

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



The Institute
on Religion &
Democracy

December 1988

The Church and the Renewal of Democracy in Chile

Penn Kemble, Senior Associate at Freedom House and a member of the IRD Board of Directors, was an observer for Freedom House at the Chilean plebiscite on October 5. Mr. Kemble is also a member of the Board of Directors of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, an organization of prominent Democrats which conducted a program to assist Chile's return to democracy, financed by a special appropriation from the U.S. Congress. In this special report, he reflects on the role of the church in the efforts to renew Chilean democracy.

The polling places closed by 7:00 on the evening of the Chilean plebiscite. It would take several hours for the early returns to be broadcast over Channel 13 -- the channel of the Catholic University and one of the few relatively independent television outlets permitted by the government of General Augusto Pinochet. Those hours would be anxious ones.¹

A year before, when the effort to arrange this simple "Si" or "No" vote on another eight-year term for the General had begun, it seemed likely he would win. The regime held many advantages: unlimited access to the media, a booming economy and the support of much of the economic elite, and the apparent control of Chile's large armed forces. Most important of all, though, was the force of fear.

There were two kinds of fear, and they both seemed to work in the government's favor. Many people were afraid that if the willful Pinochet regime lost this vote it would reject the outcome, plunging the country into crisis. There was also fear that opposition groups -- both the democratic groups supporting the "No" and Chile's confrontational and sometimes violent pro-communist Left -- would create chaos if they won.

But in the course of a year the tide had somehow turned. A spirit that the Chileans called "alegría" -- gladness -- had taken hold. By October 5th independent pollsters and political observers sensed that the "No" had gained a comfortable lead. The only way the government could win now would be by deceit and force on a massive scale.

Our group of international election observers was asked to stay off the streets on the night the vote was counted. Rumors were buzzing: Pinochet was calling off the count; the intelligence police were provoking street violence; the

communists were marching on the presidential palace; the president had fled to Paraguay, etc. We could do nothing except watch television, and wait. Then, as we watched, we found ourselves fixed upon a powerful image.

A documentary about Pope John Paul II's visit to Chile in 1987 was being broadcast on Channel 13. He was speaking in the National Stadium: for Chileans, once a place of horrors. In 1973, after the coup that overthrew the chaotic Allende government, the security forces had turned the stadium into a killing ground. Fourteen years later the Pope had come, and transformed it into a place of reconciliation. "Now, in this stadium," he declared magisterially, "this site of competitions but also of pain and suffering in past epochs, I call upon you to assume your responsibilities, youth of Chile."

No one, non-Catholic or even non-believer, could overlook the central place that the Pope and the Catholic Church played in bringing Chile to the promise of that election night. Even more impressively, the church did it by being the church. It offered an elegant lesson in what

(Chile, continued on page 2)



IRD board member Penn Kemble meets with Archbishop Bernardo Cazzaro, during a visit to Puerto Montt, Chile.

(Chile, continued from page 1)

Richard John Neuhaus calls "the church setting the agenda for the world." Moreover, the church did this without ever stooping to the level of brawling political partisanship. In fact, it was only by holding itself apart as a ministry to all Chileans that the church had accomplished so much.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Chilean Church was torn by forces erupting throughout Latin America. One por-

As the Pinochet junta hardened into a tenacious and sometimes cruel dictatorship, the Church gathered itself together to defend human rights and to assist in a return to democracy.

tion was derided as the church of the rich, a church too closely tied to the economic and political elites. There was also the church of modernity and moderation: those who had encouraged the moderate Christian Democratic Party of Eduardo Frei. Not least was the militant church of "liberation theology," which gathered hemisphere-wide force at an historic conference on "Christianity and Socialism" in Chile in 1972, attended by such luminaries as Fidel Castro and the Sandinistas' Ernesto Cardenal.

When the radical coalition government of Salvador Allende was overthrown by General Pinochet in 1973, some in the church hierarchy seemed relieved. Others were bitter. But as the Pinochet junta hardened into a tenacious and sometimes cruel dictatorship, the church gathered itself together to defend human rights and to assist in a return to democracy.

