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Will It Be Peace in Central America? Churches Can Make a Difference

The agreement signed by the Central American presidents in Guatemala on August 7 offers unique opportunity -- and holds special danger -- for peace in that region. The opportunity springs from the recognition, for the first time by all five Central American governments, of three vital principles: (1) that peace will come only through dialogues of reconciliation within each nation; (2) that national reconciliations can be achieved only through "authentic political processes of a democratic nature based on justice, freedom, and democracy"; (3) that all governments involved in the region should cease attempts to subvert their neighbors. The danger lies in the many ambiguities of the accord. If any country were to take some steps toward reconciliation, democracy, and non-intervention, yet stop short of full compliance, and if other nations were to ignore the

violation, blithely declaring "peace in our time," then the outcome might not be peace at all -- but only more war, and the loss of freedom.

Therefore a close watch must be kept to hold the signatories to their promises, in letter and in spirit. The moral authority of the churches could certainly be valuable in this regard. What follows is a survey of how various church leaders are responding -- helpfully or unhelpfully -- to the new opportunities and dangers presented by the peace plan. Attention will be focused on Nicaragua simply because it is the Nicaraguan situation which arouses widest concern. To illustrate: a recent poll by the Gallup affiliate in Central America shows that 71 percent of Hondurans and 85 percent of Costa Ricans believe that the San-

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Revolution or Reconciliation? South Africa Revisited

On a recent visit to South Africa, I was confronted with a new reality, and reminded of an old hope. The new reality, and this is the bad news, is that South Africa, in the past five years, has increasingly become a divided, fragmented society. The old hope, and this is the ray of sunlight, is that reason and faith may yet prevail over violent and anti-democratic revolution.

South Africa is a nation polarized with two equally distasteful extremes: authoritarianism on the Right and totalitarianism on the Left. The white extremists, symbolized by the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), call for a return to strict apartheid and greater political and economic control vested in the central (Afrikaner-controlled) government. One cannot help being reminded of the Nazi Party in the early 1930's. Equally forboding is the African National Congress' (ANC) call for violent revolution and its vision of a one-party Marxist-oriented state.

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Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos



ANC president Oliver Tambo is embraced by Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega after delivering an address celebrating the 8th anniversary of the Sandinista revolution.

dinista government treats its people with little or no justice. Moreover, 50 percent of Hondurans and 38 percent of Costa Ricans consider it likely that Nicaragua will invade their country within the next three years (Congressional Record, March 17, 1987).

Cardinal Obando in a Tight Spot

The Catholic Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo (recipient of IRD's Religious Liberty Award in 1982), has assumed a crucial role in the search for peace. As chairman of Nicaragua's National Reconciliation Commission, Obando is charged with overseeing efforts to verify that the peace plan is being carried out in Nicaragua. The post befits the cardinal well, since he has long sought, as a churchman, to mediate the conflict between the government and the "contra" rebels. The 1984 Easter pastoral letter, issued by the Nicaraguan bishops under his leadership, pointed the way toward reconciliation:

All Nicaraguans inside and outside the country must participate in (a) dialogue, regardless of ideology, class, or partisan belief.... The dialogue of which we speak is not a tactical truce to strengthen positions for further struggle but a sincere effort to seek appropriate solutions...in a climate of democratic harmony.

But Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega has complicated the cardinal's task, filling the other three seats on the commission with men who belong to or have cooperated with the Sandinista Front. Ortega allowed no place for resistance leaders, with whom he refuses to negotiate. Hence the cardinal, as perhaps the lone independent voice, may be caught in a rather unbalanced "dialogue."

Furthermore, Obando has come under personal attack this summer. A June 15 Newsweek article contained a clever innuendo: "His (the cardinal's) church may have received hundreds of thousands of dollars in covert aid from the United States -- from the CIA until 1985, and then...from Oliver North's rogue operation." Obando denied the allegation, and an investigation by the Puebla Institute (a Catholic human rights group) found it without basis. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas seized upon the article as confirmation of their ugliest slanders against the cardinal. Daniel Ortega branded him "a salaried agent of the CIA, an accomplice in the crimes of Ronald Reagan" (Diario las Americas, July 8, 1987).

