

January/February 1987

This issue of Religion and Democracy features two articles concerning Central America. One is on the refusal of the religious Left to abandon positions inconsistent with the present situation in El Salvador; the other on the related sanctuary movement. These should be useful to readers concerned about the upcoming Central America Week, March 21-29. This highly politicized event is organized by the Inter-Religious Task-Force on Central America and receives endorsements from church bodies, as well as groups such as Clergy and Laity Concerned, New York CIRCUS and Witness for Peace. In order to provide a more balanced and accurate understanding of Central American realities, the IRD is distributing a packet offering an alternative perspective. This packet includes the Barren Fig Tree, Sanctuary: Challenge to the Churches and several briefing papers and special reports. If each publication were purchased separately, the total cost would be over \$16.00. However, we are offering this packet for a limited time for just \$10.00. Please order by writing or calling: IRD, 729 15th Street, NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005, (202)393-3200.

El Salvador: Churches Avoid a Second Look

Six years ago El Salvador appeared often on our television screens, seething with violence and threatening to explode in revolution. Today — in spite of the current, oddly coordinated bid by the far Left and far Right to oust President Jose Napoleon Duarte — there can be no question that the overall situation in El Salvador has taken a turn for the better. Over the past five years democracy has begun to grow in that embattled land. Two free elections have been held, with broad popular participation, and human rights abuses have dropped sharply. The Marxist-Leninist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) are suffering from desertions and military defeats. Although the civil war continues, and El Salvador has a long way to go to become a stable democracy, it has made substantial progress.

The government, the rebels, and most U.S. observers have all recognized the changes in El Salvador. Only mainline U.S. churches seem not to have noticed. Many of their publications still portray the Salvadoran civil war as a conflict between a brutal military regime, subservient to the landholding class and to U.S. imperialism, and a spontaneous movement for social justice, favored by most poor Salvadorans. That picture was incomplete and oversimplified six years ago; it bears virtually no resemblance to the current situation. Consider, for example, the following discrepancies between stories in the church press and reports from other sources:

* An article in the World Council of Churches' One World magazine (Aug/Sept 1986) says, "More than 1000 civilians were killed in political violence during the first few months of this year." It blames these deaths exclusively on "the army and its allied death-squads," with no mention of any FMLN responsibility. (The WCC's sources were the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador and the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared. There exist serious doubts as to the objectivity of those two organizations, as is discussed below.) But the New York Times (August 26, 1986) describes the situation rather differently:

(Salvador, Cont'd on page 2)



Land reform in El Salvador has gone forward. The largest farms of over 500 hectares have become private cooperatives. Decisions are made by co-op members in assemblies such as this one. The government's agrarian reform institute provides technical assistance.

photo by David Jessup

(Salvador, Cont'd from page 1)

The chief success of the Government or President Jose Napoleon Duarte, made possible by strong American pressure, appears to have been to virtually end Government-sanctioned killings by death squads, disappearances, gross physical torture and massacres of civilians -- abuses that made El Salvador one of the most notorious human rights violators in the world a few years ago.

Some killings and disappearances continue to occur, and there are also cases of indiscriminate air attacks on civilians by the Government. But politically motivated killings have fallen from an estimated 800 a month in 1980 to probably fewer than 30 a month, several of which appear to be carried out by leftist rebels.

Rebel violations include an increasing number of summary executions, attacks on civilian road traffic, dozens of kidnappings and the indiscriminate use of land mines, which probably kill and wound as many civilians as does bombardment by the army, or more.

* An article in the United Methodist Women's Response magazine (April 1985) depicts President Duarte as a creature of the United States, in league with "the old guard right Salvadorans." But William Doherty of the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development calls Duarte "a popular president...who has personally been to the polls twice." Doherty praises Duarte for pursuing a land reform program despite resistance from "the right wing oligarchy in cahoots with military officers" (Hispanic Review of Business, March 1986). Duarte's new package of taxes, aimed at wealthy businessmen and landowners, has provoked fury on the Right.

