

# Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

January 1983

## Catholic Bishops Elevate Nuclear Arms Debate

Last November the nation's Roman Catholic bishops met in Washington to review the second draft of a proposed pastoral letter on nuclear arms and strategy. It was the election season, and the bishops' draft (in what some mistook for a political gesture) tentatively endorsed the language of a nuclear weapons freeze resolution backed by Senator Kennedy and strongly opposed by the Reagan Administration. The Washington media swarmed around the bishops as though they were a convention of an opposition party. All the fuss and fracas may have obscured an important development in the American churches: the Catholic bishops have begun to turn a simplistic and slogan-filled controversy about Christian ethics and nuclear war into a serious theological inquiry.

This is not to say that there are no grounds for criticizing the bishops' draft letter -- there are. But, even those who oppose its present emphasis (a further and possibly final revision of the statement will be made when the bishops reconvene in May) can find encouragement in the premises and method of the bishops' argument.

What the bishops have done -- as Professor William V. O'Brien of Georgetown University has pointed out -- is to return the debate about the ethics of nuclear strategy squarely to its place within the "just war" tradition. The just war doctrine was first propounded by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, but has been accepted

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## Cuban Poet Survives through Faith

Cuban poet and artist Armando Valladares was the guest at a reception hosted by the IRD and Of Human Rights on December 9, 1982. Mr. Valladares was released from Castro's prisons in October of 1982. He told how he overcame his ordeal through the power of Christian faith:

"I would like to say a few words about religion in Cuba and how faith, the communication of man with God, is capable of providing him with an indestructible strength, a force that nothing can destroy.

"In the most difficult situations, I was always full of hope and faith. In the most obscure and isolated corner of a cell, I felt that God was beside me, that I had reason and therefore I had peace of conscience. That became a faith, indestructible. The more my jailers hated me, the stronger my faith became.

"I can tell you, indeed, that my religious convictions and the love of my wife, Martha, were the two strengths that allowed me to resist all those years, without having a single moment of doubt about the reasons for which I was in prison or about my faith. My companions in prison were all believers."

Some said the Cuban boat people only wanted America's material riches. Armando Valladares, a Cuban poet released after 22 years in Castro's prisons told an IRD meeting in Washington about the strength of the Cubans' faith and how it fuels their desire for liberty.



Photo: Rebecca Hannerl



Photo: UPI

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and adapted by many Protestant theologians. In crude summary, it argues that a Christian can justify war when: the cause is just; there is no other recourse; the war is conducted by competent, legitimate authorities; the objectives are feasible; and reconciliation, not revenge, is the ultimate goal.

Many peace activists within the churches have for some time been arguing that the possibility of nuclear war has rendered the just war tradition wholly obsolete. They advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament: the abandonment of the strategy of deterrence and the withdrawal of Christians from what they take to be sinful involvement in the work of maintaining America's deterrent capability.

The bishops' draft disavows both these extreme propositions. It reluctantly acknowledges that deterrence strategy may be "tolerable" so long as it is based upon the need to prevent nuclear war and so long as it is understood as a stage in the process of seeking mutual and verifiable nuclear disarmament. It also allows that, at the present time, Catholics may in good conscience continue to participate in the strategic weapons programs of the armed forces and industry.

But, in the view of many -- including a number of bishops who spoke up forcefully at the November meeting -- the draft letter fails seriously in

its assessment of the international conflict which underlies the nuclear arms build-up. There is not one sentence in the document which squarely compares the condition of political democracy, human rights, or religious freedom in the democracies to that of the Soviet empire.

Instead, the bishops' draft follows dubious intellectual fashion in portraying the Cold War and the arms race as a conflict between two equally amoral superpowers, in which Christians and their churches have no evident stake. A Polish Pope could possibly impart a greater realism in this matter to his more sheltered American colleagues.