Sadly, some in the U.S. religious community have on occasion joined in defaming the Nicaraguan church leader. The Jesuit magazine America (November 16, 1985) printed without disclaimer Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto's assertion that Obando is the CIA's "most valuable asset in Central America."

National Council of Churches General Secretary Arie Brouwer has characterized the cardinal and his fellow Nicaraguan bishops as "church leaders in opposition to justice for the people (who) are often prisoners of ideology and abstractions, and out of touch with the people" (Religious News Service, March 24, 1986).

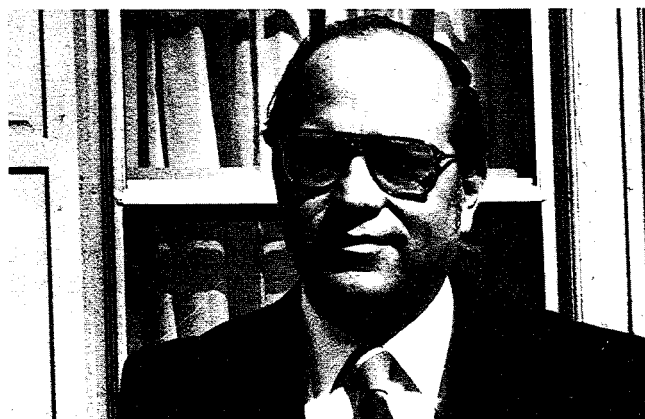
Gustavo Parajon: Will the Partisan Turn Reconciler?

Another key figure in the Nicaraguan peace process may be Dr. Gustavo Parajon, head of the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development (CEPAD), a Protestant relief agency supported by many U.S. denominations. President Ortega named Parajon to serve on the Reconciliation Commission in the role of "a notable citizen, not in public office and not belonging to the party in power."

Dr. Parajon insists that he is politically independent. His record, however, casts doubt upon that assertion. Past IRD publications have documented the partisan pro-Sandinista stance adopted by CEPAD under Parajon. This bias has been manifested in: CEPAD's close cooperation with government programs, including forced relocations and a propagandistic literacy campaign; its praise of Sandinista policies -- Parajon has declared that "we have seen the hand of God at work" in the government (Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Report from the Capital, April 1983); and its defense of the Sandinistas against charges of violating human rights and religious liberty.

Yet, in an interview after his appointment to the Reconciliation Commission, Parajon may have given a hopeful sign. He called for the government to lift emergency restrictions and permit closed newspapers and radio stations to reopen (New York Times, August 26, 1987). Now that the Sandinistas have taken some of those measures, it is not clear whether the CEPAD leader was anticipating their actions --

Photo by Beth Spring/Christianity Today



Dr. Gustavo Parajon, head of the Evangelical Committee for Aid to Development (CEPAD), has been named to the new Nicaraguan Reconciliation Commission by Daniel Ortega.

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or whether he was demonstrating genuine independence. On August 27, IRD Executive Director Kent Hill wrote a letter to Dr. Parajon challenging him "to move forward from this opening statement into a new boldness on behalf of human rights, religious liberty, and democratic elections." On the commission, Parajon will have to press these concerns on both the government and the insurgents. Whether he takes that risk will be the test of his independence and his capacity to contribute to reconciliation.

Mainline Churches: A Unilateral Reading of Peace

Unfortunately, many mainline U.S. church officials show little interest in pressing both sides in the Nicaraguan conflict. Instead, their political statements and activities have focused on just one demand: that the United States cut off aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. Nor, it appears, has the steadily emerging evidence of the Sandinistas' true nature shaken the faith of their mainline sympathizers.

The latest religious pro-Sandinista campaign, launched this September under the name "Days of Decision," merely repeats the slogans and tactics of previous lobbying blitzes. Church members are urged to write, phone, demonstrate, and visit congressional offices to register one simplistic message: "In the Name of God, Stop U.S.-Contra Terrorism." The campaign makes no attempt to persuade the Sandinistas to honor their pledges of democracy, reconciliation, and non-intervention.

