

Religion & Democracy

A Newsletter of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

May/June 1985

NCC Official Urges Nicaraguans to Repudiate IRD Report

A recent IRD briefing paper on the evangelical community in Nicaragua set off a disturbing and revealing chain of events, at the NCC headquarters in New York as well as in Nicaragua.

In January the IRD published an interview, entitled "Who Speaks for Nicaragua's Evangelicals," with Kate Rafferty, a mission journalist who has traveled widely in Nicaragua. Rafferty told about the work and views of the National Council of Evangelical Pastors of Nicaragua (CNPEN) and other Protestant groups which remain independent of the Sandinistas. She further criticized the NCC-supported CEPAD (Nicaraguan Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development). CEPAD's ability to disperse funds in a non-partisan manner, its claim to represent Nicaragua's evangelicals, and its credibility as an unbiased defender of the Sandinistas were called into question.

CEPAD leaders were given vigorous advice from their allies in the U.S. on how to respond to these criticisms. On March 27th, the Managua independent daily, La Prensa, published a letter which had come into its possession from Oscar Bolioli (the Associate Director of the Department of the Caribbean and Latin America of the NCC) written to Gustavo Parajon and Gilberto Aguirre of CEPAD. In this remarkable letter Bolioli outlines a strategy for dealing with the IRD and the Rafferty interview. Bolioli wrote:

...I have read (the IRD document) with much dismay. I am troubled because this document has been skillfully written and will doubtlessly have grave repercussions here in the United States.

I believe it is important to obtain responses to this, owing to the fact that it will make it easier for us to confront IRD and in doing so invalidate these accusation....

I understand that this is a difficult task. However, as I told you in my previous letter, IRD is focusing its attacks on CEPAD as a means of attacking the NCC....

Among Bolioli's "suggestions" was that the

CNPEN be pressured to repudiate the Rafferty interview and the IRD.

* On March 4th CEPAD held a meeting with the leadership of the CNPEN in Managua. The meeting lasted some six to eight hours. CEPAD accused some individuals in CNPEN of being the source of the information in the Rafferty interview.

* On March 7th, the CNPEN was called before the powerful Managua regional committee of the Sandinista Front to explain its relationship to the IRD and the Rafferty interview.

* On March 14th, the CNPEN Secretary Guillermo Osorno addressed a letter to the IRD asking the IRD to make clear that the information presented in the Rafferty interview was not officially given by the CNPEN Board of Directors. (Ms. Rafferty had not asserted that point in her interview.)

The Osorno letter (a translation of which is provided on page two) in fact does not repudiate

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Religious Liberty Conference Spawns Controversy

A mid-April International Conference on Religious Liberty, co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, the IRD, and four other religious groups, focused attention on the plight of oppressed religious believers around the world while it drew sharp criticism from NCC-related officials.

The purpose of the conference, which attracted over 200 participants from 17 countries, was to build concern for religious liberty as a basic human right and to encourage the U.S. government, U.S. human rights organizations, and religious groups to work actively to relieve religious oppression.

The conference was unprecedented, both because of the State Department's high level of involvement in the gathering and because of the

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a single point affirmed by Rafferty. It seems evident that the Osorno letter was written under duress, in response to pressure brought to bear by the Sandinista government, CEPAD, and regrettably, our own National Council of Churches.

* * * * *

There is another unfortunate turn to these events. IRD leaders had been in consultation this Spring with representatives of the Washington-based Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) regarding the possibility of a joint delegation to Nicaragua. Now the IRD must decline to participate to avoid jeopardizing Nicaraguans with whom such a delegation would have to meet.

The IRD has been the object of attacks in the Sandinista press going back to our first Religious Freedom award luncheon in January, 1982, in honor of Miguel (now Cardinal) Obando y Bravo, the Archbishop of Managua. In a speech shortly after that event, Sandinista Commandante Sergio Ramirez accused the IRD of being a CIA front. Since the Rafferty interview these blasts at the IRD have revived in the Sandinista media, on a significantly wider scale. (One more amusing example is the accusation that the IRD has revived the cry "Burn the Huguenots.") The charge that the IRD is a mouthpiece for the CIA and the "contras" may not be very convincing to Nicaraguans, but it must be taken seriously by them. For a Nicaraguan to be accused of links to these organizations is highly dangerous.