* An article in The Lutheran (June 18, 1986) asserts that "the guerrillas have more popular support than the government and might be able to win the war." Yet results from the 1984 elections show that over 70 percent of Salvadorans voted, ignoring the rebels' calls for a boycott and defying their threats of violence against poll-goers. Duarte won 55 percent of the vote, with the rest going to candidates to his right. Former FMLN commander Napoleon Romero estimates that over the past three years the guerrilla fighting force has shrunk from about 10,000 to 5,000, as disaffected combatants have deserted the ranks (Diario las Americas, March 30, 1986).

Ducking Some Hard Charges

The tendency of U.S. church leaders to close their eyes to Salvadoran realities was manifested most recently during a controversy last summer. In a May 1986 news conference, Luz Janet Alfaro, a former official of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, came forward with shocking allegations



photo by David Jessup

A Salvadoran woman and her child, members of a co-op on the former hacienda "La Canada" in Sonsonate Province.

of FMLN infiltration into the commission and other church-related organizations. Although the truth of some of Ms. Alfaro's charges cannot be determined, other charges do square with independent evidence. One would expect that the affected Salvadoran churches, along with U.S. denominations that support their work, would at least give careful scrutiny to Alfaro's testimony. Salvadoran church leaders, voicing resentment of the scandal created by her accusations, have avoided discussing their substance in public. U.S. church officials -- more culpably -- have rushed to issue blanket denials.

Alfaro admitted having been a member of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN), one of five Marxist-Leninist factions comprising the FMLN. She detailed how she and other undercover FMLN adherents at the human rights commission had fabricated statistics on government human rights abuses, in order to discredit Duarte and stimulate sympathy for the rebels. Alfaro also alleged that several other human rights groups -- most notably the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared -- are controlled by the insurgents, and she named nine other human rights workers as FMLN agents. After police arrested and interrogated the nine, several confessed having links to the guerrillas. Six are still being held as political prisoners -- without trial, without fixed sentence, under suspicion of the vague crime of "subversive association," but without an opportunity to defend themselves. Their situation demonstrates the urgent need for further reforms particularly in the paralyzed Salvadoran judicial system.

At a second news conference in June, Alfaro widened her accusations to include Diaconia, a church-sponsored clearinghouse for relief and development grants. The ex-rebel called Diaconia "an FMLN bank," through which foreign church donations were diverted to FMLN subsidiaries. She went so far

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as to claim that Dr. Medardo Gomez, Bishop of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church, was a member of the Communist Party and that the Rev. Octavio Cruz, social services administrator of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador, belonged to another guerrilla faction. Gomez and Cruz were not detained, but they received anonymous threats against their lives.

Alfaro's charges produced an immediate outcry. In a June 8 homily, Catholic Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas of San Salvador protested what he regarded as a campaign against the churches. He suggested that some confessions other than Alfaro's may have been coerced. Shortly thereafter a blizzard of telegrams from foreign church leaders swept into Salvadoran government offices. Lutheran bodies in particular were vocal in defending the personal integrity and safety of their fellow Lutheran, Dr. Gomez.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) delivered a more categorical, peremptory rejection of Alfaro. A resolution passed in mid-June, before any thorough firsthand investigation could have been done, expressed strong "support for and solidarity with" all those implicated by her. The PCUSA General Assembly declared the accused to be all "honorable church and human rights leaders."

But most professional human rights monitors spoke with much greater caution. Amnesty International, while raising concerns that the nine ar-

rested Salvadorans might have been subjected to physical abuse or legal irregularities, abstained from prejudging their guilt or innocence. Even the left-leaning Washington Office on Latin America showed restraint: "The veracity of these accusations is as yet uncertain...."

