

The Christic Institute: Fighting the "Secret Team" -- With Your Church's Money

"These guys behind the friendly face of Ronald Reagan are fascists.... I'm sorry to use that language, but there's no other word for them, and they're murderers just like the Nazis were." So spoke Sara Nelson, Executive Director of the Christic Institute, at a recent conference (*The Washington Post*, Sept. 11, 1988). And that hysterical slam is only incidental to the battery of wild assertions launched by Nelson and her husband, Daniel Sheehan, General Counsel at the self-professed "radical" public-interest law firm.

In fact, the Christic Institute doubts that Reagan -- or any of the previous six presidents -- has really been running the government. Instead it charges that since 1959 U.S. foreign policy has been in the hands of a "secret team" of CIA agents, abetted by an assortment of anti-communist activists, paramilitary enthusiasts, Cuban exiles, and Colombian drug kingpins. According to Sheehan, we have been manipulated by monsters:

[The "secret team"] represents the very epitome of organized crime, but on an international stage. They deal wholesale in narcotic drugs, illegal weapons and violence. Rather than take over local businesses or undermine local government, they seek to take over whole nations. They do not hesitate to murder and destroy anyone or anything that gets in their way.

Sheehan attributes to the "secret team" a decades-long, globe-spanning crime spree: attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro in the 1960s, heroin trafficking and the murders of 100,000 peasants during the Indochina conflict, the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, and most recently the smuggling of cocaine into the United States and arms to the contra rebels in Nicaragua. If this awful conspiracy is not stopped, Christic literature avers, American democracy could soon vanish altogether, replaced by a dictatorial, anti-communist "national security state."

What to make of such an incredible tale? Is it simply the delusion of a small band of feverish paranoids -- a John Birch Society of the Left? Perhaps so, but it also represents your church dollars at work. The Christic Institute, author of this grotesque fantasy, has become a big hit in certain mainline Protestant circles.

Since 1986, when the institute filed a \$24 million suit against 29 alleged members of the "secret team," its fund-

raising -- up to \$2 million per year -- has relied particularly on church publicity networks. Christic leaders have been featured speakers at a 1987 meeting of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and a 1988 conference of the ecumenical "Impact" lobbying coalition. Christic charges have been trumpeted in denominational magazines and in numerous local church activities. And all this religious exposure has paid off handsomely. National agencies of the United Methodist Church have given the institute a total of \$46,000 over the past three years. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Unitarian Veatch Foundation are also major contributors, according to Christic Director Sara Nelson.

Honest Doubters Question the Crusade

Yet while mainline Protestant activists have put their money and their faith behind Christic's "secret team" theory,

(Christic, continued on page 6)

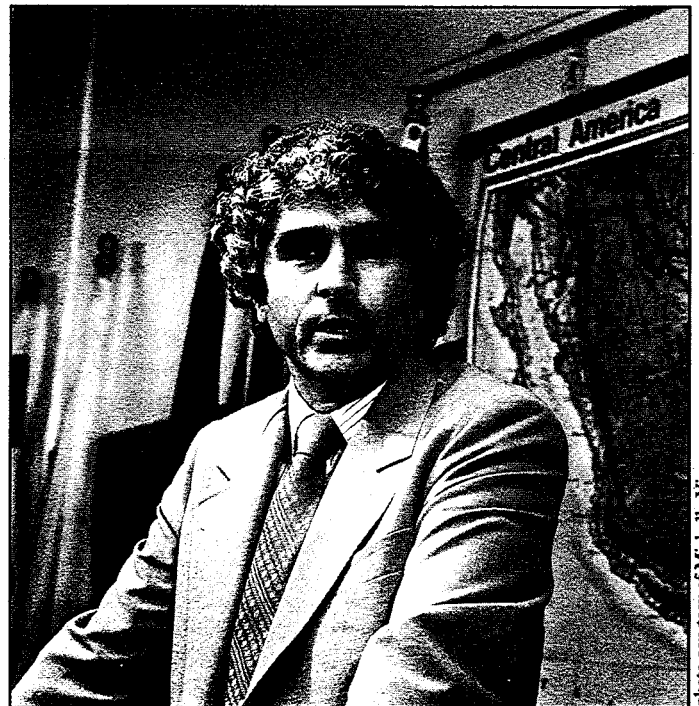


photo courtesy of Michelle Vigres

Daniel Sheehan, General Counsel of the Christic Institute, spins his tales of "secret team" conspiracies.