Because of this, the IRD was obliged to reconsider its participation in the joint delegation to Nicaragua with ESA. The IRD had insisted that it could only participate in this trip if it could be established that Nicaraguans who might be critical of the Sandinistas could safely present their views to our group. It is now clear that such conditions do not exist in Nicaragua. Any non-Sandinista who might meet with representatives of the IRD would very probably be treated as an IRD sympathizer, possibly even as a CIA agent or "contra." Not only would such persons be unlikely to be forthcoming in their descriptions of the actual situation in Nicaragua, but they would be placed in serious danger simply by our invitation to meet with us.

In a letter to Vernon C. Grounds, President of ESA, IRD's leaders explained that:

...Because of these circumstances we must abandon our participation in the proposed delegation. This is unfortunate. We found a number of important areas of agreement in our discussions with ESA. It is clear that most ESA leaders who are currently sympathetic toward the Sandinistas would change their minds if it could be shown that the Sandinistas indeed are Marxist-Leninist or that CEPAD has an unduly intimate relationship with the Nicaraguan government and discriminates against anti-Sandinista pastors. We hope that the ESA will find some other means of investigating these matters. □

Managua, Nicaragua
March 14, 1985

To the Bulletin Director
Institute on Religion and Democracy

Dear Sir:

Greetings. With all due respect, I am writing to request an immense favor. With regard to the statements made by the CNPEN to the journalist Kate Rafferty of Open Doors, which were published in your January 1985 bulletin, we would appreciate it if you would make clear the following (in the same place and context of the January 1985 bulletin):

A. -- That the CNPEN is an organization which is exclusively pastoral, without any partisan political ideology of any kind, since God has

called on us to preach His word as it is in the Holy Bible.

B. -- That the statements made in your bulletin where we are mentioned were not officially made by our Board of Directors, but that they could have been picked up by the journalist Kate Rafferty from persons who sympathize with our organization but are not legally empowered to make such statements and do not take into account the great harm which these are causing us.

C. -- We do not want to omit the fact that the CNPEN has never had any ties with IRD, an institution about which we began hearing only a very short time ago.

Thank you for your understanding and God bless you.

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diverse religious groups which came together as co-sponsors. Other sponsors included the American Jewish Committee, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and the Jacques Maritain Center of Notre Dame.

Desiring a vigorous and diverse discussion of the problem of religious repression, sponsors reserved 5 of the 12 slots for speakers for NCC-related representatives, including leaders of the U.S.-U.S.S.R Church Relations Program and CAREE (Christians Associated for Relations in Eastern Europe). Each prospective NCC-related speaker declined to attend, apparently in what was a decision by the NCC to boycott the event.

Throughout the conference, speakers surveyed the state of religious freedom in the Third World and the Eastern bloc. Governments cited as oppressors of religion included the Soviet Union (Jews, evangelicals, Eastern Rite Catholics), Iran (Baha'is), Egypt (Coptic Church), Greece (evangelicals) South Africa and the Philippines (any religions which criticize the government's human rights policies) and Afghanistan (Moslems).

Two speakers, Peter Reddaway of the London School of Economics and a member of the board of Keston College, and IRD's David Jessup, offered a critical analysis of the NCC's U.S.-U.S.S.R. Church Relations Program.

Response to the conference by mainline church leaders was sharp but somewhat contradictory. In a prepared statement given at the conference, Charles Bergstrom, head of the

Office for Governmental Affairs of the Lutheran Council, U.S.A., cited "glaring omissions in the sponsorship of the conference." On the other hand, NCC General Secretary Arie Brouwer, in a letter to the State Department, said that the NCC wouldn't have co-sponsored such an event (arguing that co-sponsorship amounted to being "co-opted by the state"), but that nevertheless the NCC should have been "consulted in making the arrangements for the conference."

UM Bishop Leroy Hodapp (an NCC governing board member who did attend the conference) pursued this argument in a letter to IRD chairman Edmund Robb. Hodapp wrote, "When church and state organically join together in planning to meet [on issues of religious liberty] and then use the occasion and the setting (a conference room of the State Department) to caricature and then castigate other religious groups who are not even present, the question of religious freedom in America becomes a high agenda item." Hodapp said this was the "same process... in operation" as when the "Russian state 'appropriates' certain religious bodies, which then mouth the party line, while at the same time ignoring others and openly attacking some."