The centerpiece of Days of Decision is a short statement signed by more than 300 religious leaders. The statement sides with the Sandinistas even in its description of the Nicaraguan civil war: "The United States is using the contras to wage a war of state-sponsored terrorism against the people of Nicaragua." Support is affirmed for the Guatemala accord, but the only aspect of it mentioned is non-intervention by the United States. The statement speaks as if its authors supposed that nothing in the peace plan required changes by the Nicaraguan government. In fact, the religious signers seem to think that the Sandinistas are doing quite well. They call their regime a "government...elected by a majority of its people," striving "to exercise their right of self-determination, and to create a new society." Sandinista policies are said to "have much more to do with endemic poverty and biblical teaching on justice than with Soviet influence." How different such an evaluation is from that reached by the editors of the Washington Post (September 22, 1987): "The Sandinistas are a Marxist-Leninist party profoundly antagonistic to democracy. It misreads them to say they are not true believers."

Days of Decision resembles the "Mobilization" rally this April (Religion & Democracy, May/June 1987), although with significant differences. Like the Mobilization, Days of Decision is coordinated by the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, a radical activist group largely dependent on church support. The list of signers of the Days of Decision statement looks quite similar to the list of Mobilization sponsors. Among the statement's endorsers are: General Secretary Arie Brouwer of the National Council of Churches; President Avery Post of the

United Church of Christ; President John Humbert of the Disciples of Christ; eleven United Methodist bishops, including William Boyd Grove, President of the Board of Church and Society; seven Catholic bishops; three Episcopal bishops; and many top Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) staffers.

Yet there are some church officials who distinguished themselves by not signing the Days of Decision appeal. Among them: Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning of the Episcopal Church; Stated Clerk James Andrews and Moderator Isabel Wood Rogers of the PCUSA; and Bishops Paul Duffey and Earl Hunt, Secretary and President of the UM Council of Bishops. Most strikingly, none of the leaders of the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America appears on the Days of Decision list.

Many of these notable abstainers -- Browning, Andrews, Duffey, and Lutheran Bishop James Crumley, in particular -- had lent their names to the April Mobilization. Why, then, their change of attitude? Perhaps some appropriate lessons were drawn from the Mobilization. When the IRD revealed that

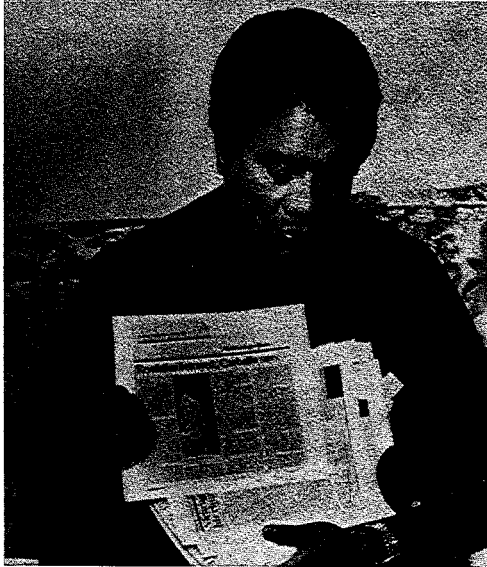
The World Without War Council (WWWC) has published a third edition of its Directory of National Organizations Dealing With Central America. According to WWC Director Holt Ruffin, the reason for publishing this resource guide is "to facilitate a more unified and coherent American understanding of the alternatives to war in Central America." The IRD believes this directory is a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the religious and political climate of the Central American debate. Copies of the guide are available for \$5.00 by writing the World Without War Council, 1514 N.E. 45th St., Seattle, WA 98105.

the march had used religious endorsers as a facade to cover a more radical core of organizers, we requested that future campaigns of this sort be more candid. And Days of Decision has been somewhat more candid. Its press releases specify that its organizational sponsors -- alongside the Washington offices of the American Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ -- include far-Left groups such as the Nicaragua Network and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. It may be that some church leaders, seeing those groups listed, decided not to associate again with them and their agenda.