Nevertheless, a delegation from the World Council of Churches and U.S. National Council of Churches, visiting San Salvador June 21-26, had made up its mind before it arrived. The WCC/NCC representatives refused to meet with Alfaro or the other confessed FMLN adherents. They simply issued an unconditional endorsement of all the suspect organizations and individuals. The delegation's report urged foreign churches to increase their donations to Diaconia and to promote the re-establishment of the human rights commission. No mention was made of any need for reforms to prevent rebel manipulation of those organizations.

President Duarte hastened to reassure the churches that he appreciated their concern for the accused church workers. He met with the WCC/NCC representatives and promised that the charges "will be investigated according to the law and with full respect for human rights." In a paid newspaper advertisement, his government declared that it "never intended to attack or discredit the valuable social

(Salvador, Cont'd on page 4)

NCC and IRD Lock Horns Over Church Funding in the Philippines

Last fall, a lengthy article in the Washington Post (Oct. 18) charged that mainline U.S. church funds have found their way into the coffers of Communist front organizations in the Philippines. It was further reported that captured Communist documents reveal a deliberate policy of infiltration of church groups in order to further the party agenda. Because Post reporter William Branigin's impressive documentation was consistent with earlier patterns of questionable church funding, the IRD issued a press release, publicizing the letters which we sent to the National Council of Churches and the United Methodist Church — two groups specifically mentioned by the Post — "calling for a complete disclosure of what organizations in the Philippines receive church financial and moral support."

The request for disclosure was ignored by the United Methodists, but sparked a spirited attack on the IRD by the NCC. In a Nov. 25 press release, Dwain Epps, Director of the NCC's International Affairs Commission, commented that "the IRD apparently continues to support elements in the Philippines identified with former dictator Ferdinand Marcos." NCC General Secretary Arie Brouwer called the IRD press release "part of a continuing program of disinformation by the IRD. Political distortion under the guise of religion, in which the IRD regularly and consistently engages, is a severe threat to the freedom of the people of both the Philippines and the United States, as well as to the integrity of the church itself."

In a December 5 press release, the IRD pointed out that though public endorsements of Philippine President Corazon Aquino are welcome, they completely ignore whether church funds are funneled to groups ultimately hostile to President Aquino's success. It was also noted that attempts to link the IRD with the Marcos regime were demonstrably false; last February the IRD issued a press release supporting the Philippine Catholic bishops in their charge of Marcos election fraud.

The IRD press release concluded: "It is a sad day for the church when a request for public disclosure of the beneficiaries of church support evokes a defensive attack on the organization which asks for the disclosure. We trust the time will come when that will no longer be the case.... Far too often, church leaders, in the name of justice, have supported forces which once in power have produced a legacy of tyranny and oppression. Good intentions are not enough, and that is why we have no alternative but to continue respectfully to seek NCC clarification of its allegiances in the Philippines, as well as elsewhere in the world."

To date, the NCC has continued to refuse to provide an accounting of where their funds go in the Philippines. If there is nothing to hide, why the silence?
— Kent R. Hill

(For copies of the full text of the three press releases mentioned and the original Washington Post article, write the IRD office: 729 15th St., N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20005.)

(Salvador, Cont'd from page 3)

and humanitarian work done by the Catholic Church and Christian churches generally." But Duarte did not yield to demands that he drop the case against the imprisoned "human rights" workers.

Disturbing Evidence from Captured Documents

Regardless of the legal disposition of the case, church leaders cannot afford to ignore Alfaro's testimony. Other evidence confirms it at too many points for it to be dismissed as disinformation. There are clear indications that at least some FMLN sympathizers work inside at least some church-sponsored organizations. It may not always be possible to identify individual infiltrators; however, the signs of their presence are unmistakable.

For example, the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador has long exhibited a bias in favor of the guerrillas. It has regularly attributed to government forces numbers of killings that cannot be confirmed independently, while ignoring rebel atrocities amply documented elsewhere. A Washington Post article noted the "stridently pro-FMLN tone" of the commission's bulletins and its role in arranging meetings between journalists and insurgent leaders.