Religious Liberty Alert

In 1986, a Roman Catholic order known as the Trinitarians reestablished its Office of Persecuted Believers. The director of this Trinitarian ministry is Fr. Stan DeBoe. He is currently involved in an internship at the IRD (through May 1989) which is preparing him to develop the religious liberty programs which the Trinitarians will follow. During this time he will continue learning issues related to religious liberty, developing action programs, and working closely with the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the U.S.S.R., as well as participating in IRD religious liberty programs. Below he shares the Trinitarians' vision for this important ministry, one which we hope can be a model for other churches and denominations.

Most of us know the tragic plight of some religious believers. They are held in prison or forced to work in menial jobs, or enter military service against their convictions; they are pressured to deny and give up their faith; they are denied access to literature, contact with family, the right to return to their homes. Some who persist in practicing their faith are tortured and even put to death.

Nor is this situation new. The above list is taken from the experiences of men, women, and children of the twelfth century. During the Crusades, religious persecution was widespread. Christians suffered at the hands of Muslims, Muslims at the hands of Christians. Most prisoners of war were sold into slavery. Once sold, they lost all freedoms, especially the freedom to practice their faith.

John De Matha, a Roman Catholic priest from the University of Paris, was so moved by the condition of prisoners that he founded the Order of the Most Holy Trinity, a community of priests, brothers, and sisters who dedicated their lives to the freedom of captives. The Trinitarians would buy the people being sold into slavery, restore them to health and return them to their homelands. The Trinitarians enabled many, both Christian and Muslim, to live freely and to practice their faith without fear.

Eight centuries after their founding, the Trinitarians are still working for those who experience persecution because of religious beliefs. Some forms of slavery and oppression are even more terrifying than what existed 800 years ago; world views have developed that are hostile to any type of religious belief. The fundamental right of a person to believe and express this relationship with God is threatened daily. The Trinitarians are as moved by the situation today as were John De Matha and his first followers.

The Trinitarians, through our Office of Persecuted Believers, remain the only Roman Catholic order dedicated to work for religious liberty around the world. In the brief time that the ministry has been active in this country, the Trinitarians have worked on behalf of Vladimir Slepak and his wife, Soviet refusniks who for 17 years have been attempting to emigrate. A major mail campaign

for three Lithuanian clergymen resulted in 22,000 people sending postcards to the Soviet embassy asking for the release of the priests. The Slepaks and one priest have been released.

A project on which I am now working is the development of a plan for sending Bibles and religious literature to people and churches in the Soviet Union. Taking advantage of the new (but perhaps temporary) openness, the Trinitarians, in cooperation with the IRD and other Coalition groups, are inviting believers in the West to join this project. Participants will commit themselves to sending Bibles and religious literature to those in the Soviet Union who have virtually no access to them. The Trinitarians are ready to assist people in sending literature by providing information on ordering the Soviet-language materials as well as the names of churches and people to whom they may be sent.

The work of the Trinitarians is needed as much today as it was 800 years ago. When our brothers and sisters are suffering for the name of Jesus Christ, the members of his Body have an obligation to work for their freedom. The renewal of this ministry in the Roman Catholic Church through the Trinitarians will serve to strengthen the ministry of the whole Church and bring hope to those who need our voices, our actions and our prayers.

-- Fr. Stan DeBoe

Need a Christmas Project?