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President Reagan addresses participants of the International Conference on Religious Liberty. Representing sponsoring organizations on the platform are (from left) Dr. Martin Cohen, Rev. Billy Melvin, Elliott Abrams, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Dr. Ralph McNerny, and IRD's chairman Edmund W. Robb, Jr.

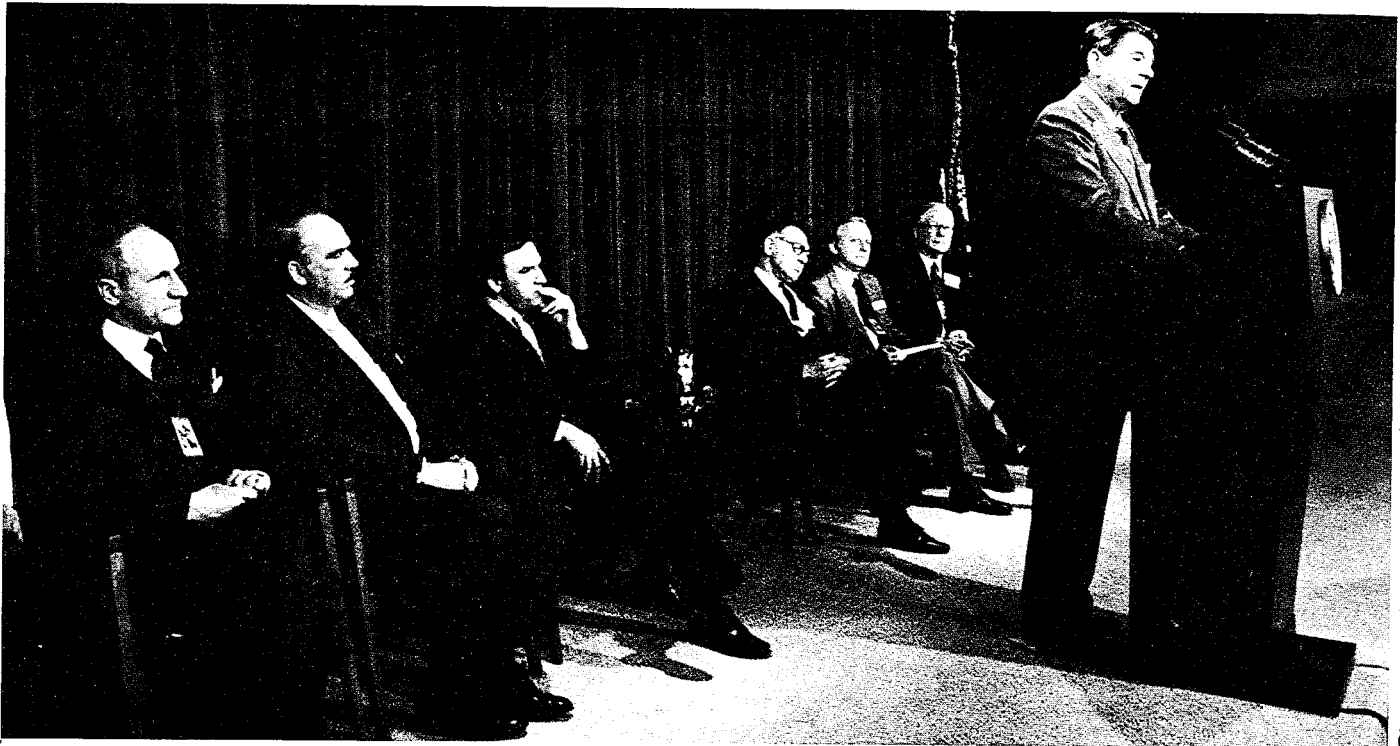


Photo by Terry Arthur/The White House

Conference, Cont'd from page 3

Bishop Hodapp persuaded the entire UM Council of Bishops of this curious reasoning -- and at its May meeting the Council voted to protest the conference because it represented "an obvious violation of the principle of the separation of church and state when the representatives of one of those groups used the platform on that occasion to attack other religious groups and individuals."

In a response to Hodapp, IRD Chairman Edmund Robb adamantly rejected any attempt to draw a parallel between religious oppression in the Soviet Union and the co-sponsorship of the religious liberty conference in the U.S.