In 1975, after the Pinochet regime abolished an activist, ecumenical group called the Committee for Peace, the Catholic Church promptly created its own Vicariate of Solidarity, a legal aid and support group for victims of human rights abuses. The Vicariate managed a huge caseload, but its organizers did not allow its work to be politicized. Individuals who appeared to have been involved in violent or subversive political activities were steered towards private attorneys, so that the church could not be accused of supporting their causes. Extremists were kept out of positions of authority within the Vicariate. The Vicariate was harassed by the government and was often alone in raising its voice for human rights. But because it came under the mantle of the church, Pinochet never dared to do away with it.

In 1985 the Vatican appointed a number of new bishops in Chile, and elevated Archbishop Juan Francisco Fresno to the rank of cardinal. Cardinal Fresno and the other new appointees

had been somewhat critical of the Pinochet regime, but they were also centrists, opponents of liberation theology. Their appointments received unfavorable reviews from the Catholic Left, including the U.S.-based *National Catholic Reporter*. But soon after his appointment, Cardinal Fresno and his bishops called together some eleven of Chile's political parties to put forward what was called the National Accord: a program and an alliance for an orderly return to political liberty and free elections in Chile. Pains were taken to include parties of the democratic Right, while communists and others who refused to renounce violence were left out.

From then on, the church worked tirelessly but carefully to foster a return to democracy. Through it all, the bishops and the leaders of the National Accord stressed the necessity of negotiating with the armed forces as well as with the militant Left: no group was anathematized. When Pope John Paul visited Chile in 1987, there were sensationalized reports that in a private audience he had called President Pinochet a "dictator." Few noted, however, the Pope's discerning observation that the Pinochet dictatorship could not be compared to the communist dictatorship in Poland because the Chilean military acknowledged that its rule could only be temporary.

The church smiled on the formation of a Campaign for Free Elections in 1987, and, when Pinochet announced the plebiscite and insisted on his own candidacy, the church encouraged the Campaign for the "No." The effect of all this was the re-creation of a true democratic center in Chile, the center that had collapsed during the strife of the early 1970s. The church was not the actual organizer of the effort, but the church gave it an aura of moral force and credibility. The effects were felt even in the armed forces.

Back at our hotel on election night, the televised replay of the Pope's visit and his plea for reconciliation gave way to a

(Chile, continued on page 6)



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Marxists Repress Christianity, But Some Christians Don't Mind

Of the strange alliances in world politics, perhaps none is more mystifying than the tie between left-leaning Christians and the forces of Marxism-Leninism. What makes the relationship so remarkable is its one-sidedness. The Christians support Marxist movements and apologize for them. Yet once in control, Marxist regimes repress Christians, so that by helping Marxists, the left-wing Christians are furthering the persecution of their own faith.

For a comprehensive documentation of this latter point, we can turn to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, a massive survey of the status of Christians around the world, published in 1982. Collating the reports of 369 local contributors, the editors of this volume compiled a worldwide rating of religious liberty. They assessed over 30 different areas of religious rights, from the freedom to worship indoors to the freedom to print Bibles. The result is a score for each country which can be adapted to a 0 to 5 scale of religious liberty for Christians, with 0 representing no freedom and 5 signifying complete freedom.

These freedom ratings can be averaged for the different types of countries: Marxist regimes (countries where the leaders have formally announced adherence to Marxism-Leninism); Muslim countries (where over 80 percent of the population adhere to Islam); and military regimes (where a military coup took place or a military executive ruled in the decade prior to the survey).

The table shows the results of these computations.¹ The Marxist regimes are clearly the worst violators of religious liberty for Christians. Looking at particular cases, one notes that only three countries in the world have a freedom score of zero, where Christians are completely persecuted. All three are Marxist: Albania, Mongolia, and North Korea.²

The comparison between Muslim and Marxist countries is instructive. Islamic governments have often combated "infidels" in an attempt to force their conversion. In the great majority of Muslim states, Islam is the official state religion. Nevertheless, while Christians do not have full freedom in Muslim nations, they are significantly better off than in Marxist countries.

Particularly surprising are the results for the military regimes. These are the countries often referred to as military dictatorships, which in the 1970s included nations such as South Korea, Thailand, Chile, Nigeria, Ghana, Burundi, and so on. Though they may practice restraints on political activities, these regimes show no unusual tendency to interfere with Christianity. The religious freedom score for military regimes is virtually the same as for the rest of the world.