For information on how you can order Christmas cards, Bibles, and other literature in Russian, Lithuanian, Estonian, or other languages, and for addresses to which they may be sent, write:



Father Stan DeBoe
Holy Trinity Fathers
P.O. Box 5719
Baltimore, MD 21208

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NCC Study on South Africa

Looking for a Polarized "Moment of Truth"

Every year the National Council of Churches (NCC) produces an "in-depth study" on the mission of the Church in a particular part of the world. This year's annual mission study looks at South Africa. A book entitled *South Africa's Moment of Truth*, a study guide for adult church classes, a booklet aimed at youth, and various other materials have been produced and are being widely distributed. Such an educational effort is a worthy endeavor and would be commendable -- were it not for the inaccurate analysis and counter-productive policy suggestions that are expressed.

South Africa is indeed a topic that is, and should be, discussed from the halls of Congress to the pews of our churches. Apartheid is a totally unacceptable political, social and economic system, and Christians must work to facilitate its abandonment. Unfortunately, the National Council of Churches' *South Africa's Moment of Truth*, by Edgar Lockwood (Friendship Press), falls into a trap set by the premises of liberation theology. It assumes that you must be either an oppressor or oppressed, that there are no other choices. This false dualism plays directly into the hands of those who want to fuel the polarization process in South Africa. Both right-wing authoritarians and radical-left revolutionaries condemn any notion of a middle-ground, or of a democratic solution. Unfortunately, the NCC study bolsters these irresponsible extremists' positions when it states: "Christians now have to take sides -- either by joining the struggle for liberation or by opposing it." One chapter of the book is entitled "The Liberation of Theology -- On Which Side Shall the Church Be Counted?"

Of course for the NCC -- and this really comes as no surprise -- "joining the struggle for liberation" means active support for armed revolutionary groups, particularly the African National Congress (ANC). For those churchgoers who might be slightly queasy about donating time and money to an organization that plants limpet mines in hamburger stands, the NCC offers another option: support comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa.

Moment of Truth paints a picture of a South African economy teetering on the brink of disaster; with one small push -- like sanctions -- it could be sent plunging into the gulch below. This inaccurate analysis does serve one

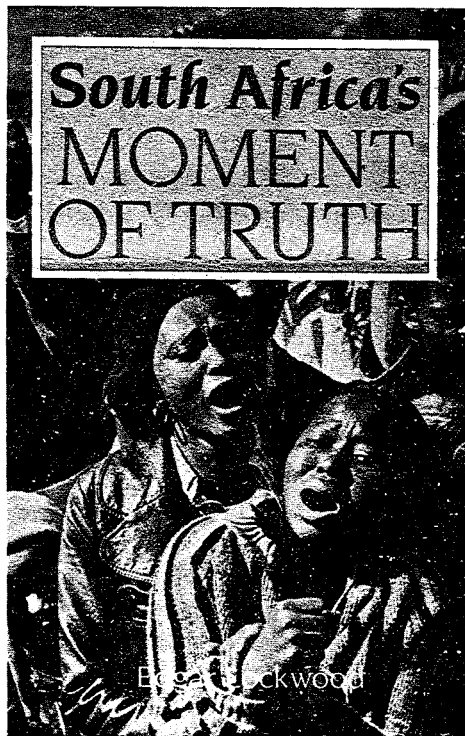
purpose: it reveals the ultimate intention of many who support comprehensive economic sanctions. That goal is, of course, the destruction of the South African economy. The NCC study states that "it is important that comprehensive sanctions encompassing trade, technology, licensing

and all forms of investment" are implemented. The "reasoning" this argument attempts to follow suggests that a destroyed or seriously impaired South African economy "can promote the change of heart that could lead to negotiations with the legitimate leaders of the black majority."

But will attempting to destroy a nation's economic base facilitate open discussions and negotiations? In the case of South Africa, serious reform efforts will most likely take place not in a decaying situation, but in an expanding, healthy economy. In fact, it is via the economy that apartheid has thus far been eroded (e.g., the scrapping of the dreaded Pass Laws and Mixed Marriage Acts), and it will likely be through black economic empowerment that a post-apartheid South African society based on democratic ideals and institutions has the greatest chance of succeeding.