Moreover, there is evidence that the rebels themselves view some church-related groups as "instruments" in their struggle against the government.

The archives of one FMLN faction (the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party or PRTC), captured along with one of its top commanders in April 1985, reveal the guerrillas' pride in their efforts to infiltrate various Salvadoran institutions. One PRTC memorandum reports optimistically: "In the field of conspiracy, there has been work within the Church and the Army; this form of struggle has advanced positively." A "Plan of Immediate Action for Political Work Among the Masses" stresses that FMLN-influenced organizations must act in closer concert with each other and the guerrilla front. The plan proposes creation of "a single movement" composed of "the instruments which fight for human rights," among which it names the human rights commission and the mothers' committee.

A PRTC financial report classifies grants intended for humanitarian projects as "one of the three principal sources of obtaining foreign currency" for the party treasury. There is also a cryptic reference to a coalition of charitable organizations (Diaconia?) as a major money conduit: "In regard to projects, we still have not been able to achieve the political control of the institution that could represent us in D---, although we have been able to establish relations with some institutions that make up that organization, which has enabled us to obtain a significant increase in funds raised."

(Salvador, Cont'd on page 5)

Slowed Sanctuary Movement Sidesteps Facts, Hews to Ideological Line

A re-evaluation of mainline churches' views on El Salvador will require a reconsideration of the most visible expression of those views -- the sanctuary movement. In its heyday the movement was a formidable publicity machine. Composed of a mere one-tenth of one percent of church congregations nationwide, it was nevertheless able to generate massive media coverage. Newspaper reporters and television cameramen could not resist the well-staged drama of sanctuary: bandanna-disguised peasants telling shocking tales of persecution in Central America and of flight to the United States; ministers, monks, and other religious people proclaiming that their consciences required them to defy the law to shelter the suffering refugees; immigration officers threatening to break into churches and homes to seize the refugees and their religious protectors.

Sanctuary leaders, playing the hero's role in such scenes, had an unmatched opportunity to deliver pronouncements on Central America. Normal means of church political activism had never spread the message of the religious Left so effectively. But the "humanitarian" sanctuary campaign reached the masses with a radical claim: that the U.S. government was responsible for the refugees' plight, first by its pursuit of foreign policies which sponsored the evils they fled, then by its enforcement of immigra-

tion policies which denied them safe haven. Movement spokespersons often focused on El Salvador, attributing the violence there to a U.S.-backed military regime trying to suppress a popular uprising. Few reporters bothered to check whether the facts, in El Salvador and in the United States, supported the sanctuary movement's contentions.

Losing Momentum

Now, though, the movement faces a crisis of its political faith. Public interest in sanctuary has waned, and new evidence from El Salvador has undermined the arguments made by its proponents. The trial of eight sanctuary workers in Tucson last year yielded a rather deflating verdict: not exoneration, but conviction; not the martyrdom of imprisonment, but the nuisance of probation. There was no sign of a sympathetic surge of recruits for the Tucson defendants' cause. The number of declared sanctuary congregations has leveled off at scarcely 300, and many of those are not actually housing refugees.

Although mainline Protestant denominations continue to support sanctuary (the 1986 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, approved a second contribution of \$100,000 to the National Sanc-

(Sanctuary, Cont'd on page 5)

(Salvador, Cont'd from page 4)

Why Ignore the Evidence?

Given these multiple indications that FMLN operatives are active in at least some Salvadoran church-related organizations, why are the churches so reluctant to confront the problem? Why did the WCC/NCC delegation deny that there was any problem at all? Certainly the unsafe conditions in El Salvador, still plagued with hundreds of politically-motivated murders annually, should make Christians hesitate to publicize allegations that might mark innocent Salvadorans as targets for "death squads." And surely churches have cause to complain about the disruption of their internal life when Salvadoran security forces place churchpeople in legal limbo, under indefinite detention or subject to unresolved charges.

