aquino as a part of an "elite opposition," lacking the leadership capabilities of the leftist National Democratic Front. Another article lauds the New People's Army as "the main source of hope for desperately poor peasants."

■ Next January, Public Television viewers will have the opportunity to see a hard-hitting hour-long debate between the IRD's Ed Robb and William P. Thompson, Co-Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, USA. Mr. Thompson is generally thought to be the most influential figure in the church Left, and those who watched the taping said Ed Robb was in good form. The program is more than talking heads -- each protagonist produced a twelve minute film to make his case. We suspect this show may startle you.

Call your local station for the exact time: the show is one of a

series called "Counterpoint," produced by the Shavano Institute. (Public television being what it is, you may have to ask that they carry this show. If they don't, tapes may be available after the broadcast date.)

■ The recently merged Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has established a seven-member committee "to look into the causes of unrest regarding the World and National Councils of Churches." Chairing the committee will be J.R. Shirek, an elder in the First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, Florida.

Last summer's General Assembly of the church ordered the formation of the committee. Originally, the committee was to report by the 1984 Assembly, but Moderator J. Randolph Taylor has indicated that he would rather they do their task well than meet that deadline. "There is a need for them to let the church ask questions, and to get the answers, before they can undertake the whole difficult task of making recommendations."

Presbyterians interested in contacting the committee with suggestions or concerns may do so through the Stated Clerk's office, 341 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30365 or Rm. 1201, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115.

■ The largest of the three Afrikaans churches in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), has finally taken some steps to distance itself from apartheid. The changes began in a series of provincial synods of the NGK this year. The synod of the Western Cape called on its members to end all racial dis-

crimination. It also decided that church councils "must ensure that no person who in good faith wishes to worship -- regardless of language or racial group -- will be prevented from attending a service." Such exclusion, the synod declared, is "decidedly in conflict with the Word of God."

■ A group of United Methodists associated with the IRD announced on September 24 that it had organized a new intra-church caucus, UMs for Religious Liberty and Human Rights. The UM group will be working to bring its concern for freedom before the May 1984 General Conference of the United Methodist Church.

"Freedom of conscience must be moved to the top of the church's agenda," explained the committee's convener Diane Knippers. "There is a growing controversy over appropriate church responses to abuses of religious liberty and other human rights. The recent WCC Assembly illustrated the enormous confusion in the church."

The steering committee of the new group issued a Study Paper on Religious Liberty and Human Rights; drafted legislation to strengthen the UM Social Principles' emphasis on liberty for consideration at the 1984 General Conference; and discussed several issues in world affairs which might be addressed in General Conference resolutions.

In response to a recent tour of Cuban Methodists sponsored by the UM mission board, the new group has also asked that board to sponsor a Consultation on the Church in Cuba. Arguing that the delegation from the Cuban church could not speak openly

about conditions in Cuba without facing repression, the proposal suggested supplementing their information with testimony from Cuban refugees and former political prisoners as well as various human rights groups and the Organization of American States. Such a consultation would seek to obtain an accurate picture of the degree of religious freedom in Cuba and make recommendations for church efforts to expand such freedom.

For additional information on the new UM group and a copy of their study paper contact the IRD Washington office.

■ Two top awards at the recent meeting of the UM Association of Communicators went for articles which asked probing questions about church witness in world affairs. Roy Beck of The United Methodist Reporter won a certificate of merit for best news story for his series covering the National Council of Churches controversy. James Robb, Good News magazine (and a former staff member of IRD), took the certificate of merit for a feature story critiquing the UM mission board, "Missions Derailed." The judges' panel included Marjorie Hyer of the Washington Post, Charles Flippen of Towson State University, and Vince Clews, a Baltimore TV producer.

■ Donald Shriver, president of Union Theological Seminary, admonished the recent NCC governing board meeting that "there is no focus of evil in the world in one particular place,

certainly not Moscow" and that we ought to apply Martin Luther's teaching regarding not bearing false witness to our relationship to the Soviet Union, including the instruction to "explain their actions in the kindest way." The board also heard NCC-staffer Eugene Stockwell report on his recent trip to Nicaragua. He described a crucifix he had been given by the Sandinista leader, Comandante Ortega, as a "symbol of the crucifixion of Nicaragua, but we hope for resurrection."