Many of the Marxist regimes included in the survey were recent and only partially-formed in 1980, the year in which the *Encyclopedia* editors assessed religious freedom. To get a picture of how a fully-consolidated Marxist regime treats Christianity, we can look at the 14 Marxist regimes established before 1970. Their average freedom score is lowest of all, indicating that the better established the Marxist regime, the more complete the repression of Christianity.

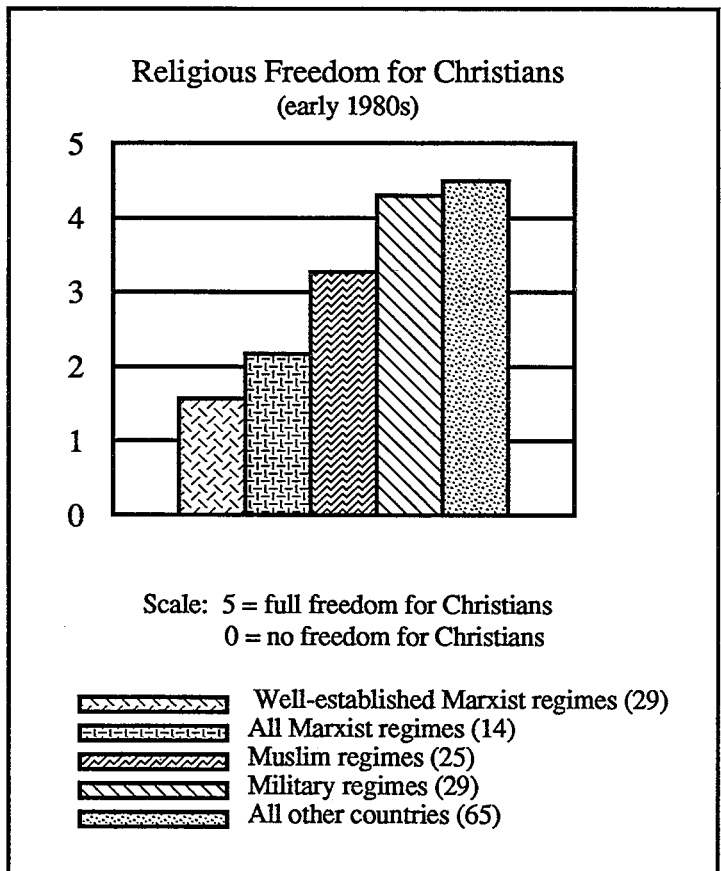
None of this should come as a surprise, of course. Karl Marx was a dogmatic atheist who, in his famous quote, considered religion "the opium of the people." Lenin was an embittered church-hater who declared, "Every religious idea, every idea of God, even flirting with the idea of God, is unutterable vileness." With roots like these, the followers of Marx and Lenin could hardly fail to be hostile to Christianity.³

What is decidedly unnatural is the uncritical support the left-leaning Christians give them. The pacesetter for Christian endorsement of Marxism has been the World Council of Churches. As early as 1970, the WCC began funding Marxist terrorist groups in African countries. In Angola, it gave the Marxist MLPA insurgents \$78,000 in the years 1970-1974; in Guinea-Bissau it gave the Marxist PAIGC \$170,000 in the same period; in Mozambique, the contribution to Marxist FRELIMO was \$120,000. When these guerrilla armies took over at the end of Portuguese colonial rule in 1975, each announced a Marxist-Leninist regime in its respective country.

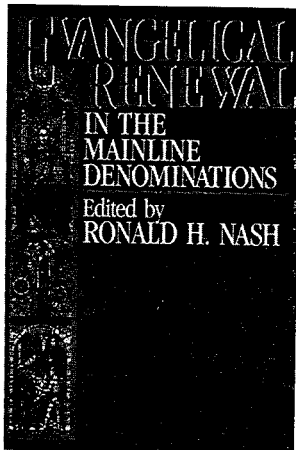
To the insurgent army of Robert Mugabe in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, the WCC gave a total of \$143,000 between 1970 and 1978. Since his conquest of power, Mugabe has turned the country into a one-party state and pledged to move it toward Marxist-style socialism.

Some thought that the WCC's support for Marxist guerrillas was a momentary deviation that would be corrected

(Marxists, continued on page 4)



The Book Shelf



During a lecture early this year at Westminster College, Isabel Rogers, then moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), confessed that mainline Protestant denominations "no longer are the primary shapers of values in society." That function, she said, "has been taken over by other forces." This sad story of the Church's slow drift away from its role in shaping the values which help undergird American society is complex.

