

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



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The Episcopal Church: Moving to Influence Direction of N C C/W C C

Another major denomination has weighed in with its study of the National Council of Churches (NCC) and World Council of Churches (WCC), following the major media criticisms of the councils which surfaced five years ago. An Episcopal Church committee, charged with evaluating the denomination's continued participation in the NCC and WCC, issued its report in November. Its critique is comprehensive, if sometimes tactfully obscure. The committee chairman, the Rev. Dr. William Lawson, predicts that implementation of the report's recommendations would "go a long way to make the NCC and WCC more responsive." Exactly which policies the "more responsive" councils should adopt is less clear.

The Episcopal report addresses several problems within the NCC: its awkward structure, its "perceived ideological stance," and its "complicated funding" (read "financial morass"). Regarding the WCC, the report likewise touches on the divergence between its "perceived ideological stance" and the mission priorities of North American churches. A major disappointment is the astonishingly superficial

treatment of the WCC's Special Fund to Combat Racism. While avoiding any careful evaluation of the Special Fund's controversial grants to "liberation movements," the report urges the Episcopal Church to consider renewing its contributions to the fund.

The IRD-related Episcopal Committee on Religion and Freedom (ECRF) offered testimony to Dr. Lawson's committee in early 1986. ECRF chairman Frank Watson asked that the investigating committee consider substantive issues, and not merely focus on procedural and organizational questions. "The controversy which erupted in the early 1980s was over the content of programs and policies of the councils, not the shape of administrative flow charts," he said. ECRF asked Dr. Lawson particularly to examine the councils' too-cordial relations with Soviet-bloc agencies; their funding of non-democratic groups in Latin America, Southern Africa, and Southeast Asia; and their distorted and biased annual mission studies. Finally, ECRF urged that (1) ways be found to ensure that the views of the "substantial centrist majority (and even the conservatives) in the Episcopal Church" be adequately represented to the NCC and WCC and (2) the NCC be pressed to offer total financial disclosure, including a "complete listing of financial grants made to all organizations or groups."

The Lawson committee predictably affirmed continuing, even increasing, Episcopal Church participation in the ecumenical councils. The report, however, did define a modest role for the councils, pointing out, for example, that decisions of the NCC and WCC lack "the authority of an ecumenical council of the Church" and that the NCC represents less than half of all U.S. Christians. (In fact, the NCC represents less than one quarter.)

The N C C: Damning with Faint Praise _____

The report contains little specific criticism of the NCC, yet the necessary changes suggested in the recommendations presuppose serious problems. Religion and Democracy asked Dr. Lawson if the report is clear enough for the typical reader to grasp. His response was that anyone involved in the ecumenical movement would understand. Referring to the General Secretary

(Episcopal, cont'd on page 5)



Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos

Tibetan refugees in India protest Chinese killings of their countrymen. For more on the problems of religious freedom in Tibet, see the Religious Liberty Alert on page 3.

The FBI and CISPES: The Rest of the Story

Recent news reports have described a long, intrusive FBI investigation into a group called the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). The stories tell how bureau agents infiltrated CISPES meetings and watched CISPES offices and demonstrations, photographing activists and writing down their license plate numbers. Although no evidence of criminal activity by CISPES ever turned up, the surveillance continued for six years. Press reports implied a simple explanation for this apparent abuse: the FBI was harassing CISPES because it is "a liberal group that is opposed to President Reagan's foreign policy" (New York Times, Jan. 28, 1988).

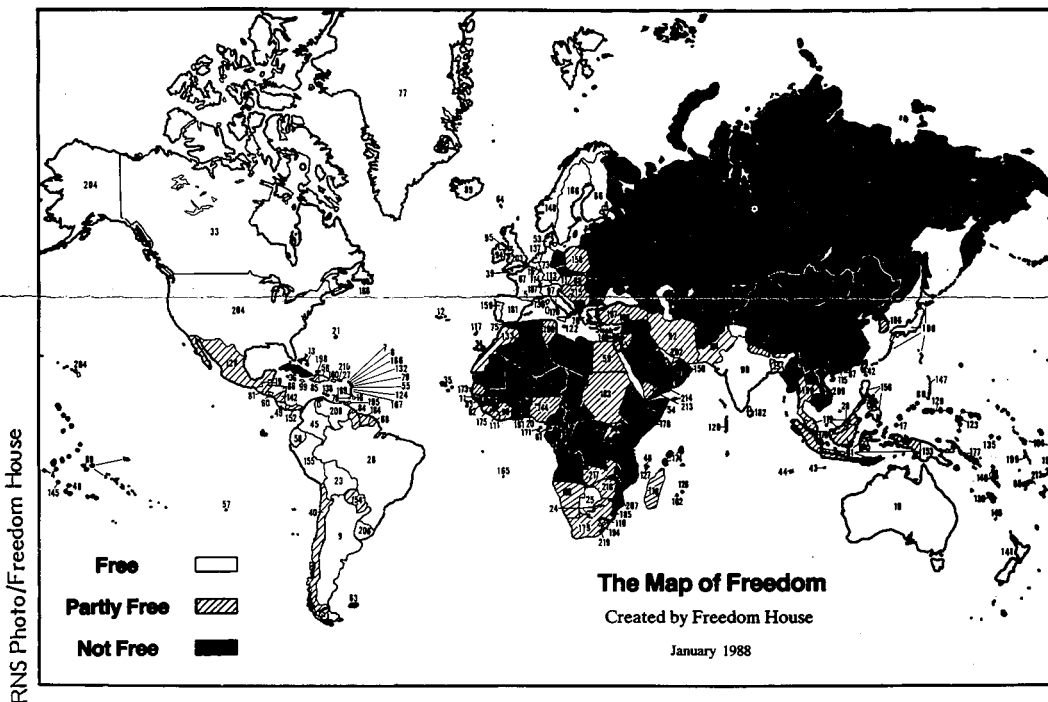
The FBI declined to offer its own explanation; however, CISPES documents suggest why the bureau might have suspected something more sinister than liberal dissent. In its own words the committee appears as the U.S. partner in "solidarity" with the Marxist-Leninist-dominated guerrilla movement in El Salvador. The CISPES bylaws state, "We politically support the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front/Democratic Revolutionary Front (FMLN/FDR) because of their important role in the struggle for national sovereignty and peace with justice." At a September 1987 convention, CISPES chose its top objectives for 1988: "1) increasing our political and material support for the Salvadoran popular move-