■ Television viewers may have been surprised when broadcasts from Grenada featured a spokeswoman for the island's Cuban

embassy whose English had an inimitably American twang. Several people familiar with the world of 475 Riverside Drive called to our attention that this articulate lady was none other than Gail Reed, who not so long ago was Director of Interpretation and Promotion for the Church World Service of the National Council of Churches. Back then she was a figure in the Venceremos Brigade, a pro-Castro group in the U.S. Now she is married to Julian Torres Rizo, chief of mission in Grenada and -- until recently, at least -- one of the stars of the Cuban diplomatic corps.

You can say this for Gail Torres -- wherever she goes, she creates a sensation.



This fall, IRD hosted a reception in Washington for the Dutch scholar, Dr. J.A. Hebly. Dr. Hebly, an ordained minister of The Netherlands Reformed Church, has served as a director of the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, The Netherlands. He was in the U.S. as a Guest Scholar at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars to work on his research project concerning "current American views on the situation of the churches in Eastern Europe and their present, largely politically oriented, contacts with the Western churches." IRD plans to publish his remarks at the reception in the near future.

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NCC Is Preaching -- But Not Practicing -- New Directions

The November National Council of Churches governing board meeting left some observers with the feeling that the NCC has a long way to go in its efforts to bridge the gap between the upper council echelons and American churchgoers.

The much-touted Presidential Panel reported out a generalized "Proposed Directions for our Community" at the Hartford meeting. The new directions are supposed to give new emphasis to "faith and order" (theological) concerns as well as efforts to enhance ecumenism on local and regional levels. Mutterings of dissatisfaction (particularly over the possible reduction in the prominence of NCC social witness) promise a real battle when these general proposals are translated into more tangible structures and budgets.

In its action on world affairs, the National Council followed the lead of the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC by allowing one of the world's totalitarian regimes a de facto veto over the church's social witness. In the debate on the Council's policy statement on

Latin America -- which systematically condemned U.S. policy in the region -- an effort was made to include some criticism of Cuba's attempts "to destabilize governments of the region through overt and covert action." An amendment with this language was offered to a section which generously recommended the extension of U.S. diplomatic recognition of Cuba and to end U.S. trade and travel restrictions. At first, the language criticizing Castro was added by a comfortable margin.

The next morning, as debate on the policy statement continued, a member of the UM delegation moved to strike the censuring passage criticizing Cuba. NCC staff member Eugene Stockwell then maneuvered to address the board concerning the NCC relationship with the Cuban Evangelical Council. Stockwell neatly turned the tide by arguing that the Cuban churches had effectively persuaded the Cuban government to send Cuban Christians to Kampuchea as a part of an NCC-sponsored Church World Service relief effort, and had taken some of the NCC human rights concerns to the highest levels of the Cuban government (with unknown results). The NCC board then reversed its earlier action, deleted the criticism of Cuba, 58

to 47, and went on to adopt the policy statement with only one negative vote.

Other foreign policy actions of the NCC included:

- Issuing a message to member communions which used unusually strong language to warn that "we as citizens are judged personally as well as corporately if our government becomes idolatrous or demonic" and called for a special panel to prepare a statement on international relations for the governing board.

- Establishing a new office on US/USSR relations which will arrange four exchange visits -- one of them involving about 300 persons -- between the U.S. and the Soviet Union next year. The new office is chaired by Dr. Bruce Rigdon, who is a member of the Executive Committee of Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe (CAREE), which contributes to the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference.

- Issuing a message in response to the U.S. action in Grenada to sister congregations in the Caribbean which argued that the violation of international law takes us back to "the law of the jungle," asked if we have "fallen into the temptation of worshipping other gods?", and sought mutual repentance.

— Diane Knippers

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Address Correction Requested