"Surely you are not suggesting that the plight of religious believers in the Soviet Union is somehow comparable to the situation of the NCCC in this country." he wrote. "The NCCC has not been noticeably reticent about attacking U.S. government policies in the most searing and unforgiving terms. Nor has it been shy in offering opinions about IRD. Am I to infer that you believe that the NCCC seriously feels that its freedom is threatened because three out of

twelve conference speakers, none representing any agency of the U.S. government, make some passing criticism of NCCC policies? Does religious freedom mean that churches can choose to leap into the political fray, dish out criticisms, and be protected from criticism directed at them?"

Robb concluded by explaining again IRD's purpose for being involved in the conference: "As you know, the U.S. State Department is continually involved in negotiating with other governments around the world, friend or foe. We have long felt that in addition to the usual real-politik matters such as trade, national security, and political alliances, issues of human rights and religious freedom should be placed high on the agenda of such negotiations. For example, we would like the plight of Father Gleb Yakunin to be among the issues discussed during the current review of U.S.-Soviet relations. We are delighted that we were able to encourage the State Department to hear our concerns, along with those of religious leaders from South Africa, Venezuela, the Philippines, Iran, Hong Kong, and others. It is unfortunate that the NCCC chose to forgo an excellent opportunity to present its views." □

The Little Red Schoolhouse — Sandinista Style

Much has been made of advances in education under the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But it is clear that back-to-the-basics represents a bit more than the three Rs. One writing exercise is constructed on the following practice sentence: "Hay libertad de cultos para todas las iglesias que defienden los intereses del pueblo." Or "There is religious liberty for all the churches that defend the interests of the people." Following that assurance (and several exercises on marking syllables), Nicaraguan children learn more vocabulary words illustrated in these sentences: "The true church should be committed to the people" and "The church should not be negligent before the needs of the people." Of course, the literacy manual as a whole leaves no doubt that it is the FSLN which guards the interests of "the people."

Revolutionary education extends into arithmetic class (right). Hand grenades and machine guns assist in teaching "multiplication with the numbers from 1 to 20." Nicaraguan children also suffer through those dreaded "word problems". One example: "The magazine clip of a rifle can hold 8 cartridges. How many cartridges can two clips hold?" □

MULTIPLICACION CON LOS NUMEROS DEL 1 AL 20. CONCEPTO.

$2 + 2 + 2 = 6$
3 veces 2 es igual a 6
 $3 \times 2 = 6$

$3 + 3 = 6$
2 veces 3 es igual a 6
 $2 \times 3 = 6$

From the Religious Liberty Conference

In the course of the development of history, the State's understanding of its role and the Church's understanding of its role has changed and to a certain extent expanded. And because both have claimed greater areas of competency, there is greater possibility for conflict. A very significant event in my country was the declaration of martial law in 1972. With that, the State assumed authority over many things. It's a nervous State, a very highly security conscious State. When we speak of religious persecution in the Philippines, it is not religious persecution in the classical sense, in the sense that the government is persecuting people because of what they believe. It is not outright persecution for the belief in God but rather it is the perception of the State that the activities of the church are undermining the stability of the government.

Father Joaquin Bernas, Ateneo de Manila University, the Philippines

First of all (Western Christians need) to monitor and publicize the true situation in the Soviet Union through every available channel and forum. There is nothing the Soviet State fears more regarding religion than this. Second, we need vigorously to pursue genuine person to person friendship and fellowship with individual Soviet Christians. Third, we need to exert pressure on the Soviet authorities in all ways to moderate their persecution, to liberalize their policies, to free the religious and other prisoners and so on. Here, of course, quiet diplomacy may sometimes be helpful as a supplement to public pressures. But the public pressures, in my view, are the key and without them the quiet diplomacy will not get very far. Fourth, we need to exercise great caution and diplomatic skill and subtlety in dealing with the leaders of the officially recognized Soviet churches. Realizing for example, that while some of them may be hundred percent captives of the State others are only fifty percent.

**Dr. Peter Reddaway,
London School of Economics**

The second important factor, is what could be called a systemic intolerance of alternative belief systems that is common to totalitarian and quasi-totalitarian regimes, an intolerance of autonomous, "mediating" structures that cannot be totally co-opted and fully utilized by the regime. Of course, religious belief systems cannot be reconciled with Marxism-Leninism nor can a religious organization be fully absorbed by a communist regime or transformed into a "conveyor belt" of the ruling communist party. The result is that religion and religious organizations

are perceived in communist systems around the world as islands of non-conformity, as the only readily available alternative belief systems which have to be tolerated mainly due to the large numbers of religious believers in society, and perhaps by virtue of the religion's connection with ethnicity and culture. Religious institutions are perceived as havens for opposition, perhaps even non-religiously motivated.