The Western allies possess nuclear arsenals not because we are mad with sin (sinful though we are) but because we are aware that there is another danger to humanity besides the awesome threat of nuclear war: totalitarian enslavement. In the terms of the just war doctrine, this reality lends a measure of "justness" and "proportionality" to our cause, and to the strategy of deterrence.

Those who urge unilateral nuclear disarmament sometimes seem to be arguing that in order to preserve the material world we must be ready to surrender our own free souls. One hopes that in the course of their future deliberations the Catholic Bishops will remind us that this was, after all, one of the devil's bargains.

-- by Penn Kemble and Diane Knippers

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## NCC: Being Specific

Leaders of the National Council of Churches, stung by an article in the January Reader's Digest which discusses the work of the IRD, have circulated a response which asserts that the IRD is "manufacturing an arsenal of vague and damaging allegations against church leaders."

This is puzzling; one thing we have never been is vague. Here are just a few samples of some specific things the NCC has said or done to which, at one time or another, we have raised objection. We are still waiting for some explanation of these matters, and of the broader pattern of which, unfortunately, they are indisputably a part.

● The NCC's listing of its 1981 expenditures by the Division of Overseas Ministries, Department on Latin America and the Caribbean, begins with grants to EPICA and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). EPICA is outspokenly pro-Cuban and pro-Sandinista, and goes so far as to forthrightly defend the Marxist-Leninist government of tiny Grenada for its persistent refusal to hold free elections. A new and lavish (132 pg.) EPICA publication on Grenada explains that elections only "divide the people" and "threaten the revolutionary process" (p. 112).

● NACLA, a long-time recipient of church money, is scarcely less flamboyant in its promotion of totalitarianism in Latin America. It extolls the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua, and the Marxist revolutionaries in El Salvador, while smearing their critics as CIA agents. NACLA's model of the good society is not limited to Cuba. Two of its leaders, in a study published jointly with the Monthly Review Press, recently declared that:

It is only in societies organized along socialist lines -- where production and distribution is organized by the principle of social equality rather than private profit -- that the possibility of ending hunger exists. China is a dramatic example.

(Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn, Agribusiness in the Americas, p. 11)

● In a book published by the NCC's Friendship Press in 1980 -- the year of the Cuban boat people -- we read:

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# SOUTH AFRICA: The Search for a Third Way

Pastor Richard John Neuhaus, editor of the Lutheran Forum Letter, recently visited South Africa under the sponsorship of the U.S.-based Council on Religion and International Affairs. He is at work on a critical study of South Africa from an American Christian point of view. The IRD offers this interview as one of a series of conversations with religious leaders who share our concerns.



Photo: UM Board of Global Ministries by John C. Goodwin

**Religion and Democracy:** You recently travelled to South Africa and are writing a critical study about its problems. Do you see any real choice for Christians between the continuation of the completely unacceptable regime of apartheid and a bloody civil war, which could very well result in another form of despotic regime?

**Neuhaus:** Yes, there are other things being discussed, ranging from what the government of South Africa calls its "reform" proposals to the very important proposal for a national negotiation that is advanced by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi -- leader of the Zulus, the single largest Black group and, indeed, the single largest population group in South Africa.

**R & D:** What can American churchgoers do to encourage such alternatives?

**Neuhaus:** We should not dismiss the proposition that the first thing we ought to do is to pray. The people there -- especially the Blacks who face ghastly oppression and denials of elementary rights -- are caught in a tortuously difficult situation. It is terribly important for Christians in this country to be communicating with South Africa. That means not only going to South Africa, and reading about it: there are also quite a number of South African students in this country, and church people could invite them into their homes and into their churches to get a first-hand feel for some of the problems facing that country.

**R & D:** Many U.S. church leaders advocate an economic boycott of South Africa, and urge corporations in which churches hold stock to

divest themselves of all holdings in South Africa. What is your sense of that proposition?