Yet rebel manipulation is also an intrusion into church life. If only the churches would quietly sort out among their affiliates the few who are compromised with a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movement from the many whose loyalty belongs to Jesus Christ, they would find themselves strengthened, not weakened, by this crisis. The Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador has already started to clean its house, by withdrawing official recognition and office space from the human rights committee and the mothers' committee. Can foreign churches involved in El Salvador do less?

U.S. churches also need to confront their own false images of El Salvador. Looking squarely at El Salvador, mainline church leaders have to ask themselves: whether the government aided by the United States might be something other than a vicious military dictatorship defending a reactionary elite; whether the Marxist-Leninist insurgents might be something other than populists seeking social equality; and whether the cause of true democracy might have been advanced by the U.S.-backed moderates rather than by the Soviet-aligned revolutionaries.

If our church leaders can shed their leftist presuppositions, perhaps they will feel more free to support El Salvador's democracy — imperfect as it is. And at this moment that democracy needs all the help it can get. The FMLN guerrillas are intensifying their campaign of sabotage and terrorism, hoping that additional miseries, on top of the devastation of last October's earthquake, will destroy all confidence in the government. Simultaneously, extreme rightist groups have reacted to the new tax bill by staging a general strike and encouraging the military to consider a coup. Might not now be the time when the prayers and actions of U.S. Christians could make the difference in El Salvador, preserving democracy there against those who would strangle it in its cradle?

—Alan Wisdom

(Sanctuary, Cont'd from page 4)

tuary Defense Fund, and two boards of the United Methodist Church are sending out "mobile teams" to promote sanctuary work), the movement has failed to broaden its base. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) turned back an attempt by sanctuary advocates to gain its endorsement. Citing arguments both for and against sanctuary, the NCCB Committee on Migration refused to take sides on the issue. The committee concluded: "The facts...are not clear regarding both the real danger deported asylum-seekers will face and their right to stay in the country vis-a-vis the requirement of the common good, for example, that the law be upheld. Therefore, different conclusions can be reached other than those of the sanctuary movement."

In addition, last fall the movement suffered several political defeats. Actions declaring symbolic local sanctuaries have been rescinded in New Mexico (by the new governor), in Los Angeles (by the city council), and in Seattle (by a referendum).

Study Undermines Sanctuary Claims

If sanctuary were simply another leftist cause, it could probably rely on a hard core of enthusiasts to carry it through its current doldrums. But much of this movement's early enthusiasm sprang from a simple, compelling assertion: that sanctuary saves lives. Sanctuary fundraising letters have brought in millions of dollars, for instance, by picturing a masked child and claiming that he must be hidden "to prevent his

being identified and murdered in cold blood if the U.S. Executive Department succeeds in forcing him and his family to go back to certain death in their tortured homeland." It was only this sense of desperate urgency, requiring a heroic response, that led many to condone the breaking of U.S. law.

Yet sanctuary's moral high ground, always shaky, has recently been cut away. Sanctuary advocates have never been able to produce convincing docu-

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Sanctuary activist Phillip Wheaton addresses a 1985 IRD conference on the sanctuary movement. The complete proceedings of the conference, which brought together advocates and critics of sanctuary, are available from the IRD for \$5.00.

photo by Rebecca Hammel

BRIEFS

■ "I vividly remember the cry of the people: 'La Iglesia es una! La Iglesia es una!' (The Church is one! The Church is one!), ...alternated with the chant, 'O-ban-do! O-ban-do!' (referring to Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo of Managua)." So began a report by Bernard Cardinal Law of Boston on the Eucharistic Congress celebrated by Nicaraguan Catholics in November.

The crowds at the congress were voicing their unity with Obando and his fellow bishops as they confront a hostile Sandinista government. The chants also represented, according to Cardinal Law, a repudiation of the self-styled "Popular Church." This "Popular Church" consists of a small band of mostly-foreign priests who, in defiance of the Nicaraguan bishops, bestow their religious blessings on the Sandinistas. Law interpreted government sponsorship of this faction as an effort "to neutralize or negate the influence of the Church through a counterfeit."