U.S. Catholic Bishops Listen to Central American Brothers

More far-reaching shifts in perspective may be occurring among U.S. Catholic bishops. A committee of bishops, headed by Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn, is preparing a statement on Central America for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB). In composing that statement, the U.S. bishops have sensibly consulted their Central American colleagues -- with salutary results. A joint communique, issued after a July meeting of U.S. and Central American bishops, hails as "a sign of hope the rise of democratic processes both in Latin America generally and specifically in Central America."

Msgr. Bismarck Carballo exhibits press clippings detailing his expulsion from Nicaragua. On Aug. 25, the Sandinistas announced that he would be allowed to return home.



RNS PHOTO/World Wide

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More importantly, the U.S. bishops heard -- and apparently took to heart -- objections by the Central Americans to an early draft of the NCCB statement. The draft, according to Bishop Sullivan, had posed open-ended questions about whether the Sandinistas had betrayed the Nicaraguan revolution and gone over to the Soviet camp. But the Central American bishops would not entertain such a tentative approach. "They had no question it (the Nicaraguan government) has become a threat, and that it is an unacceptable threat," said Sullivan. "They have no question that the Sandinistas betrayed the revolution." The Central Americans also rejected any attempt to blame Sandinista abuses on U.S. aid to the contras. Sullivan added that he was now convinced that the Sandinista regime is Marxist-Leninist and totalitarian. The U.S. bishops would, he expected, revise their statement in light of this harsher view of the Sandinistas, although they would still likely oppose contra aid (Origins, August 13, 1987).

Central America Peace and Democracy Watch

For those who are still unsure about the nature of the Nicaraguan government, the Guatemala accord offers an opportunity to test Sandinista commitments. On the other hand, those who have denounced past Sandinista betrayals now have a responsibility to work within the new peace process, so that this time the Nicaraguan people may indeed see the promises of democracy and reconciliation fulfilled. Anyone on either side of the contra aid debate should have an interest in monitoring closely the Nicaraguan government's compliance with the peace plan.

This task is what a new coalition, called the Central America Peace and Democracy Watch, proposes to undertake. The Watch intends to translate the general provisions of the Guatemala document regarding democracy and reconciliation into specific actions that it will expect of the Sandinistas by specific dates. It will measure Nicaragua's progress

toward those goals by the government's willingness to take initiatives such as: ending the state of emergency; releasing political prisoners; guaranteeing due process under law; granting access by all social groups to all communications media, without censorship; restoring freedom of assembly and of movement; and ceasing pressures on individuals to join Sandinista Front affiliates or to leave independent organizations. As unarmed Nicaraguan civilians test whether they can indeed exercise their rights, the Watch will try to protect them by publicizing their efforts and the government's responses. It will sponsor delegations which will visit Nicaragua in the coming months, and it will publish reports on the situation there.

The Central America Peace and Democracy Watch includes among its sponsors both supporters and opponents of contra aid. One may hope that other U.S. religious leaders will join Hyman Bookbinder of the American Jewish Committee and Roman Catholic Bishop Rene Gracida in endorsing this effort. You may obtain the Watch bulletin by writing: 2025 I Street, NW, Suite 218, Washington, DC 20006. Groups which will be monitoring the peace plan include: the American Institute for Free Labor Development (1015 20th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036), Freedom House (48 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010), and the Puebla Institute (44 West 36th Street, New York, NY 10018).

-- Alan Wisdom

A Report on Reform Efforts Within the Denominations

In addition to publishing our newsletter and other informational materials, the IRD assists groups which are working directly within various denominations in their efforts to reform the political action agendas of their own churches. Like the IRD, these groups consistently advocate a concern for democratic values and religious liberty in church policies and programs. From time to time, we will share information with **Religion & Democracy** readers on what a number of groups are doing.

Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

The fastest growing group in the Presbyterian Church is **Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF)**, says its spokesman Ervin Duggan. In just over a year, their list of supporters has grown from 200 to 3,000. PDRF's Peacemaking? Or Resistance? Presbyterian Perspectives, a collection of essays countering the official Presbyterian peace study, has been circulated to every local Presbyterian congregation, and over 20,000 copies of the booklet have been sold. PDRF is now planning a similar publication responding to denominational policies on Central America.