**Neuhaus:** In this country, that is a hotly debated question. Interestingly enough, it is not much of an issue within South Africa. Chief Buthelezi, in many ways the most credible Black leader in South Africa, makes a very compelling case that American divestment not only would fail to advance social justice, but would actually weaken the attack by Blacks upon the apartheid system. I, frankly, am undecided. Divestment has a symbolic value: it is another important signal of disapproval. The danger is that it may be another one of those actions which does more to make us feel better than it actually does to remedy an injustice. This is something that churches and, increasingly now, state legislatures in this country are looking at closely. I hope that there will be a very serious weighing of the arguments against radical divestment brought by the Rockefeller study, which was chaired by Franklin Thomas and involved other important American Blacks, as well as the arguments brought by Chief Buthelezi. Among Blacks in South Africa, even Blacks who are close to the revolutionary option in the African National Congress, there is a private sentiment that divestment is not a major instrument for change. But they do recognize the emotional hold that it exerts upon some Americans who are concerned about South Africa.

**R & D:** We often hear reports that the hope for change in South Africa lies with various kinds of political groups. Yet we know there are strong

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Christian churches in that country. Is there any possibility that the churches in South Africa could play a role similar to the role played by churches in this country during our civil rights struggle?

**Neuhaus:** The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa is the church of the overwhelming majority of white Afrikaners. It has generally been a profound disappointment to people who care about justice in South Africa. There has been an extremely close link, informally if not officially, between the Dutch Reformed Churches and the government. But, on the other hand, in recent years there has been a growing number of instances of heroic statements from within the Dutch Reformed Church, both by individuals and increasingly by networks of concern. Of course, outside the Dutch Reformed Church there are the so-called English churches and they have tended, with the South African Council of Churches, to be a consistent voice of protest against the apartheid regime. So, religion plays a powerful role there. Perhaps the most remarkable thing on my recent visit to South Africa was the strong impression that the religious leadership even in the conservative mainline of the Dutch Reformed Church is no longer prepared, as it was prepared as little as five or seven years ago, to provide a moral or theological legitimation for apartheid. There is a kind of embarrassment and loss of moral confidence, which I think one can take to be a modestly hopeful sign.

**R & D:** Are there other groups besides these Christian reformists in the society who are working toward a peaceful democratic resolution? Or, is polarization inevitable?

**Neuhaus:** There are many such forces, actually. In recent years, organized labor has become a very significant factor. It has only been a few years now since Blacks were legally permitted to form unions. Given the setting, these unions are necessarily highly politicized, and are pressing very hard for change. In fact, aside from the self-acknowledged right wing in South Africa, everybody says that he is for change. Even the government says that. The question is whether the current proposal of the government -- to include the so-called Colored and the Indian populations in the formal political life of the country -- is, indeed, a step toward the inclusion of Blacks. When you have the white and the Colored and the Indian populations together, you have approximately eight million of the population. There are another nineteen million Blacks. So you have a two to one relationship. The great debate now is whether the reform that is proposed is, in fact, a step toward the inclusion of the Black population or whether it is simply a case of the white population reaching out to the Colored and the Indian populations in order to

strengthen its hand in excluding the Black majority.

**R & D:** Isn't there a danger that the homelands policy -- the policy of setting up separate Black states which are merely a means to disenfranchise the Black population politically -- will enable the government to create a duplicitous alliance with the Coloreds precisely in order to exclude the Blacks?

**Neuhaus:** That's a very distinct possibility. The dilemma is that, in fact, nobody there -- aside from a very small and eccentric minority -- really wants to pursue a consistent homelands policy. A consistent homelands policy would require the complete relocation of the Black population, including the urban Black population that is essential to the mainstream economy, away to their various so-called homelands. Nobody in power or near power really proposes doing that. What they want is to have the Black population be part of the mainline economy from which whites overwhelmingly benefit, while at the same time denying the Black population political rights.