The NCC study claims that "black South Africans are asking for sanctions." This is highly dubious. Contradictory evidence is conveniently left out of the book: fourteen of the last fourteen surveys of black South Africans have shown that the majority of blacks are *against* sanctions *if* they cause the loss of their jobs. These surveys are quite useful in that they begin to reveal the suffering that economic sanctions inflict upon both blacks and whites in South Africa. If black South Africans truly believed that crippling the economy would result in the destruction of apartheid, they would have long ago enacted the most complete and effective sanctions themselves. They would have removed themselves from the labor force and gone on a permanent or extended labor strike. The author of *Moment of Truth* suggests, "Sanctions do create some hardship and suffering, but this is the price of creating hope for real change." It is easy for American churchgoers, in our righteous indignation, to call for sanctions. But is it moral that we do it from the comfort of our Georgetown homes? Our sacrifice is negligible; it is the black South African worker who loses his or her job.

In perhaps the most disturbing sections of the NCC material, it becomes evident that the ANC has been chris-



tened as a favorite son from among various "liberation movements." The ANC's commitment to a one-party state with a centrally-planned economy does not seem to have tempered the NCC's endorsement. Nor does its commitment to violent revolution or its historical and current ties with the South African Communist Party. In fact the NCC study plainly states that "there can be little doubt that the ANC is an organization of the political left in which the Communists play a strong role." No problem, says the NCC, because the African situation "is unique": "African people ... are apt to see Western capitalist states and enterprises as greedy and powerful and unprincipled. Marxist theory is generally seen as a helpful tool in understanding how capitalism has worked to Africa's detriment." (It is tragic that the NCC study also neglects to note or explain why so many African countries are abandoning socialist experiments in favor of free markets these days.)

And if that is not a good enough explanation of why American churchgoers ought to support the ANC, try this one: Any attempts to examine closely the ANC's Marxist orientation or any attempts to differentiate between Marxists and non-Marxists within the ANC "would cause divisive splits and lead to the kind of witch-hunt that marked the U.S. in the McCarthy era of the 1950's."

It would be far more helpful for the NCC to resist the polarization process which is infecting all of South Africa -- and in which the ANC plays a significant role.

The polarizing NCC approach is not helpful in advancing reconciliation, a negotiated settlement, or, ultimately, justice and peace. Instead of demanding the most comprehensive and radical economic sanctions, and an uncritical acceptance of the ANC as the sole legitimate representative of South African blacks, would it not be refreshing for the NCC to support black entrepreneurs building new businesses; or to assist young non-white students in preparing for a college education; or to help in a reconciliation effort between the Anglican, Dutch Reformed and independent church leaders; or to support organizations that are committed to building truly democratic institutions for a post-apartheid South Africa?

Unfortunately, the NCC has opted for the easy way out. Joining or encouraging an armed revolution is deceptively simple and a sure recipe for pointless bloodshed and suffering. The tough challenges are for those who have enough faith, patience, and optimism to believe that South Africa's future is not necessarily a future of tragedy, but rather that of a prosperous and free nation.

-- Walter Kansteiner

Mr. Kansteiner, Director of Economic Studies at the IRD, is the author of the IRD's newest book, *South Africa: Revolution or Reconciliation?* (see *Religion and Democracy*, July 1988). It is available from the IRD for \$8.00 (\$7.20 for IRD members).

The Institute on Religion and Democracy
is sponsoring a conference entitled

"Christian Teaching and the Just Resort to Violence"

The Institute on Religion and Democracy is sponsoring this conference to establish the necessary groundwork for discussing contemporary revolutionary violence. Our main purpose is to apply this foundation to today's geo-political conflicts. We are not content to remain in the realm of theoretical speculation. We will ask panelists to explain how revolutionary movements throughout the world may or may not be morally justified. The particular areas of emphasis will be Nicaragua and South Africa.