Law and other observers judged that the Eucharistic Congress had succeeded in its purposes. It was not intended as a direct counterattack against the Sandinistas, who had struck at the Catholic Church over the previous year by closing its newspaper and radio station, exiling Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega and Fr. Bismarck Carballo, and arresting lay activists. Instead the Nicaraguan bishops wanted to consolidate and manifest the spiritual strength of their own people, to prepare them for a long struggle against the Marxist ideology promoted by the gov-

ernment. Archbishop James Hickey of Washington called the congress "a time of intense renewal of the Catholic spirit and faith of the Nicaraguan people, a time for deepening their loyalty to Christ the King, made present in the Eucharist."

During the week of the Eucharistic Congress, churches throughout Nicaragua held conferences, processions, ceremonies of penance, and special communion services. An estimated 40,000 people attended the closing mass in Managua — significantly more than the turnout two weeks earlier for the Sandinista Front's 25th anniversary. The presence of distinguished foreign guests — bishops from all the other Central American countries and the United States, papal legate Opilio Cardinal Rossi, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta — exhibited the solidarity of the Catholic Church worldwide with its beleaguered members in Nicaragua. In fact, that international participation may have been what made the congress possible, by dissuading the Sandinistas from their usual practice of suppressing opposition rallies.

Meanwhile, Nicaraguan Protestants, lacking the protection of international solidarity, suffered under continuing government pressure. In December the Sandinista press recycled trumped-up charges against several ministers, causing fear that they would again be arrested.

■ United Methodist officials were widely reported as boasting that their bishops had "gone beyond" the U.S. Catholic bishops in rejecting nuclear weapons. Now, in the next escalation of the ecclesiastical anti-nuclear race, the Presbyterians are threatening to

Religious Liberty Alert

A little known but increasingly critical example of religious repression against Christians is developing in India.

The Indian government has recently undertaken a series of steps to prevent further conversions to Christianity and to Islam. In December of 1986, the President of India, Jael Singh, asked Christian missionaries to declare a "self-imposed moratorium" on efforts to convert Hindus and to concentrate on service to the country's poor and destitute. Some foreign missionaries have already been expelled and others denied visas, raising fears that all foreign missionaries may be expelled in the future. These actions have prompted Roman Catholic church authorities to ask Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to set up an independent tribunal to examine such cases.

President Singh's call for the voluntary moratorium on conversions coincides with increasing demands by Hindu groups for a nationwide ban on conversions from one religion to another. Thousands of Hindu politicians and religious leaders attending a recent conference expressed concern over trends of conversion of Hindus to Christianity and Islam. Claiming that conversion work was "anti-national," they called on the government to put controls on such activities.

These recent actions by the Indian government

are based in part on a political fear that the Christian community, following the example of the Sikhs, will demand some independence. However, Archbishop Henry D'Souza, an Indian, has charged in a letter to the Prime Minister that it was an "insult" that Christianity is looked upon by many Hindus as "nationally disintegrating." He said that Christian doctrine has always taught "love of neighbors and loyalty to the nation." The Archbishop added that the Indian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and under that document Christians should be allowed freely to profess and propagate their religious beliefs.

It is not just in their evangelistic endeavors that Indian Christians face discrimination. About one-third of India's 17 million Christians are from the "untouchable" caste of Hinduism. When the 1950 Indian Constitution formally abolished the caste system, it also provided for a type of "affirmative action" — that those castes of Hindus and Sikhs which had been discriminated against were to receive special aid, and that a proportion of jobs, college admissions and legislative seats were to be reserved for them. However, India's highest court has now ruled that when a person from an "untouchable" caste background is converted to Christianity this constitutional "affirmative action" is denied. The court based its reasoning on the fact that Christianity does not observe the Hindu caste laws of untouchability,

overtake the Methodists. The Advisory Council on Church and Society of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is circulating a 62-page paper entitled "Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?" Local congregations are being asked to study the paper as a step toward developing future General Assembly policy.