**R & D:** What do you say to those who contend that, because of its government's intense anti-communism, the U.S. should look upon South Africa as a political ally and turn a blind eye toward its injustices?

**Neuhaus:** It is no secret that the Soviet Union and its allies want very much to destabilize South Africa. We are justified in being concerned about that, and about the importance of keeping alive the possibility that democratic values can somehow take hold in that part of the world.

But Christians in the United States should not let these considerations intimidate us into silence about the grave injustices that exist in South Africa. The role of our churches, moreover, is quite different from that of the U.S. government. When the Reagan Administration talks about a policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa, we must insist that such engagement has an effectively critical component.

Criticism of the injustices of South Africa need not be self-righteous denunciation. It would be especially unwise to turn the churches of South Africa into pariahs. We must remember that all churches are communities of sinners who live by the forgiveness of God. But, if we properly join criticism with understanding, we can help the white churches of South Africa take the difficult steps they must now take toward achieving fundamental reforms.

And we also can help support Black church leadership that is pressing to quicken the pace of change. Above all, we Christians dare not give up on the hope for a democratic future in South Africa. We must not resign ourselves, either, to the unjust status quo or to the alternative of unlimited violence.

# NCC: Being Specific

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The revolutionary Cuban government which took power January 1, 1959 established a socialist society that focused national priorities on the needs of the people instead of those of the multinational corporations.

● In the issue of the NCC Chronicles for the summer of 1980 -- when the Sandinista government of Nicaragua was breaking its pledge to hold free elections and beginning its campaign against the Miskito Indians -- the NCC Department of Overseas Ministries gave a \$200,000 grant to the Nicaraguan government for a "literacy campaign." At the time an NCC official declared that, "The government is trying to strengthen their political acumen so that the democratic forms will work at all levels, national and local."

● In an NCC Friendship Press pamphlet on China published in 1975 -- one year before Mao's death, and the brief gasp of liberty we saw at the democracy wall -- we read:

"...the road of Mao and his followers

clearly emerged as one that humanized the social relations of the society. It had the active support of the vast majority."

Even the present leaders of China would dispute this statement. The victims of the cultural revolution -- those that survived -- would be astonished.

● The NCC maintains official financial and organizational ties to Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe (CAREE). This organization met in Chicago a few months ago, at the precise moment when the military junta in Poland was dissolving the Solidarity organization -- but said not a word in protest. CAREE is an affiliate of the Christian Peace Conference, based in Prague, Czechoslovakia, whose General Secretary, Dr. Karoly Toth, once set forward this approach to peace:

...(Without) liberation in the Marxist-Leninist sense of the term, we cannot seek pacification. Consequently, the Christian fight for peace has the obligation to prevent premature peace.

This list, alas, goes on. The IRD can readily supply more specifics for those who need them.

## "Knowing how to see reality with the eyes of God,"

says the headline at the right, just a page from a pamphlet called "What is Liberation Theology," published December, 1980, by the Latin American Evangelical Commission for Christian Education (CELADEC). In 1981, CELADEC received \$15,000 from the U.S. National Council of Churches, \$5,000 from the United Presbyterian Church, and \$3,000 from the United Methodist Church. The Spanish text reads as follows:

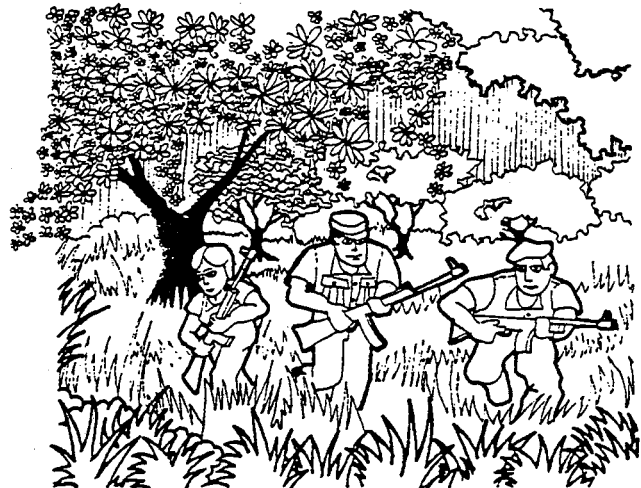
God does not act solely through Christians. God is present in the liberating action of men and women who do not consider themselves to be Christians. God is denied or affirmed whenever liberty and justice are affirmed or denied. God is present where there is love, and not only among Christians. Nevertheless it is the responsibility of Christians to indicate this presence of the Father in the actions of those who do not have faith, but are full of love, giving their lives for the poorest and the suffering.

