

March/April 1987

## Presbyterians to the Barricades?

### Presbyterian Scofflaws: Church Studies 'Resistance'

- \* Are you "addicted to nuclear weapons"?
- \* Do you habitually engage in "a unique form of idolatry..., trusting in gods of death for (your) "security"?"
- \* Do you find yourself gripped by an "obsession with national security," subject to outbursts of "belligerent militarism"?

If you are a typical American, you may not have detected any such symptoms in yourself. But the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which has published study materials containing the above, fears that your disease may be worse than you imagine. It is now discussing how to deliver you from "the demonic influences of nuclear weapons policies." The methods of exorcism under consideration, however, could prove traumatic to the church and to our nation's democratic institutions.

Although the expressions cited above may seem far-fetched, the issues being raised are exceedingly serious. Nor is the PCUSA Advisory Council on Church and Society joking in its paper entitled Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance? (hereafter abbreviated "PAP"). The paper suggests, with utmost earnestness, that U.S. "militarism" has become so rampant and so dangerous that the church's commitment to peacemaking might require it to mount a campaign of "resistance" to the United States government. By "resistance" PAP means, for example: refusing to pay "war taxes," urging young men not to register with Selective Service and military officers to resign their commissions, decertifying military chaplaincy as an acceptable form of ministry, and such acts of civil disobedience as "lying on railroad tracks to protest the transportation of materials used in the production of nuclear weapons."

The Advisory Council aims to have at least ten percent of PCUSA congregations study this document by June 1. Their responses would then go to a special committee, which will draft a policy statement for submission to the 1988 General Assembly -- the denomination's highest body.

(Studies, Cont'd on page 2)

### Resisting Resistance: Dissidents Muster

Most Presbyterians are, to say the least, not quite ready to join a movement of resistance against the U.S. government (see story to left). According to a 1985 Presbyterian Panel survey, 86 percent of PCUSA members oppose "war tax resistance" and 61 percent disapprove of "sanctuary" for illegal aliens. Their principal objection to these two forms of resistance was: "It is against the law, and the church should not break the law in these circumstances."

Unfortunately, this overwhelming sentiment did little to restrain Dana Wilbanks and Ronald Stone. Nor does it necessarily doom the proposals made in their Presbyterians and Peacemaking. Provided that most church members remain uninvolved, the Advisory Council on Church and Society may be able to build institutional momentum toward General Assembly endorsement of some form of resistance. A Presbyterian Peacemaking Program memorandum from November 1986 hints at a strategy: recruit likely sympathizers for the one-sided study, avoid exposing

(Dissenters, Cont'd on page 6)

An interfaith group holds a "Stations of the Cross" protest, on Good Friday 1984. The last "station" is pictured in front of the aircraft carrier Intrepid, now a museum in New York.



Religious News Service Photo

(Studies, Cont'd from page 1)

Much could be gained by a disciplined analysis of hard questions like the causes of U.S.-Soviet conflict, the morality of nuclear deterrence, and the proper relationship between Christian churches and a democratic government. Christians will find it impossible to speak as one Church on many such questions, but a discussion of various views could help instruct our individual consciences. Unfortunately, the Advisory Council shows little interest in encouraging that kind of balanced study. Its paper does not provide a range of perspectives, but rather offers a single line of thinking. The authors, seminary professors Dana Wilbanks and Ronald Stone, acknowledge their "clear bias that such a radical situation (the nuclear arms race) may well require a quite radical response."

PAP closes by offering three options for a General Assembly stance, all of which presuppose that U.S. Christians have legitimate reasons to break the law. The least extreme option would have the church "support the consciences of individual members who believe Christian obedience calls them to engage in acts of resistance"; the most extreme option would declare resistance an essential point of faith for all Presbyterians. The second option -- probably the one which the authors realistically hope to see adopted -- would offer official church encouragement of resistance, but not require it of all church members. Nowhere is it intimated that most Presbyterians might regard law-breaking as unnecessary, inappropriate, and misguided in present circumstances.

### U.S. "Militarism" the Only Enemy

How did the Advisory Council arrive at such radical proposals, so much at odds with the values of other Presbyterians?