Numerous factors were involved. One root cause, however, was the crumbling of the church's theological foundation: the evangelical (read: theologically orthodox) consensus which existed in most mainline churches before the latter part of the 19th century. Therefore, "one of the more surprising phenomena of American religion in the late twentieth century is the resurgence of an evangelical presence in the large, mainline denominations...." So begins *Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches* (Crossway Books, 1987, \$7.95), edited by Dr. Ronald Nash, Professor of Philosophy at Western Kentucky University.

Evangelical Renewal is written for both clergy and laity who are interested in, and want more information about,

evangelical renewal in their own churches as well as other denominations. Most mainline churches have representative renewal movements which are attempting to recover and restore this lost, but not forgotten, "evangelical" heritage. Nash writes: "It is hard to turn around without bumping into one of many evangelical renewal groups. Here and there, in little pockets . . . the seeds of revival and renewal are beginning to sprout." *Evangelical Renewal* includes chapters, written by several denominational leaders, on restoration efforts in seven of the most prominent mainline denominations in the United States: the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, the American Baptist Churches, and the Lutheran churches. Nash also includes a chapter on renewal in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church. A helpful addition to the book is the directory of suggested renewal groups and publications for each of these denominations.

One of the basic commitments of the Institute on Religion and Democracy is to support doctrinal and spiritual renewal -- the preservation of a theologically orthodox community of faith -- within the "mainline" Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. *Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches* can be, in the words of its author, an "important starting-point" for anyone interested in making a contribution to the restoration process.

-- Richard Sperbeck

(Marxists, continued from page 3)

after the scandal was made fully public (in such reports as Ernest W. Lefever's 1979 book on the WCC-Marxist connection, *Amsterdam to Nairobi*). Such has not been the case. For example, right up through its January 1987 Central Committee statement, the WCC has strongly backed the

There can be little doubt that the guerrilla armies supported by the World Council of Churches, being favorably inclined towards Marxism-Leninism, will almost certainly persecute Christians.

Marxist-Leninist SWAPO, the 6,000-man guerrilla army active in Namibia.

In view of this record, it would seem hypocritical for left-wing church leaders to criticize the Reagan administration for supporting insurgents in Nicaragua. After all, more than a decade before anyone even imagined supporting freedom fighters in Nicaragua, the World Council of Churches was funding its own contras, organizations using violence to overthrow existing regimes in their respective

countries. In truth, the council wrote the book on "contra" aid.

What, then, is the difference between the "freedom fighters" of the WCC and the "freedom fighters" of the recent U.S. administration? Well, one difference, judging by the empirical evidence, is that there can be little doubt that the guerrilla armies supported by the World Council of Churches, being favorably inclined towards Marxism-Leninism, will almost certainly persecute Christians once they gain victory.

-- James L. Payne

(Dr. Payne has taught political science at Wesleyan, Yale, Johns Hopkins, and Texas A&M. His latest book is a study of militarism worldwide, *Why Nations Arm*.)

1) The data for this article, both coding for degrees of religious freedom and categorizing of countries by type of government, was compiled in 1980. The particular categorization of some countries may have changed since the original data was collected.

2) There are now signs of a surviving church in North Korea. See *Religion & Democracy*, Sept/Oct 1988.

3) Indeed, most post-Lenin communist leaders have sought to stamp out, or at least co-opt religion. It should be noted, however, that in recent months (in the U.S.S.R.) there has been some liberalization towards religion under Mr. Gorbachev.

Religious Liberty Alert

Vietnam: In Search of *Glasnost*

Thirteen years after the fall of South Vietnam, the Vietnam War continues to influence American politics. Republicans and Democrats are still battling over the lessons and legacy of that conflict. *The Wall Street Journal* declared the whole Vietnam question the first "galvanizing issue" of the 1988 presidential election.

Within Vietnam itself, however, the luxury of such debate is not available to those suffering government oppression for their religious beliefs. Buddhists, Roman Catholics and Protestants have all experienced hostility from the Hanoi government since it seized power.

Nearly 100 Buddhist priests and nuns are being held in Vietnamese jails and "re-education camps." In a country of 62 million people, 80 percent of whom are Buddhist, as recently as mid-1985 the Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies in Ho Chi Minh City was permitted to have only 35 novices.