Date: November 17, 1988
Time: Registration begins at 8:30 am
Location: Washington Plaza Hotel, Massachusetts & Vermont Avenues, N.W., Washington, D.C.
Fee: \$35 (includes continental breakfast and lunch)

For more information, please call (202) 393-3200

Correction: In our June 1988 newsletter we identified Blahoslav Hruby as the "new" editor in 1972 of *Religion in Communist Dominated Areas*. Mr. Hruby was in fact a co-founder with Paul Johnson of RCDA in 1962.

Congratulations are in order for Blahoslav Hruby and his wife, Olga. On September 30 they received the annual Faith and Freedom from Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom at a dinner in Washington, DC. Speakers at the dinner included Senator Wyche Fowler (D-Ga.) and Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.).

The IRD offered a special briefing on Korea, South Africa, glasnost and the church in the USSR, and pro-democracy reform efforts in other denominations to several dozen PDRF members attending the Faith and Freedom Weekend.

This Nicaraguan Prisoner Has a Name and a Face

Late last year, the IRD organized a trip, in cooperation with the Central America Peace and Democracy Watch, to El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. One of the participants was Ervin Duggan, Chairman of the Board of Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF). The following is Mr. Duggan's reflection on one man with whom we met. An edited version of this article first appeared in PDRF's newsletter, Mainstream, Summer 1988.

I met Roger Guevara last December, when I toured Central America to help gauge compliance with the Arias peace plan. The location for my meeting with Roger was an austere office containing a table and some broken chairs, but no desk, no typewriter, no lamps, no telephone, and no bustling staff. Humble headquarters, I thought, for the head of a coalition of thirteen political parties.

Humbler still are Roger's new quarters: a prison cell somewhere in Nicaragua, where Roger has been sentenced to six months of incarceration for "disturbing the peace." A trial, in progress as I write, could result in a longer sentence for Roger -- or in exile, as the Sandinista regime seeks to consolidate its power.

It would be hard to picture a man more committed to peace than Roger Guevara, a 37-year old Catholic and former professor of international law at Central American University. This big-framed, but soft-spoken man is possessed by a transparent sense of integrity, kindness, and sensitivity. After being fired from his teaching post for lack of revolutionary zeal, he has not only led the civilian opposition to the Sandinistas, but used his legal talents -- at the price of harassment by the authorities -- to defend Catholic leaders in trouble with the government.

Despite the personal sacrifice and obstacles he faces in a regime that "never had a thought of alternating power," Roger chose to stay on in Nicaragua. He might have chosen to join the burgeoning ranks of reformers and refugees in exile, but as he explained last December: "Nicaragua is not yet Eastern Europe. It is not yet subject to the total control of the people by the state. It is not in total submission to the Soviet Union -- not yet."

Today, Roger is in prison for his role in organizing an opposition rally in Nandaime on July 10 -- a peaceful rally until rushed by police with gas masks and truncheons, firing tear gas and beating unarmed demonstrators. At least 40 members of the democratic opposition were arrested in connection with the rally. One has already died in prison -- of a heart attack, according to police.

Who will help Roger Guevara? He is only one of roughly 8,000 political prisoners in Nicaragua. The scriptures tell us to "remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners." But unfortunately for Roger and his compatriots behind bars, my denomination -- the Presbyterian Church (USA) -- officially supports the same "revolutionary process" that landed my Christian friend in jail. A Presbyterian missionary I met in Managua carries a canvas tote bag which sports the symbol of the Sandinista



Roger Guevara, Secretary General of the Democratic Coordinator, a coalition of non-violent opposition groups inside Nicaragua.

mass women's organization: a rifle, superimposed upon the Sandinista flag.