PAP and related study materials take their first wayward turn in applying a classic passage from the Sermon on the Mount. Where Jesus calls his disciples to the hard task of loving their enemies, PAP would have us take the easy way out, by pretending that we have no enemies. It denies that there is any objective basis for the United States to regard the Soviet Union as an enemy. Authors Wilbanks and Stone assert that U.S.-Soviet conflicts are but temporary "divergences" -- comparable to those "between the United States and Japan." They dismiss the notion of a fundamental antagonism between democracy and Marxism-Leninism as a modern "Manichean heresy": "the poison of anti-communism."

Indeed, a supplemental essay by PCUSA staffer Robert Smylie, called "What About the Russians?," finds more similarities than differences between the two political systems:

Both societies have pluralistic political systems: the U.S. has states, the U.S.S.R. has republics. Both also have a party system ....

The party systems differ, but even "one party" systems have their own internal dynamics (as our Southern tradition should have taught us). Obviously, end results differ.

The final, pathetic understatement is not elaborated. Smylie apparently does not care to explain how widely the "end results" differ -- guaranteed civil liberties versus an untrammled dictatorship, for instance.

Where the PAP documents do contrast the U.S. to the U.S.S.R., they tend to judge the Soviets more favorably. Smylie asserts that:

- \* the Soviets kindly aid other countries in "revolutionary efforts to free themselves from colonial rule or economic domination," whereas the U.S. has "abandoned its revolutionary heritage" and "taken the reactionary role";
- \* U.S. military development has driven the arms race, leaving the Soviets "in a constant catch-up position"; and
- \* the U.S. is guilty of "misguided attempts to coerce the Soviets" when it insists on Soviet respect for religious liberty as the price of East-West trade.

As these skewed comparisons suggest, PAP is much quicker to recognize the enemy in our own government than in any other. Wilbanks and Stone label this enemy "militarism." Although they ascribe militarism to the Soviets too, they are far more concerned about its many supposed manifestations in the United States. Our society, in their view, has become a "national security state," in which we have turned preparation for war into an all-consuming priority. The "military-industrial complex" is said to draw so many institutions and individuals into its orbit that civil liberties and rational democratic debate are subverted. This picture of unbridled militarism is pure theory. PAP never employs objective standards of militarism, which might have shown that the U.S. ranks as a relatively unmilitarized society.

### Anti-Nuclear Anathemas, But No Alternatives

Perhaps, though, Wilbanks and Stone use the loaded term "militarism" simply to underline their sharpest grievance against U.S. defense policy: that we possess nuclear weapons. From their perspective nothing other than militarist madness could explain our deployment of these means of mass destruction. PAP will not contemplate the notion that U.S. nuclear weapons might contribute to peace by deterring Soviet aggression. On the contrary, it denounces nuclear deterrence as "idolatrous" and "demonic."

The peacemaking study arrives at its anti-nuclear stance through applying the classic "just war" criteria by which theologians have evaluated conventional conflicts. PAP pronounces any use of nuclear weapons to be immoral because: those weapons cannot discriminate adequately between civilian and military

(Studies, Cont'd on page 4)

---

Religion and Democracy is published by The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 729 15th St., NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005 (202/393-3200). Kent R. Hill, Executive Director and Editor; Diane L. Knippers, Managing Editor; Maria H. Thomas, Administrative Director; Walter H. Kansteiner, CEPIS Director; Alan F. Wisdom, Research Director; Richard Penn Kemble, Program Consultant; Diana Scudder, Editorial Assistant.

IRD membership is \$25.00 per year; a subscription to the newsletter is \$15.00 per year (and is included in the annual membership fee). Tax-deductible contributions in any amount are welcome.

# IRD Challenges the 'Witness' of Witness for Peace

Is Witness for Peace a genuine "witness for peace," or might it more accurately be called a "witness for the Sandinistas"? After a series of exchanges, both public and private, the Institute on Religion and Democracy remains convinced that, regrettably, Witness for Peace has not achieved its stated goal of "political independence."