The picture explains itself.

## Saber mirar la realidad con los ojos de Dios

Dios no se hace presente solamente en los cristianos. Dios se hace presente en la práctica liberadora de hombres y mujeres que no se consideran cristianos. Dios es negado o afirmado siempre que la libertad y la justicia son negadas o afirmadas.

Dios se hace presente donde hay amor y no solamente entre cristianos. Sin embargo, cabe a los cristianos señalar esa presencia del Padre en la acción de los que no tienen fe pero están llenos de amor, dando sus vidas por los más pobres y sufridos.



# BRIEFS

■ The National Catholic Reporter (a liberal journal which has not been friendly to Reagan Administration policies in Central America) recently sent a team of reporters to investigate charges that covert activities sponsored by the U.S. government have forced Nicaragua's Sandinista government to uproot the Miskito Indians. The NCR team, while not endorsing whatever the CIA may be up to down there, found that:

nearly five months of research into the relationship between the Miskito Indians and the Sandinista government, including visits to Nicaragua and Honduras and interviews with the Miskito Indians, produced no evidence to substantiate the Nicaraguan government's claim of a plot.

An NCR editorial put it even more strongly. The Sandinista Government, it charged, is "perpetrating lies to justify the harsh manner with which it has treated the Miskito Indians."

■ Last month the United Nations General Assembly, in a

consensus vote which included the Soviet bloc countries, adopted a most remarkable resolution. Among other things it

calls upon all member states to encourage their citizens freely and publicly to express their own views on disarmament questions and to organize freely and meet publicly for that purpose.

The Soviet government, of course, is still suppressing every vestige of genuine peace sentiment within the societies it rules. But if churches in the democratic world -- even the smallest congregations -- began calling on the Soviets to honor the U.N. resolutions they vote for, it could make a difference.

■ The IRD is sponsoring a conference on "Bread and Freedom" for Presbyterians concerned about hunger and economic progress, February 18-19, at the Capital Hilton in Washington, D.C.

Professor Peter Berger will deliver a major address on "The Ideology of the Third World." The conference will also feature a panel on "The Reformed Faith and Progress" including some of the United States' most prominent Presbyterian theologians such as Dr. John Leith, Union Theological Seminary; Dr. Rene

Williamson, professor emeritus, Louisiana State University, and Dr. Richard Lovelace, Gordon-Conwell Seminary.

Registration is \$50 with meals (includes Friday dinner; breakfast and lunch on Saturday) or \$30 without meals. Special room rates are available at the hotel for registered conference participants. For more information, call or write IRD, 1000 16th Street, N.W., Suite LL50, Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/822-8627.

■ The next Institute on Religion and Democracy regional conference will be held in Dallas, Texas. Confirmed speakers include Richard John Neuhaus, Lutheran theologian and editor of Forum Newsletter, and Edmund W. Robb, United Methodist evangelist and chairman of IRD. Watch your mail for registration information.

■ The NCC has prepared a lengthy rebuttal to Rael Jean Isaac's article, "Do You Know Where Your Church Offerings Go?" in the current issue of Reader's Digest. Mrs. Isaac has written a response to the NCC charges. Copies of both are available from the IRD office for \$1.00 to cover the cost of postage and handling.

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Address Correction Requested