Who will help Roger Guevara? The peace plan of Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias, which was supposed to bring down the crushing weight of "world opinion" on the Sandinistas if they failed to democratize, seems curiously weightless now. The U.S. government is paralyzed by partisan bickering over Central America, and by the presidential campaign. My closest friend in politics, a Democratic senator, told me when I raised the issue that Nicaragua has simply "chosen a system of government different from ours." We Americans, he says, "have no right to interfere."

I wake up at night, wondering how Roger Guevara is faring under Nicaragua's "different" form of government -- and I wonder about his wife and children. I find, among the notes of our encounter in December, the neatly-printed business card he gave me. And I wonder: Does anybody really care?

-- Ervin Duggan

(Christic, continued from page 1)

some quarters of the secular Left have been more skeptical. An article by Jonathan Kwitny in the "left/liberal" *Nation* magazine (Sept. 19, 1987) pointed out the many holes in Daniel Sheehan's legal arguments: key witnesses who could not be located, whose veracity was highly suspect, or who denied the testimony attributed to them; numerous obvious mistakes of fact; and a mountain of totally unsupported assertions. Kwitny had this trenchant comment:

Sheehan, who has ignored the errors in his filings pointed out by others, argues that if 80 percent of his allegations are correct, he'll be satisfied. I really believe his zeal is genuine and that he doesn't realize that 80 percent accuracy in character assassination is not commendable. And so far, that is a very optimistic estimate of his score.

James Traub, in the radical *Mother Jones* magazine (Feb/Mar 1988), assessed Sheehan as "an Irish storyteller" with a talent for "blamey":

Ask these journalists, experts, Capitol Hill investigators, and former CIA agents, many of whom are sympathetic to Danny Sheehan's general critique of covert operations, and they will tell you that his gorgeous tapestry (of accusations) is woven of rumor and half-truth and wish-fulfillment. In Danny Sheehan they see a man in whom passion has overcome reason.

Both Kwitny and Traub warned that Christic's shoddy prosecution of the "secret team" might end up undermining the Left, by discrediting and distracting attention from its larger campaign against U.S. intelligence agencies.

Who's Buying this Tattered Tale?

Kwitny's and Traub's prediction has come true -- at least in the institutions of government. Liberal Democrats in the Congress had been intrigued by Christic's early fingering of persons associated with Oliver North's contra supply network; however, neither Senate nor House com-

mittees could find confirmation of the institute's charges of CIA/contra drug-running and assassinations. They dropped the matter quietly. Perhaps the crowning blow came in May, when federal Judge Lawrence King dismissed the Christic lawsuit against the 29 supposed "secret team" members. King ruled that Sheehan had failed to provide any hard evidence linking the defendants to the damages alleged. Sheehan has responded by appealing the court decision, and calling the congressional committees "totally corrupt" dupes of the intelligence apparatus.

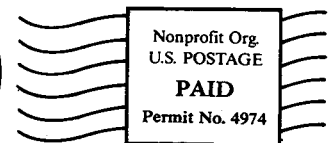
Indeed, the Christic Institute has never let the facts stand in the way of its greater ideological crusade. A Christic annual report clarifies that its strategy has been political all along: "We seek legal victories on public interest issues that can educate and organize people for fundamental change." Generally, this approach has meant firing off a volley of sensational charges against public officials, winning wide publicity but no convictions.

The institute never specifies the "fundamental change" it is seeking. But its reports on the "secret team" case have set one broad goal: a new U.S. foreign policy which would "learn to live with the Sandinistas" and all other "Third World governments deemed Communist and/or hostile by Washington." In addition, both Daniel Sheehan and Sara Nelson have repeatedly suggested another desirable result: removal from office and criminal convictions of Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

The courts and the Congress find no merit in Christic's case. So what are our churches doing mixed up in this mess of mangled facts, crazy conspiracy theories, and partisan leftist bloodlust? What does it all have to do with the work of Christ? That would be a good question to ask the church officials who have opened their meetings, their magazines, and their coffers to the Christic Institute.

-- Alan Wisdom

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



Mr. & Mrs. Edward C. Knippers Jr.
2408 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201