"Presbyterians and Peacemaking" is more than another denunciation of "demonic" nuclear deterrence; it undermines the bipartisan foundations of U.S. foreign policy. The paper suggests that our nation is so dominated by "militarism" that good Presbyterians must "resist" the government -- refusing to pay income taxes, for instance.

How are Presbyterians to turn their church away from embracing these extreme views and tactics? Our advice is that you urge your elders or Sunday school class to undertake the study, but to use a broader range of resources than provided by denominational offices. After considering all sides of the issue, your church can then return written responses to the Advisory Council. A large volume of dissenting responses might deter resistance advocates.

Copies of the official church study are available for \$2.50 from: The Advisory Council on Church and Society; 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1020; New York, NY 10115. Materials sharply critical of the official study, from a more traditional Presbyterian position, may be obtained for \$4.00 from: Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom; 20th Floor, First American Center; Nashville, TN 37238. The next issue of Religion & Democracy will contain a more detailed critique of the PCUSA study paper.

arguing that the sole criterion for receiving aid and special privileges was "the evil of untouchability," a concept confined to Hinduism. Catholic spokesmen, however, have made clear to various local officials that untouchables suffer the same social and economic disabilities both before and after conversion to Christianity. A delegation from the U.S. National Council of Churches met last year with Prime Minister Gandhi and asked that the privileges be extended to Christian untouchables.

While this religious persecution and harassment against Christians in India has been intensifying, it is receiving little international attention. When asked by the IRD, even the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Liberty confessed complete ignorance about this situation. We urge you to write to the following expressing your concern about the crackdown on foreign missionaries in India, the call for a voluntary moratorium on conversions, and the legal status of Christians from "untouchable" castes.

Angelo d'Almeida Ribeiro
Special Rapporteur for
Religious Intolerance
Center for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH 1211 Geneve 10,
SWITZERLAND

Prime Minister
Rajiv Gandhi
South Bloc
New Delhi
INDIA

— Maria H. Thomas

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mentation of individuals "identified and murdered in cold blood" when forced to return to El Salvador. Now a new study, the most comprehensive so far on the subject, has failed to turn up even one case of a deportee suffering a human rights violation.

The study was done by the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM), a non-political organization funded by 32 nations which has aided refugee resettlement worldwide for 34 years. Between December 1984 and December 1985, ICM interviewed more than 4,800 deported Salvadorans as they arrived at the San Salvador airport. Only 35 of the 4,800 cited concerns about personal safety as their reason for having left El Salvador. The large majority gave better job prospects in the U.S. as their motivation for having emigrated.

Six months after the initial contacts at the airport, ICM sent out letters and teams of interviewers to locate the deportees. It was able to locate 79 percent of them, and none of those had been arrested, tortured, or murdered by Salvadoran government forces. Four had died, all of non-political causes. None of the 4,800 names appeared on any list of "death squad" victims.

ICM officials stressed that their survey was not exhaustive. There may have been isolated cases, outside ICM's knowledge, of deportees who did meet a violent end. The civil war in El Salvador does pose a generalized danger to all its citizens. Likewise, the ICM study does not deny that there may be some Salvadoran refugees in the U.S. with a well-founded fear of being singled out for persecution in their homeland. U.S. immigration officials and judges do recognize hundreds of Salvadorans annually as deserving of political asylum here. What ICM's findings do suggest is that the U.S. legal system has not worked to mark deportees for "certain death." The overwhelming majority of those returned to El Salvador do not run extraordinary risks.