The controversy began on October 14, 1986, when Witness for Peace scheduled a \$250-per-person, black-tie fund-raising dinner in Washington. When the IRD learned that a number of prominent Washington figures who were listed as hosts for the dinner had not, in fact, authorized the use of their names, the IRD issued a press release to correct the record regarding the sponsorship of the dinner. (After initially denying the misuse of names, Witness for Peace representatives finally acknowledged the "merit" of IRD's criticism about the dinner sponsors, attributing the foul-up to the special events firm which Witness for Peace contracted to organize the dinner.)

From the first, however, the IRD made it clear that what most disturbed us was not a misuse of public names, but Witness for Peace's even "more profound form of deception and abuse — the appropriation of Christian witness to advance its political defense of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua."

An accompanying statement explained:

It is one thing to oppose aid to the contras, for example, on non-violent grounds. But Witness for Peace goes beyond this to serve as an apologist for a regime which every day looks more like that of Cuba.

The IRD statement cited a number of examples illustrating what it considers to be a consistent pattern of Witness for Peace support for the Sandinista regime. The October IRD statement observed that:

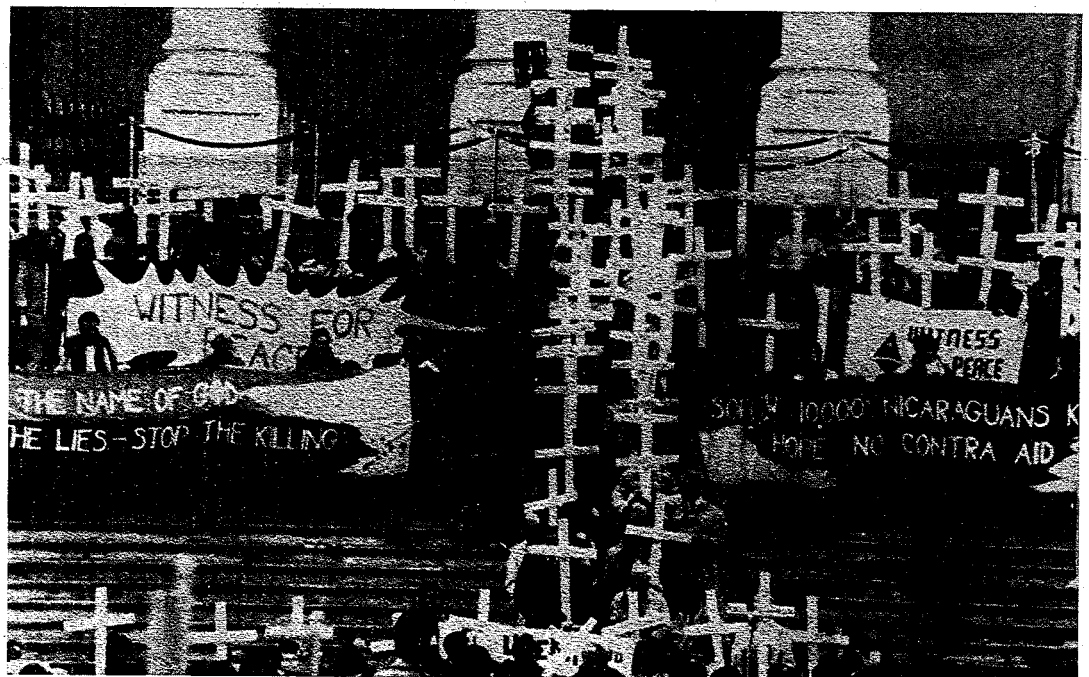
Witness for Peace does not protest the contributions made by the Soviet Union and Cuba to the militarization of Nicaragua, and to the civil war that has resulted. Witness for Peace has not objected to the support the Sandinista government has given to those committing violence against the democratically-elected governments of El Salvador and Colombia. Witness for Peace has not offered to intervene to prevent bloodshed present in combat zones in El Salvador and Costa Rica.

Witness for Peace responded to the IRD salvo by sending its two Washington staff directors, Sam Hope and Jean Walsh, to meet with IRD Executive Director Kent Hill and Program Director Diane Knippers. As the subsequent Witness for Peace letter to the IRD Board reported, this meeting was "an open and honest two-hour dialogue" which "took place in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding."