This year PDRF surveyed the nearly 12,000 local Presbyterian churches regarding their views on the sanctuary movement. The survey revealed that less than two percent had declared themselves sanctuary churches; the overwhelming majority disagreed with

the sanctuary tactic. Duggan explains that the survey revealed a "massive rejection of the idea of sanctuary, in spite of denominational expenditures of more than \$100,000 and extensive staff time in promoting" the sanctuary movement.

On September 25, PDRF gave its first "Faith and Freedom" award during a dinner in Washington. The award went to Ernest Gordon, the founder of the Christian Rescue Effort for the Emancipation of Dissidents (CREED).

PDRF has launched its own newsletter this year, entitled *Mainstream*, and is currently soliciting applicants for its first full-time executive director. Write PDRF, 30 Burton Hills Blvd., Suite 500, Nashville, TN 37215 (615/665-1016).

Attention all Presbyterian collegians! The Presbyterian Lay Committee is helping to form a new group for college-age Presbyterians called **Collegiate Presbyterians for Reform (CPR)**. In its initial statement, CPR argues that "theologized politics of the ideological left" are contributing to the destruction of the church. Write to CPR, c/o Presbyterian Lay Committee, 1489 Baltimore Pike, Suite 301, Springfield, PA 19064.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The uniting Lutheran denomination will be graced with a reform caucus called **Lutherans for Religious and Political Freedom (LRPF)**. According to Lutheran layman and LRPF chairman Dr. David Carlson, LRPF's priority concern is launching its quarterly newsletter, *Lutheran Commentator* (\$10 per year; \$12 first class and Canada; \$8 students and seniors). The first issue (summer '87) contains an article on church attitudes toward economic questions, several pithy news briefs, and a piece on church tours to Nicaragua entitled "What the Pilgrims Missed." To subscribe, write P.O. Box 1093, Minnetonka, MN 55345.

Lutherans for Religious and Political Freedom also sponsors periodic forums in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area with speakers such as IRD board member Richard John Neuhaus; Robert Spaeth, dean of St. John's University; and Jack Schwandt, professor of political science at St. Olaf College.

Episcopal Church

The fledgling **Episcopal Committee on Religion and Freedom**, which is a committee of the IRD, has expanded its national board of directors and is preparing for the General Convention of the Episcopal Church next July. (Write ECRF chairman Frank Watson, c/o the Institute on Religion and Democracy, 729 15th Street, NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005.) ECRF's priority concerns are the celebration of the Millennium of the Church in the U.S.S.R., South Africa, Central America, and the Urban Bishops' Coalition statement on the economy. The latter is the topic of an article by IRD staff member Walter Kansteiner in a forthcoming issue of the independent quarterly newsletter *Anglican Opinion*. *Anglican Opinion* (\$15 per year; \$27.50 for two years) is edited by ECRF board member David Apker and may be obtained by writing 6320 Monona Drive, Madison, Wisconsin 53716.

United Methodist Church

The United Methodist bishops' pastoral letter "In Defense of Creation" continues to be the focus of debate in the Methodist church. In July, IRD chairman Edmund Robb sent critiques of the bishops' letter by noted UM ethicists and theologians Stanley Hauerwas, Paul Ramsey, and William Willimon to each UM bishop. In his letter to the bishops, Robb said:

These articles strongly suggest that the pastoral letter has departed from orthodox Christian teaching at various points. I do not believe that this was the intention of the council. While we may agree to disagree on matters of prudential judgment, it seems to me that some clarification of the council's theological instruction is seriously needed.

United Methodists who agree that their bishops' pastoral letter could use some modification, before next spring's General Conference, might write their own bishop. The UM Council of Bishops meets this November 15-20 at Lake Junaluska, NC.

— Diane Knippers

From the Director's Desk

The IRD is very fortunate to have a splendid professional staff. I want to give you a brief report on my three senior colleagues.