The question must therefore be asked: How can the sanctuary movement now justify its flouting of the law? The United Methodist Reporter, having done stories on the ICM study and reactions to it, raised that question gingerly in an editorial (September 26, 1986). It challenged the sanctuary supporters not to be "so tied to a particular understanding of a situation that we cannot change our minds in the light of changing circumstances and new information." The editorial wondered whether sanctuary churches might now reconsider their choice of illegal tactics, redirecting their energies toward "work with-

(Sanctuary, Cont'd on page 8)

LIBERTY UPDATE: We have just learned that Alexander Ogorodnikov (the subject of our last "Religious Liberty Alert") was allowed a visit by his mother for the first time in six years. Soviet authorities also allowed a Russian Orthodox priest to hear his confession and to give him spiritual comfort. This is only the second time in the last decade that a religious prisoner has been granted a visit by a priest, the first being Father Gleb Yakunin.

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in the U.S. legal system to help qualified illegal immigrants obtain asylum."

Facts Brushed Aside, Fact-Tellers Condemned

Unfortunately, sanctuary leaders have not heeded the Reporter's sound counsel. Instead they have rejected the new information and attacked those who conveyed it. The Rev. Guillermo Chavez of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society blasted the Reporter, calling its coverage of the ICM study "a brand of journalism ... incompatible with the purpose and function of a religious newspaper."

Sanctuary leaders also resorted to impugning the integrity of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration. Noting that ICM receives some financial support from the U.S. government, Michael McConnell of the Chicago Religious Task Force for Central America (the national clearinghouse for the sanctuary movement) said of the ICM report: "This is like asking the fox to guard the chicken coop." Yet Lila Fernandez, head of the United Methodist Church's own Committee on Relief, affirmed, "The Intergovernmental Committee's reputation is worldwide and not political." Despite embarrassed rationalizations by sanctuary advocates, it was perfectly clear that they had no evidence to contradict ICM's findings on the fate of the deportees.

How could the sanctuary movement brush aside so quickly this new report casting doubt upon its central claim? If the movement were primarily a humanitarian ministry to Salvadoran refugees, then surely the ICM study would have prompted it to reconsider the best way to serve those refugees. Perhaps the large sums of money spent on sanctuary publicity could have done far greater good if they had gone to meet the desperate needs of refugees inside Central America.

Sadly, helping Salvadoran refugees does not seem to be the main concern of the movement. Many sanctuary spokespersons have acknowledged that they give priority to larger, more political ends. For example, Michael McConnell of the Chicago Religious

Task Force told the United Methodist Reporter that he did not want debates over whether Salvadoran refugees could return safely to divert people from the fundamental issue raised by the movement, which is "the bankrupt Central American policy of the United States."

A 'Celebration' of Radical Politics

The latest meeting of national sanctuary leaders took McConnell's advice to heart. The three-day gathering last September in Washington, DC, was billed as a "celebration," not a re-examination, of sanctuary. From the opening procession of refugees in bandannas to the final morning of lobbying on Capitol Hill, the focus was on reaching the media and the Congress with a political message. Speaker after speaker denounced U.S. aid to democratic forces in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America. Some of the Salvadorans and Guatemalans introduced as typical refugees were longtime activists in groups aligned with Marxist guerrillas. Ideological bias was plainest in the failure to include any representatives of one of the largest groups of oppressed Central American refugees: Nicaraguans who have fled from the Sandinistas.

Extremist rhetoric abounded at this "Sanctuary Celebration." Renny Golden of the Chicago Religious Task Force proclaimed, "Our most urgent task is to speak prophetic denunciation of the false idol of national security." Gus Newport, the radical mayor of Berkeley, CA, warned, "Every day we send a dollar to El Salvador, we are supporting terrorism." One Salvadoran refugee asserted that "the bullets that wounded me...came from North Americans," while another incited movement members to "destroy the machinery that produces refugees."

Thus, as fresh facts continue to withdraw the "humanitarian" cloak from the sanctuary movement, the radical motivations of its leadership emerge more clearly. Many Christians who had responded sympathetically to sanctuary's initial humanitarian appeal may now find it wise to distance themselves from the movement.

-- Alan Wisdom

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