Nevertheless, in its November 25 response to the IRD Board, Witness for Peace protested: "Our motives have been impugned, our political independence questioned, and the integrity of our religious witness denied." The three-page Witness for Peace statement argued that it was indeed "politically independent" and cited several examples of Witness for Peace "criticisms" of and "concerns" about the Sandinistas, including the mistreatment of Miskito Indians, harassment of church leaders, lack of provision for conscientious objection from military service, suspension of civil liberties, and inadequate numbers of women in the top levels of the Nicaraguan government. The Witness for Peace statement also disclosed that:

...WFP has met face-to-face with Nicaraguan Government officials to express concern over such matters as the incommunicado detention of political prisoners, government interrogation of religious leaders, the expulsion of Bishop Vega and Monsignor Carballo, the closing of the newspaper La Prensa and the magazine Iglesia, the closing of the station Radio Catolica, and the closing of Campus

(Witness, Cont'd on page 4)



Witness for Peace played a major role in a March 1986 protest against the war in Nicaragua. Forming a human cross on the Capitol steps, nearly 200 religious leaders accused the U.S. government of creating "a scaffold of deception...around Nicaragua."

(Witness, Cont'd from page 3)

Crusade for Christ and the confiscation of its literature.

Witness for Peace told the IRD directors, "We believe a public apology is in order."

On January 13, 1987, IRD Chairman Edmund W. Robb, wrote the Witness for Peace Steering Committee: "We stand by the accuracy of our original press release." He did indicate IRD's intention of sharing the substance of the controversy with readers of Religion and Democracy. The Rev. Robb's letter was accompanied by a seven-page analysis of the controversy by Kent Hill, which further documented, using Witness for Peace literature, "an unmistakable animosity towards Sandinista opponents and an indisputably positive attitude towards Nicaragua under Sandinista hegemony."

Responding to Witness for Peace's rejection of the label "apologist" for the Sandinistas, Dr. Hill suggested:

There is perhaps some confusion as to what it means to be an apologist. It does not require that an organization be externally controlled (by) those whom it defends. It does not necessitate that those being defended be considered perfect or above criticism. What is required is that, on balance, an apologist be willing to defend and justify the actions and motives of those being supported.

The IRD document continued:

Much of the WFP criticism of the Sandinistas -- for example, regarding the mistreatment of the Miskito Indians -- simply mirrors what the Sandinistas themselves have been willing to concede. Since the Sandinistas have admitted some misconduct, the fact that WFP also acknowledges the same is scant evidence of political independence.

The IRD document further contrasted Witness for Peace's recent expressions of concern about religious liberty in Nicaragua with earlier examples of Witness for Peace ignoring such concerns:

- \* March 4, 1986 -- Witness for Peace participated in a demonstration in Washington, DC, which dismissed U.S. government charges of religious persecution in Nicaragua as "deception and lies."
- \* March 1986 -- a Witness for Peace "Newsbrief" devoted to the question of religious repression in Nicaragua minimized or dismissed any charges of major Sandinista misconduct toward believers.

(Studies, Cont'd from page 2)

targets; the decision to use them would likely violate democratic, constitutional procedures for declaring war; and no objective achieved through a nuclear strike could be worth the resulting devastation.

These arguments carry great force, and Americans will have to wrestle with them as long as we retain a nuclear arsenal. Nevertheless, those who favor nuclear deterrence have made replies that deserve a hearing. United Methodist ethicist Paul Ramsey contends that we must distinguish our "double intention" in possessing nuclear weapons. We keep them, in this view, less for the horrible destruction they would

- \* October, 1986 -- a Witness for Peace publication entitled What We Have Seen and Heard in Nicaragua quoted an official of CEPAD (a Nicaraguan evangelical relief organization which cooperates with the Sandinistas) as saying: "We have not seen any policies of harassment against the Protestant churches, or even the Catholic Church."

In the light of these incidents, the IRD posed the following question to Witness for Peace: "Why is it a lie when Sandinista critics talk of religious harassment and an example of 'political independence' when the WFP does?"

Of course, the IRD was pleased to learn that Witness for Peace representatives have personally expressed to Nicaraguan government officials concern over incidents directed against the church. IRD Chairman Ed Robb wrote:

If these Witness for Peace representatives indeed do accurately reflect the views of the Witness for Peace Steering Committee, the IRD Board would like to request that you make that judgment clear to the American public. To date, Witness for Peace publications have appeared to either deny or minimize the concerns you expressed in your memorandum to us.