**Dr. Bohdan Bociurkiw
Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada**

Religion's role in the independence struggle of Third World countries corroborates what was once envisioned by Indonesian President Sukarno in the 1930's when the country was still under colonial rule: religion has a liberating function for all nations. But once independence is gained, religion's function begins to change. Many developing countries are prone to the divisive role of religion once independence is obtained.

Abdurachman Wahid, Chairman of Executive Committee, Nahdatal Ulama, Indonesia

Religious liberty was central in the motivations of the founding of America. Freedom of conscience is the parent liberty from which all other liberties derive: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, the right to privacy. As Leo Pepper has written in his book Freedom and Separation: America's Contribution to Civilization, "In the American system religious freedom is the progenator of practically all other freedoms." Consider freedom of speech. Today it is generally thought of in terms of political speech -- the right to attack the government and condemn its policies. Historically, however, freedom of political speech came late on to the scene; it came after freedom of religious speech had been won. The struggle for freedom of speech in England from which we inherited our tradition was initially a struggle for freedom to speak religiously.

**Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum,
American Jewish Committee**

Religious liberty is not a luxury and it is not something to be deferred for three reasons: First, for us believers, faith in God is the one thing needful. It is the pearl of great price. Secondly, its centrality, as I've already suggested, lies in the perhaps not contingent fact that the other rights seem best preserved in an ambience of religious faith. Finally and more fundamentally still, religious liberty underscores the nature of the human person, of "the good of man," in Aristotle's phrase. Freedom is what is

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Ethiopia Watch: A Word of Caution

Late last year, in the midst of media attention to the famine in Africa and the generous outpouring of contributions to alleviate the suffering there, several leaders of Protestant relief agencies offered some peculiar public observations:

* "Racism" in the U.S. was responsible for the "devastation in Ethiopia," said Willis Logan, director of the Africa Office of the NCC's Church World Service (CWS).

* Norma Kehrberg, chief staff executive of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), told a news conference following a CWS tour of Ethiopia that she was impressed with the country's "openness and accessibility." She pledged UMCOR's continuing efforts to keep church members informed and to correct "misinformation" put out by U.S. government officials.

* The UMCOR president, Bishop Roy Clark, felt obliged to defend the Soviet Union against the contention that it should do more to aid its Ethiopian ally. According to the UM News Service, Bishop Clark argued that figures published by Ethiopia's official Relief and Rehabilitation Commission showed that the Soviet Union had done much more than the United States in assisting with "transportation." (While the Soviet Union has sent virtually no food to Ethiopia, it has supplied massive military aid.)

Recalling earlier controversies over church relief aid to Vietnam and Cambodia, the IRD

formally requested Church World Service to publicly commit itself to providing "no 'development' aid which assists the Ethiopian government in repression of citizens or counter productive agricultural policies."

The subsequent response to the IRD's concern exemplified the polite but patronizing response inquiring church members often receive from 475 Riverside Drive.

In his January 28 letter to Richard Butler, the new director of the NCC's relief agency, IRD chairman Edmund Robb urged that CWS clearly acknowledge the role of Ethiopian government policies when discussing the "root" causes of the famine in educational literature, press statements, and when lobbying the U.S. government. The letter also requested CWS to continue to provide cross-border aid to the northern provinces of Ethiopia through Sudan and to refuse to cooperate in the Ethiopian government's forced resettlement efforts.

The IRD's request for a formal commitment to such policies was prompted by alarm over relief officials' apparent misunderstanding of the Ethiopian government's complicity in the tragedy -- policies which a January 18 Washington Post editorial called "close to being the practice of calculated genocide."

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Photo by United Methodist News Service

A delegation of United Methodist bishops got a surprise visit from President Daniel Ortega during their five-day factfinding trip to Nicaragua in January. Pictured with President Ortega (third from left) are Bishop Kenneth Hicks, Bishop C.P. Minnick, and Howard Heiner (who works with CEPAD and hosted the delegation). In May, the UM Council of Bishops followed the delegation's recommendations and voted to protest any U.S. aid to the "contras"; urged support of the Contadora negotiations as well as negotiations between the U.S. and Nicaragua; urged U.S. officials not to restrict travel to Nicaragua; and encouraged U.S. churches to establish "covenant relationships" with local congregations in Nicaragua.