Approximately 10 percent of the Vietnamese population is Roman Catholic. Before 1975 there were 19 Catholic seminaries in South Vietnam. Currently, there are two seminaries in all of Vietnam, one in Hanoi and one in Ho Chi Minh City. The main seminary in Hanoi had only 18 students in 1987. Less than 20 ordinations had been authorized by the communist government in the previous 20 years.

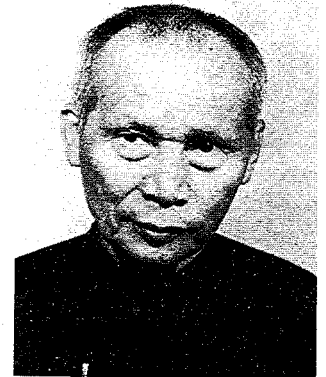
The teaching and practice of all religions is severely limited by the communist government. Resolution 297 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam obligates clergymen to support state policies. Further, it requires party approval for nearly all religious activity. The Roman Catholic Church has been particularly limited by such measures; Vietnamese authorities apparently feel threatened by the hierarchy and institutionalization of Catholic tradition. In October of 1975, the Saigon archdiocese bowed to government pressure and "put at the disposal of the state" 200 Catholic private schools. The new state education, guided by Marxist-Leninist views of human nature and development, is hostile to religion and devotes considerable attention to driving it from the minds of its students.

Among Protestant Christians, there are currently six pastors known to be in prison or re-education camp. These include Nguyen Huu Chong, Le Thien Dung, and Ho Hien Ha, all of whom were arrested in June 1983, imprisoned for four years without trial, and sentenced in August 1987 to at least five years of further incarceration.

Despite these continuing violations of religious freedom, there remains a glimmer of hope for religious believers in Vietnam. Closely allied to the Communist Party in Moscow, the Hanoi government has, perhaps reluctantly, initiated a *glasnost*-like effort to repair decades of religious and political repression.

Reg Reimer, President of World Relief Canada, reported upon his recent return from Vietnam that he no-

Father Dominic Tran Dinh Thu is an 82-year-old Roman Catholic priest and the founder of a Vietnamese Catholic organization, the Congregation of the Mother Coredeptrix. Fr. Dominic is currently imprisoned on Con Son Island -- a Vietnamese prison camp known for its inhumane conditions. All communication and visits to prisoners on the island are forbidden, and according to reports, he is denied adequate food and medical treatment.



In 1975, following the communist regime's attempt to destroy the congregation, Fr. Dominic was arrested and held in solitary confinement in Di Linh prison for 22 months.

In May 1987, Vietnamese police took possession of the congregation's only remaining compound, confiscated property, and arrested more than 60 people, including Fr. Dominic. The mass trial that followed ended on October 30, 1987, with Fr. Dominic sentenced to life imprisonment. In September 1988, he was retried and received a "reduced" term of 20 years for "propagandizing against the socialist system, sabotaging the solidarity policy, disturbing public security and terrorism." His crime was teaching religion to adults.

-- Stan DeBoe

ticed a slight but welcome touch of *glasnost* there. On this, his fourth post-1975 trip to Vietnam, he said that the government security apparatus appeared to be more relaxed than previously.

A formidable element to keep in mind during this time of "restructuring" is the failed Vietnamese economy. Despite reforms last year, it continues to falter. In the past two years the value of the Vietnamese dong has plummeted. Inflation is rampant, at about 1,000 percent a year. And this year, famine and malnutrition threaten at least five million people.

Such grave domestic troubles, combined with the trickling down of *glasnost*, may be a source of leverage for those concerned with religious liberties and human rights. As Vietnam hints of normalizing relations with the West, these fundamental issues should be raised in any diplomatic discussions. Such concerns may be expressed to:

Sen. William L. Armstrong
Senate Human Rights Caucus
SH-528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rep. Lee H. Hamilton
Subcommittee on Human Rights and Int'l Organizations
B358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

-- David Porter

Letters

To the Editor:

I am very pleased with your September/October issue on Korea which discusses the serious imbalance in our mainline churches' stands and actions on Korea.

I served with the U.S. government for 13 years in Korea -- from 1945 to 1958. The first three years were with the military where I helped organize the social welfare part of the national Department of Health and Welfare. Our first major work was providing food and other emergency help for some two million refugees from North Korea (a sizable group were Christian).