The complex and morally demanding debate over U.S. policies regarding Nicaragua has now been rendered all the more divisive by the dismaying "Iran-contra" scandal. But for almost six years the IRD has consistently argued that American Christians, regardless of their views on U.S. policy toward the Nicaraguan opposition forces, ought to be able to come together to support genuine religious liberty and respect for human rights in Nicaragua. Sadly, much of the mainline church world, along with groups such as Witness for Peace, has publicly remained virtually silent in the face of compelling evidence of the Marxist-Leninist commitments and misconduct of the Sandinistas. Our question remains: Will Witness for Peace, even as it continues its opposition to the Sandinistas' military opponents, now accept the IRD challenge to speak out for religious liberty for the Nicaraguan people?

— Diane L. Knippers

**Those interested in obtaining the complete texts of the statements and responses by the Institute on Religion and Democracy and Witness for Peace, may obtain them by writing or calling the IRD office.**

wreak if used than for the avoidance of that same destruction through the threat of using them. And as long as the chance of use is remote, the actual good secured by the threat may outweigh the contingent evil of future use. Moreover, deterrence has worked for the past forty years. Should we discard lightly the policy that has brought the measure of peace we now enjoy?

Unfortunately, this other side of the deterrence debate is nowhere represented in the PAP materials. Instead Wilbanks and Stone caricature the motives behind deterrence, attributing to U.S. leaders an

(Studies, Cont'd on page 5)

(Studies, Cont'd from page 4)

"attraction" to nuclear weapons, caused by "fantasies of God-like power...over life and death on earth." PAP assumes that possession of nuclear weapons implies a desire to use them, and that any use of them would produce a universal holocaust. It treats this awful prospect as the ultimate evil -- "the second death." The phrase is borrowed from non-Christian Jonathan Schell, in apparent ignorance that Revelation uses the same words to describe a disaster worse than physical extinction: eternal damnation of the soul. Perhaps this misappropriation of biblical language explains why Wilbanks and Stone charge political opponents with "idolatry" and "heresy."

After this emphatic repudiation of deterrence, one might expect the authors to have a clear alternative in mind. They do disclaim outright pacifism, professing adherence to "the Reformed theological tradition (that) the possession...of military capability...is necessary and legitimate when held and used in a just way." What military capability would Wilbanks and Stone then recommend? Their answer is embarrassingly vague. PAP declines to specify practical political options, claiming that U.S. "militarism" is too entrenched to be reformed. It confesses, "The societal movement back from militarism... is especially difficult to contemplate." But how are U.S. policymakers to uphold their commitments to defend our allies and our own people? Ronald Stone does not see much reason to worry. At an October 1986 conference discussing PAP, he gave assurance: "I'm not living with the threat that if the U.S. were to remove the threat of mass destruction, the Soviets would invade Western Europe."

The closest the peacemaking materials come to an alternative policy is a rosy scenario, briefly sketched in several passages: unilateral U.S. concessions persuade the Soviets to negotiate disarmament, and then growing interdependence gradually eliminates the causes of superpower conflict. Nowhere is there a sense that as long as the Soviet system retains its non-democratic and aggressive nature, the democratic nations will require a credible defense.

### Resistance: Last Resort of Frustrated "Prophets"

Even supposing that PAP had some fresh, non-nuclear ideas to add to the defense debate, why would it offer "resistance" as a way to advance those ideas? Repeated scriptural injunctions -- "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men" (1 Peter 2:13) -- have disposed Christians to stay within the law whenever possible. Biblical saints did sometimes disobey specific state directives which they felt it would be sin to obey; however, they generally found their consciences could be satisfied and their prophecies proclaimed without systematic obstruction of state functions. And in a democratic society, where we enjoy so many legal means of promoting almost any cause, the burden of proof falls all the more heavily upon anyone who advocates illegal means. U.S. Presbyterians -- with constant access to free speech, free elections, and free courts -- need a compelling reason to justify dodging taxes and lying down in front of trains.