Our Deputy Director is **Diane Knippers**. She has an M.A. in sociology from the University of Tennessee, where she specialized in religion and society. From 1974 to 1982 she worked for the evangelical United Methodist *Good News* magazine, for which she served as Associate Editor until accepting a position with the IRD. Now an Episcopalian, Diane is the Managing Editor of *Religion and Democracy*, and has special responsibilities in the areas of denominational liaison, the press and fundraising. She also does a weekly national radio commentary for International Media Services (IMS) which is heard on over 170 radio stations across the country. (For information on a possible IMS broadcast in your area, please write the IRD office.)

Our Director of Economic Studies is **Walter Kansteiner**. He has an M.A. in international economics from American University and a Master of Theological Studies from Virginia Theological Seminary. Also an Episcopalian, Walter has lived and worked in South Africa, and is presently completing a book on South Africa for the IRD. He edits our Church Economic Programs Information Service (CEPIS) Bulletin.

Our Research Director is **Alan Wisdom**. He has a B.A. in history, English, and Spanish from Rice University, and has done graduate studies in history at Princeton. A Presbyterian, Alan has a particular expertise in Central and Latin America, and will be spending three weeks teaching at a mission school in Venezuela this November.

The excellent quality of the materials the IRD produces is a direct product of a highly competent and dedicated staff. I am delighted to have such a fine senior staff with which to work. — Kent R. Hill

Religious Liberty Alert

"All prisoners of faith will be freed" by this November. This remarkable promise was made by the senior minister in charge of monitoring religious groups in the U.S.S.R. — Konstantin Kharchev — in an August 31 meeting in Washington, DC, with Senator Richard Lugar. Speaking for concerns shared by the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the U.S.S.R., Senator Lugar specifically requested amnesty for the more than 200 known religious prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union.

"There are no prisoners of conscience" in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, this comment was made by the same individual who promised Sen. Lugar that "all prisoners of faith will be freed" by November. Kharchev's statement was made at the Chautauqua Conference in New York four days before his meeting with Lugar. He also asserted that the religious prisoners were in fact criminals, and "glasnost will not affect criminals" (Keston News Service, #283, September 10, 1987).

So what are we to make of these contradictory messages? Some insist that the promise to Lugar is just a propaganda ploy, which will at best yield a few releases or concessions designed to placate a gullible West. Others believe a fundamental transformation of Soviet society is in the works. The truth may well elude both the pessimists and the optimists.

On the positive side, we ought not to underestimate the importance of recent developments. A number of prominent religious prisoners have been released or allowed to emigrate. There have been persistent rumors that some of the discriminatory restrictions placed on believers have been rescinded or are under review. The Soviets have agreed to allow the Baptist World Alliance to ship in 75,000 volumes of a New Testament commentary in late September, and 100,000 Bibles are to be allowed into the U.S.S.R. in early 1988. And now we have the additional promise of the release of all religious prisoners of conscience.

Such rhetoric does not necessarily translate into reality. At the same time, promises, particularly when linked to a recognition of past mistakes, can provide an impetus towards change which can go beyond even that which was originally intended.

On the negative side, however, we dare not forget the grim reality which still faces Christians in the Soviet Union. As of August 21, according to Keston College, the number of known religious prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union is still 289 (KNS, #283). Those who have been released have not been exonerated — that is, officially cleared of the original charges. In this sense, Gorbachev has not gone as far as Khrushchev did with a number of prisoners during the 1950s. The Soviet Constitution and the laws regarding religious groups still contain significant legal obstacles to the practice of religious freedom. (For example, Article 52 of the Soviet Constitution only guarantees the right of anti-religious propaganda, not religious.) The very fact



Konstantin Kharchev, the Soviet minister of religion, during his September trip to the U.S., during which he gave mixed signals regarding the plight of believers in the U.S.S.R.

that there are still quotas on importing religious literature is clear evidence of a fundamental attempt to limit religious freedom. Even the recent concessions in this regard hardly begin to address the needs of at least 60 to 70 million believers.

So how can we measure progress in the days and months ahead? Let me offer some questions to keep in mind.