Then for ten years I was Cultural Attache with the U.S. Embassy in Korea. During the first year of the Korean War, I was appointed by our ambassador as a liaison between the Korean government and the Eighth Army on the care of refugees fleeing south as the U.N. forces retreated. I am therefore well aware of the suffering of all the Korean people through the actions of the most Stalinist of the Soviet satellites -- North Korea.

Serious students of the situation in Korea agree ... that better relations between the two Koreas must begin with

establishing some basic trust. Visits between broken families and trade can begin this process. Sadly, my Presbyterian General Assembly urges (like North Korea) immediate unification through some kind of mass meeting of organizations from the North and the South! But, what can one expect from our mainline churches' bureaucracy...?

Marc Scherbacher
San Pedro, CA

To the Editor:

I just finished reading the September/October newsletter and want to express my deep felt thanks.

After reading the newsletter I feel I've gained a deeper appreciation for the difficulties South Korea faces as it struggles [to build] democracy....

Cynthia Simonsen
Vashon, WA

(Chile, continued from page 2)

broadcast of election returns. It soon was clear that the "No" would win by a comfortable majority. Would General Pinochet and the armed forces accept the verdict of the people? Would the young radicals and others who had suffered the excesses of the military regime be able to contain their euphoria and anger?

The streets were remarkably quiet. In the days before the election, the noise of chanting demonstrators and honking caravans had lasted late into the night. But both the democratic opposition and the church had asked Chileans to avoid any provocations at this delicate moment. Word spread that General Pinochet had called an emergency meeting of the military leaders at the palace. Would he ask them to back him in overturning the vote? Would they go along?

A reporter from the Catholic radio station positioned himself by the palace gate, where the commanders would pass on their way to the President's quarters. One of them, Fernando Matthei of the Air Force, got out of his car and strode purposefully toward the astonished reporter. As he passed he announced firmly, almost without breaking stride, "It seems to me that the 'No' has won. The victory of the 'No' has to be recognized."

With that one remark, broadcast throughout the country within an instant, all thought of overturning the plebiscite was dashed. The streets had remained quiet; the opposition was showing a firm sense of responsibility. And powerful forces within the regime were heeding the call for reconciliation.

Many difficulties still lie ahead for Chile. But on the night of October 5th that small, troubled country gave the world an example of Christianity and democracy making common cause: an example that should spread the "alegria" to many people.

-- Penn Kemble



On September 15, IRD board member David Jessup joined with international trade unionists in a peaceful march in Santiago, Chile. Above, the demonstration was greeted by Chilean riot police with water cannons, tear gas, and clubs.

Felix Varela: The Father of Cuban Independence



1788 — 1988

Cuba. In our lifetimes it has gone from being the jewel of the Caribbean, rich in culture and Spanish sophistication, to the Marxist experiment of one of the longest-reigning dictators in the West. Through the '60s and '70s this was viewed by most Americans, even those acutely aware of the repression of the pre-

Castro Batista government, as a tragedy. Even the radicalism of the Vietnam War era, which found it necessary to blame America for the world's ills, did not develop great sympathy for Fidel's follies. There was an evident brutality, a clear suppression of freedom, a greying of the bright hues that had made Cuba such a gem.

Then came the Sandinistas. In the minds of some, Cuba went from being a sign of communist failure to a source of a bright new future of a Marxist (and, for some true believers, Christian) Latin America.

That metamorphosis never occurred, however, in the small pockets of Cuban-American life in places like Miami and New York. There the memory of bitter repression and the misfortunes of loved ones were far too vivid to allow any such change.

It is there, also, that the memory of another Cuban leader has been cherished. The memory is of the man called "the father of Cuban independence," a figure whom communists and democrats alike acknowledge as a major force in Cuba's history: Felix Varela.

Varela (1788-1853) was a Catholic priest who distinguished himself as one of the brightest lights in the nineteenth-century Latin American philosophical world. His love of Enlightenment philosophy was the basis for an active political career, and he was among the most articulate advocates of Cuban independence. In 1821 he was elected as a delegate to the Spanish Cortes in Madrid, where he presented a call for greater Cuban independence from Spain and a plan systematically to abolish slavery in Cuba.

When, in 1823, the Spanish King Ferdinand VII was restored to his despotic throne, he took vengeance on his democratic opponents, and the only recourse left to those like Varela was to flee the Spanish dominion.