RNS photo/New York Presbytery

The New York City Presbytery "made peacemaking visible" by putting up 50 posters throughout the city. The 9' x 21' outdoor posters suggest the crayon work of a young child.

PAP's attempt to supply that reason raises more concerns than it resolves. Wilbanks and Stone argue that disarmament-minded Presbyterians have exhausted all less extreme options. Recalling Presbyterian bodies' past criticism and lobbying against U.S. military programs, they assess these efforts to work within the political system as "negligible" in effect. Administrations, Republican and Democratic, have continued to strengthen U.S. defenses, despite the protestations of General Assemblies. PAP blames this frustrating record not on the unpersuasiveness of the stands taken -- which they call "prophetic" -- but rather on a corruption of democracy itself. It declares our government to be "so possessed by the forces of destruction" that it is no longer "open...to the normative vision of a just peace."

Democracy having failed them, the PAP authors look to resistance as their winning tactic. In a supplemental essay Walter Wiest attributes to "certain limited acts of obstruction" a special potency in provoking debate, so as to inform the public and prompt the government. He could even condone destruction of property, because it "gets more publicity and publicity is important to political action." Not only is such law-breaking smart politics, according to PAP, but it also displays a "wondrous range of behavioral forms...", stimulating the creative imagination born of faith."

But some might envision resistance in less "wondrous" terms. Regardless of its direct political impact, a PCUSA resistance policy threatens adverse side-effects on the denomination itself. Many Presbyterians who support nuclear deterrence will be offended by PAP's suggestion that they "repent for (their) failure to engage vigorously and persistently in (anti-nuclear) political activity." Law-abiding pacifists will resent being told, in a supplemental article, that they "consent to the nuclear arms race by paying taxes and not attacking missiles in their silos with hammers." Indeed, Wilbanks and Stone briefly acknowledge that resistance tactics might ignite "conflict and hostility" in the church. They would take that risk. Most Presbyterians, though, may balk at dividing the church -- not to mention undermining the rule of law -- merely to generate "creative" publicity for radical views which they do not share.

— Alan F. Wisdom



(Dissenters, Cont'd from page 1)

it to potential opponents. The memo, while urging presbytery peacemaking committees to sign up "as many congregations as possible," also cautions against "discussing issues on which there will be disagreement" in "congregations which are just beginning their peacemaking journeys."

Nevertheless, the peacemaking materials have provoked wide controversy. Several newspapers have run stories critical of PAP. A group of 16 prominent Presbyterians — including political science professors, retired military officers, and former senior policymakers — has expressed misgivings about the study process. In a May 1986 letter to General Assembly Stated Clerk James Andrews, the 16 stated: "The church witness on public affairs should be undertaken only after wide discussion and debate involving all relevant Presbyterian viewpoints." An unbalanced discussion, they warned, would "inevitably lead to divisions within the Body of Christ and a loss of the church's authority and unity."

The most important response to PAP has come from local churches. Over 1,000 have asked to study the document, and hundreds have returned negative assessments. The elders of Avery Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Nebraska, wrote of their concerns: "Presbyterian military members simply will not understand the strong anti-military character of the report. It can easily be viewed as damaging to our national defense and will be considered by many both in and outside the denomination as an affront to those serving in the armed forces."

The Peacemaking Study Group at Kirk of the Hills in Tulsa, Oklahoma, reported, "We were dismayed to witness this overt attempt by a permanent committee of the General Assembly to sway members of our denomination to embark on a course of civil disobedience based on the limited opinions and experiences of a few committee members."

Protests against PAP have also resulted in overtures to the General Assembly. In February, Philadelphia Presbytery passed an overture calling for withdrawal of the study paper. In March, Mission Presbytery (central Texas) voted to request a special committee "representing a broad range of Presbyterian viewpoints and backgrounds" which would re-examine the issues raised by Wilbanks and Stone. The

Presbyterian Lay Committee, an independent renewal group, is responsible to a large extent for persuading congregations not prone to resistance to become involved in the debate.

### Another Vision of Peacemaking

Many churches have also been helped by an alternative to PAP published by Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF), a recognized caucus within the PCUSA. Entitled Peacemaking? Or Resistance? Presbyterian Perspectives, the collection of essays has been distributed to all 11,600 PCUSA congregations.