1. Are the Constitution and laws which govern religious groups amended to allow for true religious freedom?

2. Do the Soviets keep their promise to release all religious prisoners of conscience? Are the prisoners exonerated?

3. Are the 34 known religious believers in psychiatric hospitals released? Present talk of amnesty has never included them since they are not considered "responsible for their actions."

4. Are believers who wish to do so allowed to emigrate?

5. Are believers who choose to remain in the Soviet Union allowed to practice their faith without state intrusion? Does the discrimination against registered believers end? Does the persecution of non-registered believers persist?

6. Are Soviet religious leaders who travel abroad allowed to speak freely about their situation in the U.S.S.R., or are they still constrained simply to serve as a foreign policy mouthpiece for the Kremlin?

These six criteria will allow us to test the genuineness and the depth of religious glasnost in the Soviet Union. We ought to be thankful to God for any relief which comes to our Soviet brothers and sisters in Christ. We ought to acknowledge with appreciation positive steps by the Soviet authorities. But we must not lose our sense of perspective and laud as fundamental changes those concessions which may well turn out to be only cosmetic.

For years Soviet leaders and registered religious leaders have insisted that there was not a significant problem regarding religious freedom in the U.S.S.R. In large measure, the U.S. National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches, as well as some respected evangelical luminaries, blindly re-

peated similar myths. Those who contended that there were serious problems of religious repression have been far too often caricatured as "red-baiters" and Cold Warriors. Now even the chairman of the Soviet Council on Religious Affairs has conceded that there were very many mistakes on the side of the leaders with regard to religion." Kharchev also told Senator Lugar: "In the past, we perhaps did not have a proper understanding of the role of religion in the society." Perhaps now Western religious leaders will find the courage to concede as much regarding the state of religious affairs in the U.S.S.R. as has on occasion the senior Soviet minister of the Council on Religious Affairs.

We strongly recommend that our readers write to Konstantin Kharchev at the following address:

Chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs
Smolenskii Boulevard, 11/2
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

Express your appreciation for recent developments, but also your continuing concern for the many believers who remain in prison. Mention in particular: Anna Chertkova, Lev Lukyanenko, Viktoras Petkus, Vladimir Rusak, and Viktor Walter. Indicate that believers in the West will judge the genuineness

of glasnost by the Soviet willingness to rescind anti-religious statutes presently found in the Constitution and in the legal codes.

Continue to pray that the recent modest signs of change in the Soviet Union will blossom into a meaningful religious freedom in which each person will have the right to believe and practice his or her faith without fear of discrimination or persecution.

— Kent R. Hill

(Dr. Hill is also chairman of the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the USSR.)

Burundi Update:

In the July/August issue of *Religion and Democracy*, we reported on serious persecution of Roman Catholics in the tiny African country of Burundi. On September 3 a bloodless military coup overthrew the ruling Bagaza government. Since the new rulers are also from the minority Tutsi tribe, and the Roman Catholics harassed are mainly from the majority Hutu tribe, it is not yet clear what impact the change of government will have on the fate of Christians in that country. However, the *Washington Post* (Sept. 5) asserts that opposition to religious repression was "the driving force behind the military coup." Time will tell.

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Christians, both in and out of South Africa, must reject both of these alternatives, resist further polarization of the South African society, and opt for a third choice, a "middle ground." This third option is one that follows a path toward true democracy in a non-racial, multi-party state, with guarantees of individual liberties and freedoms. The middle ground is made up of South Africans from all sectors who reject the ever-increasing pressure to adopt the rhetoric, strategies and tactics of the extremes. The anti-apartheid activist and novelist Alan Paton says, "There is still a very great, almost anonymous center of people who just want peace and want to send their children to school, want to dress them properly, live a life of relative peace, and that's very strong among black people, white, Indian, and coloured."