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"We are simply asking that our church aid not be accompanied by wrongheaded and unjust political judgments, which can lead to counter-productive relief and development policies," Robb said in his letter to Church World Service. He identified three "realities of the Ethiopian situation" which must be included in understanding "root" causes of the famine:

- (1) the refusal of the Ethiopian government to admit the magnitude of its food crisis until after the lavish celebration of the tenth anniversary of its Marxist rule in September 1984;
- (2) misguided agricultural policies, including inordinate government expenditures for resettling Ethiopian peasants on inefficient state farms; and
- (3) "the cynical disregard of starvation" in the rebel-controlled provinces and the politically-motivated resettlement.

Richard Butler of CWS responded to the IRD's letter, but carefully skirted the IRD's calls for specific action:

...Church World Service has been working in Ethiopia for over ten years in partnership with Christian churches and groups there. Given the drastic changes that have occurred in Ethiopia during our

period of work there, we have come to understand the complexities of the situation and of the dynamics involved. During that time we have sought to bring aid to all people in need in Ethiopia....

Other church leaders, however, have become more outspoken about the political causes of the famine. According to The Interpreter magazine, UM Bishop Emilio de Carvalho of Angola cites war, not drought, as the reason for hunger in Africa. He told other UM bishops last November that Ethiopia has exported food for money to buy arms.

Particular commendation should go to Isaac Bivens, head of the Africa team of the UM mission agency. After spending a month in Africa this Spring, Bivens said that in a number of African countries one-party rule has brought a complete absence of free speech and political opposition. A small black minority uses the machinery of government for its own purposes.

"It's time for plain talk," Dr. Bivens said. "A one-party system usually means one person maintaining control by using guns supplied by either the East or West." He argued that "There is no way Africa can get the kind of development it needs until the people are permitted freedoms of speech, religion and political opinion."

Such candor is rare in our mainline churches.

RESPOND

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characteristic of the human person. First of all, adverbially, is what I call "freedom from" and secondly, substantively (which is the basis for the freedom from), is "freedom for" -- for our fulfillment as human beings, both in the natural order and in the supernatural order.

Dr. Ralph McInerney, director of the Jacques Maritain Center, University of Notre Dame

The first (problem) is our failure to give adequate emphasis to one particular form of denial of religious freedom; namely, the appropriation of religion to serve the political ends of the totalitarian state.

When most people think about denial of religious freedom, they think of overt repression, jailing, and torture. The otherwise excellent report on religious intolerance by Amnesty International is limited to these familiar outrages. Similarly, although it is a giant step forward, the recent U.N. document on religious freedom does not adequately deal with government efforts to transform religious bodies into instruments of the state. Yet consider what an affront to God, what a great sin it is, to appropriate His instrument, the church, by means of the coercive powers of the modern state, to expand the temporal political power of that state.

David Jessup, member of the Board of Directors, the Institute on Religion and Democracy

Living as a Jew, praying as Jew, and aspiring as a Jew to live in Israel, are rights integral to our western thought, but alien to communism. Indeed, it is when Soviet Jews seek to insist in any open way on their right to live as Jews, and

to go to Israel, that they find themselves most drastically deprived of their rights as Soviet citizens, subject to dismissal from their work, pilloried in their schools and in their institutes of higher learning, deprived of whatever religious books they may have managed with difficulty to acquire, and frequently depicted in the public press as enemies of the State, as traitors, and even as agents of a foreign power, as proxy agents, incidentally, not of the State of Israel to which they aspire to go, but the United States which has so powerfully championed their cause.

Dr. Martin Gilbert, Oxford University

In South Africa, I believe we have a situation where the state claims total authority over the lives of its citizens. Thus the state may determine where certain people must live, where they must work, what they can do, and where they can go. Whenever any state claims total authority over the lives of the citizens, the people are no longer people but they have become implements. From that concept you have what I will call the development of a functional view of man. People become functions and when they are functions, you may manipulate them in the way you think proper. And it is my firm belief that every religion has an authority to tell governments that whenever they claim full responsibility over the lives of their citizens that they are not servants of God anymore for the sake of the people, but they are becoming God themselves.

Dr. Nico Smith, minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, Pretoria, South Africa

The complete proceedings of the International Conference on Religious Liberty will appear in the Spring issue of World Affairs. You may order from the IRD (\$5. each plus \$1.50 postage and handling.)

Religion and Democracy

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