In the PDRF's lead article, Ervin Duggan, a former aide to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, scores the official study for its abuses of rhetoric: "wrapping incendiary proposals in semantic cotton-battling," "arguing by avoidance" of uncomfortable facts and contrary opinions, and "substituting noisy posturing for the difficult work of making sensible policy." Professors Mark Amstutz and John Jefferson Davis present "just war" arguments for possession of nuclear weapons as a means of peacekeeping, through the maintenance of a balance of power. James Woolsey, an Under Secretary of the Navy during the Carter administration, identifies PAP as "the latest in an ignoble tradition" of church publications which have refused to make the necessary moral distinctions between free democratic societies and aggressive totalitarian powers.

The booklet also features an analysis, by Kerry Ptacek of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, of resistance as a political tactic. He sees it as not another liberal gesture on behalf of reform, but rather a radical repudiation of the church's commitment to seeking reform by democratic methods. In PDRF's closing piece, pastor Ted Dorman finds the peacemaking study's most serious defect to be a neglect of the peace most stressed in the Bible: the peace between God and humans secured only in Jesus Christ. Commenting on the suggestion that resistance be declared an essential of Christian faith, Dorman says, "To baptize 'resistance' as a prerequisite for salvation would be more 'idolatrous' and 'demonic' than all the missiles in the combined arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union."

(Dissenters, Cont'd on page 7)



A cross-carrying anti-nuclear demonstrator is carried to a waiting police van at the U.S. Navy submarine base in San Diego. He was one of 34 protesters arrested for blocking the entrance to the facility on June 20, 1983. "Presbyterians and Peacemaking" suggests that Presbyterian church members should consider a variety of similar "resistance" activities. Religious News Service Photo.

## "Peacemakers" Strike Back

The Advisory Council on Church and Society, stung by the criticism, has taken up its own defense. It has repeatedly pleaded that PAP is not a policy statement — merely a study. Advisory Council administrator Gail Hastings Benfield admitted that the document lacked "diverse viewpoints"; however, she maintained that Wilbanks and Stone had done a "greater service to the church" by "presenting the issues in the context of a Reformed theological approach." She added that arguments for a strong national defense, which she implied did not fit into that "Reformed theological context," were amply available through unofficial sources. Benfield also claimed, strangely, that one-sided materials "made it easier to engage in vigorous discussion."

Wilbanks and Stone responded directly to the PDRF essays, in a statement adopted by the Advisory Council in January. They faulted the dissenting authors for a "polemical tone" and for "several inaccuracies." In particular, they denied the charge that PAP held the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to be "morally equivalent." They left unspecified, though, what moral differences they recognized between the two superpowers. Wilbanks and Stone then accused PDRF of a "political preoccupation":

They wish to marshal the support of religious communities (especially Presbyterian churches) for the "mainstream" military policies of the United States government and pretend to do so from an unbiased perspective. They do not explain or defend their position from a theological and biblical basis, nor do they bring their unexamined theological views into any kind of critical tension with...U.S. policies.

The statement alleged, lastly, that PDRF was trying "to terminate the process of study and discussion."

Yet PDRF leaders had presented their essays as an attempt to broaden, not stifle, the debate. And they had never proposed -- as the Advisory Council had -- to enshrine their political judgments in Presbyterian doctrine. With regard to the complaint that the PDRF document had overlooked PAP's theological sections, Ted Dorman replied:

We could find no logical connection between Stone and Wilbanks' theology and their advo-

cacy of resistance. It does not necessarily follow that a Christian's right to resist under certain conditions entails his responsibility to resist under present conditions in the U.S.

The Advisory Council has not confined itself to verbal counter-attacks; it has acted, as well, to intimidate. At its January meeting the Council requested an investigation of PDRF's compliance with denominational guidelines on "responsible dissent" and "responsible journalism."