Varela arrived in New York City in 1823 and there continued his work for Cuban independence as a journalist and a pastor. In his writings, he staunchly maintained that Cuba must be an independent republic, free from any foreign control. He counseled against political hysteria, blind nationalism, and ambition, basing his arguments on his belief in the noble destiny of the person as created in the image of God. He was a lover of liberal democracy that assured the dignity of the individual and the rule of reason.

In this, the 200th anniversary of his birth, Varela is the focus of new attention. Cuban-Americans have celebrated the Christian, democratic idealist as the antithesis of the atheist, communist, materialist Castro. Varela has become for them a symbol of a free Cuba, built on the visions of the first patriots. The present regime is an aberration, a passing phenomenon in Cuba's struggle for freedom.

In the homeland, however, Varela's memory is put to other uses. An annual Felix Varela award in political science is given by the government of Cuba. He is viewed by Cuban communists as a proto-Marxist, a brilliant political scientist and patriot who rightly understood the burden of colonialism but whose insights were hampered by his religious beliefs.

This communist view of Varela was gently rebutted by New York's Cardinal John O'Connor during his visit to Cuba last April. O'Connor spoke of Varela often during his four-day tour, which included a meeting with Fidel Castro. Repeatedly O'Connor presented Varela not only as a great political figure but as a zealous priest whose faith formed the basis of his social conscience. During his homily at the cathedral in Santiago, he hailed Varela and insisted that "all that [he] did was founded in his identity as a Christian and a Catholic."

Yet it was not the confrontational tone that prevailed. O'Connor had gone to Cuba on the invitation of the Archbishop of Havana, Jaime Ortega, on a mission of reconciliation in hopes that the Catholic Church might help to improve relations between the peoples of the U.S. and Cuba. He was greeted by enthusiastic crowds who had learned of his visit through Radio Marti (a U.S.-funded station which, over Castro's objections, broadcasts full reports of Cuban domestic news into the island) and was cordially received by the government. Two members of the government welcoming committee even attended the Cardinal's Mass -- something that had not happened in twenty years. O'Connor spoke of Varela as a bridge between the two nations.

Ironically, the Castro regime's dogmatic, fanatic belief in the rightness of the revolution has unleashed precisely the type of destruction of liberty that Varela feared. As he predicted, the result has been despotism. For a whole generation of young Cubans who have never known Cuba without Fidel, the idea of a liberal democratic Cuba may seem fatuous. To recreate the climate in which new ideas can prosper is a job not only for philosophers and preachers, but for statesmen -- and businessmen as well. This much one must, I believe, yield to the Marxists. Varela's gospel, I fear, will never reach the heart of Cuba unless it is carried by the angels of Christian democracy disguised as Coca-Cola bottles.

-- John Farina

Dr. Farina is a writer on religion and culture in America, and an editor for the Paulist Press.

From the Director's Desk

"For unto us a child is born..." So begins one of the most unforgettable parts of Handel's magnificent Messiah.

The Church's principal reason for existence is to proclaim the good news of Christmas -- the wonderful promise that human beings can be reconciled with their maker, with God Himself.

The Jewish zealots wanted more. They wanted a political Messiah. But Jesus insisted that His kingdom "was not of this world." The temptation to politicize the Gospel is alive and well in our own time, and all of us must guard against it.

The problem, of course, is that we have been called to live and serve in a world in which political judgments must be made. None of us can work for peace, social justice, or freedom without making a multitude of highly difficult decisions.

To protect the integrity of the Church and the centrality of the good news of God's love, we must distinguish as clearly as we can the eternal verities of our faith from our political judgments about how to advance the good on this earth.

At this special time of year, may we dedicate ourselves anew to those eternal truths which soar above our political differences. At the same time, may we recommit ourselves to the hard work of careful thought and prudent consideration regarding how best in the temporal world to work for peace, justice, and freedom.

The staff of the IRD extends to all its readers its warmest greetings and its best wishes for a Happy New Year!

Kent Hill

Merry Christmas

from the staff of
The Institute on Religion and Democracy

From left (standing): Marilyn White, Diane Knippers, Alan Wisdom, Karen Mabeus, Kent Hill, David Porter, Stan DeBoe.

From left (seated): Walter Kansteiner, Lisa Gibney, Richard Sperbeck.



Photo by Stan DeBoe

Religion & Democracy

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