There are no automatic solutions to the challenges which lie ahead for the democrats in South Africa. What is required for the middle ground to survive is courage, perseverance, and above all else, faith and hope. "The real tragedy of our country," one black South African trade unionist told me, "is that Christians around the world are just watching it slip into revolution." In fact, U.S. mainline church leaders are actively pushing South Africa towards revolution by ignoring or undermining moderate forces in South African society. With the National Council of Churches' recent endorsement of the World Council of Churches-sponsored "Lusaka Statement," which approves the view that liberation movements in South Africa are compelled to engage in armed struggle, the churches have become cheerleaders (as well as financial supporters) for the ANC.

Church leaders seem to be imposing a new litmus test for commitment to racial justice. The test has shifted from advocacy of disinvestment and sanctions

to a commitment to provide moral and financial backing for the ANC. Many in the U.S. anti-apartheid movement, including key church leaders, have openly embraced the ANC, and identify it as the sole legitimate representative of the South African people. The not-so-subtle implication is that if you do not support the ANC, then you must sponsor apartheid. That is precisely the polarizing technique used in South Africa by radical revolutionaries, and it must be resisted by all Americans who are able to recognize that there is a third option -- a middle ground that seeks democratic values guaranteed by individual civil liberties.

Fortunately, this tendency of mainline churches to encourage the polarization of South African society does not represent all of the U.S. churches' efforts in South Africa. A newly-formed group, called the Coalition on Southern Africa (CSA), is attempting to develop religious and economic ties with black South Africans. The Coalition, made up of prominent American black religious leaders and educators, believes that "black developmental needs must be met if South Africa's future economic and social conditions are to be viable." CSA's strategies and tactics include student-exchange programs and joint economic ventures between black American businessmen and black South African entrepreneurs.

On the parish level, there have been successful programs where U.S. congregations "adopt" a South African church. The First Presbyterian Church of Lenoir, NC, for instance, has provided funding directly to a church in Kwa Wubuhle Township near Uitenhage, enabling them to build a permanent place of worship.

South African church-related groups such as Michael Cassidy's Africa Enterprise and the National

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Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR) are supported by individual U.S. congregations in an attempt to bolster the democratic middle ground. The NIR, launched in 1985, includes South Africans from all racial groups and some 50 different denominations. The NIR has brought blacks and whites together to worship, to discuss their differences and to meet human needs throughout their country. These NIR activities, according to founding member Michael Cassidy, all seek to "prepare people to live in a changed and totally non-racial land."

South African Christians frequently reminded me that their country's needs are as much spiritual as material. Reconciliation contains elements of forgiveness and conversion, and neither can take place without spirit-filled guidance and intervention. During my March 1987 visit to South Africa, I had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of a black laborer outside of Durban. He lives and works in a highly politicized area, and "choosing sides" is a way of life. When asked if he sided with one political

group or another, he quickly responded, "No, I don't belong to any of those. I belong to my God, my church and my family."

Americans, like our democratic brothers and sisters in South Africa, must be willing to stand up to the polarized and radicalized perspectives and policies that have emerged in the South African debate. Some U.S. Christians fuel this destructive process. But we don't have to live with the destruction unleashed by such irresponsibility; the South Africans do. There is a choice between the authoritarianism of apartheid and the totalitarianism of a Marxist-Leninist state. Churches ought to support that third option and play a part in seeing that South Africa's future is not the future of a tragedy, but rather that of a prosperous and free nation.

— Walter H. Kansteiner

Walter Kansteiner, IRD's Director of Economic Studies, is in the final stages of writing a study book entitled South Africa: Revolution or Reconciliation? which will be published by the IRD.



RNS PHOTO/Odette Lupis

From left, Allan Boesak, South African Reformed church leader; ANC president Oliver Tambo; and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., the senior minister of New York's Riverside Church; at a Jan. 21 conference at Riverside. Mr. Tambo affirmed that the ANC is prepared to take up arms in opposition to the South African regime.

An alternative course for reform in South Africa is spelled out in the IRD's most recent briefing paper, "South Africa: Is There a Solution?", an interview with Frances Kendall and Leon Louw. The authors of South Africa's best-selling non-fiction book, Kendall and Louw propose a system for a post-apartheid South Africa based on the "canton" structure in Switzerland. The briefing paper is available from the IRD for \$1.50.

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