Such retaliation betrays the unease that the Advisory Council must be feeling. The PAP study process is not proceeding as smoothly as planned. The PDRF and the Presbyterian Lay Committee have succeeded in focusing attention on the radical positions promoted in PAP, and Presbyterians across the country are making it clear that they do not want their church identified with such positions. Kerry Ptacek of the Lay Committee sees this development as a hopeful sign:

The beginnings of a historic realignment in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are taking place. Conservatives are taking up issues upon which they can find common ground with moderates -- and even liberals. Resistance is the most obvious example. A radical minority occupying key staff positions in the old denominational structure has proven so divisive that the great majority of Presbyterians are finding that they have to speak out together to ensure that the door of renewal will not be shut finally for this denomination.

— Alan F. Wisdom

Copies of Presbyterians and Peacemaking (\$2.50 each) may be obtained from, and comments on it may be sent to: The Advisory Council on Church and Society; 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1020; New York, NY 10115. The alternative document is available for \$4.00 from: Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom; 20th Floor, First American Center; Nashville, TN 37238. Presbyterians interested in promoting greater lay influence on denominational issues such as resistance may contact: The Presbyterian Lay Committee; 1489 Baltimore Pike, Suite 301; Springfield, PA 19064.



Activist and former priest Philip Berrigan, left, was among members of the "Atlantic Life Community" who were removed by police as they tried to block an entrance to the Pentagon, December 29, 1986. The group was protesting U.S. nuclear testing.  
RNS Photo/Wide World

# Religious Liberty Alert

This May 1, a remarkable event is going to take place at the Capitol building in Washington, DC. A new organization, the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the USSR, is sponsoring an ecumenical rally on behalf of fellow believers in the USSR. The rally will take place between 10 and 11 a.m. on the east Capitol steps. American and emigre representatives of the Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic faiths will gather to pray and hear the message of the recently released Christian poet Irina Ratushinskaya. She will be joined on the program by members of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, as well as by representatives of a number of peoples of the USSR -- Russian, Ukrainian, and Baltic.

Hundreds of U.S. Christians are expected to participate in a display of concern and support for Christians who endure imprisonment, exile, or discrimination because of their religious faith. An "adopt a prisoner" campaign will be launched at the rally in an effort to ensure that every known Soviet Christian prisoner (nearly 400 at this time) will have prayer and advocacy support. The central theme of the rally comes from Hebrews 13:3, "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them."

While Coalition organizers are grateful for the recent release by the Soviets of a handful of religious prisoners, it should be noted that thus far less than one in five of all those released are known to be either Christians or Jews. The fundamental hostility towards religious believers in the Soviet Union is still firmly entrenched in law and painfully present in practice. The May 1 rally will remind the American people of this unpleasant reality and also signal to the Soviet authorities that American Christians will not forget the plight of their brothers and sisters in the USSR.

The IRD is one of 14 groups participating in the Coalition, and IRD Executive Director Kent Hill has been selected as the Coalition Chairman. Keston-USA, an affiliate of England's prestigious Keston

College, is serving as the Research Consultant for the rally. Every IRD member is invited to participate in this significant rally to pray, show concern, and learn more about what can be done to help. Those who cannot attend the rally are asked to set aside May 1 as a special day of prayer.

**LIBERTY UPDATE:** Alexander Ogorodnikov (Religion and Democracy, Nov/Dec 1986) was released from prison by the Soviet government on February 14, 1987. On the day he was scheduled to be released, his fellow inmates supported him by going on strike, refusing to go on their work details until they saw him leave camp. Ogorodnikov refused to sign a paper stating that he would not engage in anti-Soviet activities (often the main charge against believers). However, as a condition of his release, he did agree to support Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" (or openness). The day following his release, in a telephone conversation with a friend in the United States, Ogorodnikov said that he was tremendously thankful for all those who prayed and worked on his behalf: "When I was in my damp, cold cell, I was warmed by your prayers and fed by your thoughts."

IRD board member George Weigel is launching a new publication called American Purpose. Ten times a year, American Purpose will report on the peace, security and freedom debate among America's opinion leaders, highlighting those who understand that these are inseparable goals. Weigel promises to "pay particular and close attention to the moral argument over peace, security and freedom as it unfolds in America's churches and synagogues, and among our country's best (and worst) religious thinkers." Subscriptions (\$18/year) or more information are available from American Purpose, 4000 Albemarle Street, NW, Washington, DC 20016.

**Religion and Democracy**  
729 15th Street, N.W., Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005