ment (identified elsewhere with the FMLN/FDR); 2) promoting the recognition of the FMLN/FDR as a legitimate political force." In furtherance of these objectives, the committee planned to publish literature about the FMLN/FDR, sponsor speaking tours by FMLN/FDR representatives, and raise funds for recognized FMLN/FDR fronts.

Within El Salvador the FMLN carries out a policy of terrorism: "executions" and kidnappings of civilians associated with the government, attacks on vehicles defying rebel "transportation strikes," and the indiscriminate laying of land mines. It would not be illogical for the FBI to worry that the guerrillas' U.S. supporters might someday be tempted to terrorism here. Thus there may have been good reasons for opening an investigation of CISPES, although hardly for taking the probe to such lengths.

The CISPES documents might also give cause for the mainline Protestant churches to rethink their links to this radical solidarity group. Should the head of the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have worked with CISPES Executive Director Angela Sanbrano on the Program Committee of the April 1987 Mobilization rally? Should the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries have made even small grants to the committee -- for example, \$500 in 1984?

— Alan F. Wisdom



This map is based on a comparative survey developed by Freedom House, a human rights monitoring organization. The survey analyzes factors such as the degree to which fair and competitive elections occur, individual and group freedoms are guaranteed in practice, and press freedom exists. More people lived in freedom in 1987 than at any time since the Freedom House Survey began 16 years ago. The 20" x 30" map, and a list of the countries corresponding to the map's numbers, is available for \$5 from Freedom House, 48 E. 21st St., New York, NY 10010.

RNS Photo/Freedom House

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Religious Liberty Alert

China Cracks Down on Tibetan Buddhists

While the Western world has applauded recent economic reforms and modest steps of lessening oppression in the People's Republic of China, there is another -- lesser known and more ominous -- story to be told. In recent months, Buddhist monks in Lhasa, Tibet, have been arrested and questioned, some brutally killed, by occupying Chinese authorities. The harassment and repression have been directed against a number of demonstrations, the main forum by which the monks and Tibetan laypeople protest their domination by the Chinese. One of the Tibetan people's principal complaints is religious repression.

Historically, Communist China has tried to overcome internal opposition by forcing different minority cultures into its socialist mold. With this policy of assimilation, the government has attacked minority cultures at several points, including their religions. After the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950, they began encouraging migration by Han people (the majority ethnic group in China) into Tibet. The alleged purpose was to help develop that backward region, but the effect is that 6 million Tibetans are now outnumbered in their own land by 7.5 million Han.

In 1959, after nine years of Chinese domination, the Tibetan god-king, Dalai Lama, fled his homeland to establish a Tibetan government-in-exile in India. As China was crushing a popular uprising in Tibet in that year, thousands of monks fled with their spiritual leader. What followed was a ten-year period of chaos. Radical Red Guards wreaked havoc on that religious society by killing 1.2 million Tibetans, destroying more than 6,000 monasteries and countless religious artifacts, burning 60 percent of Tibet's biographical, philosophical and historical literature, and imprisoning one out of every ten Tibetans.

In the last decade, China has been slowly reopening monasteries and rebuilding religious buildings. But the fact remains that the main purpose of this "reform" is to increase tourism in the Tibetan region -- so as to gain foreign hard currency -- not to grant religious concessions to the faithful. The few remaining Buddhist monks are forced to labor at menial jobs as well as act as tour guides in the handful of opened monasteries. The "abbots" in the monasteries are appointed by the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Frequently the abbots are not even under vows; their function is to monitor the monks through informers.

(On February 4, 1988, the New York Times reported from Beijing that, following the Tibetan demonstrations of last fall, "the Chinese closed the principal monasteries and began a program of political re-education for the monks there....It is unclear how long this process lasted, although some reports reaching here indicate that it may have gone on into December in some places.")

According to the U.S. Tibet Committee: "Today in Tibet, Buddhist teachings and initiations are proscribed: prostrations and reciting mantras are permitted. As a result, a nation-wide facade, like that



Photo courtesy of Congressman Lantos

The Dalai Lama (left), presents a five-point peace plan for the Tibetan region to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, co-chaired by Rep. Tom Lantos (right).

in the monasteries, has been created. The symbols survive, the substance is gone. The effect is to make Tibetans look like a backward, superstitious race bowing down in blind faith before demonic idols -- exactly what the Chinese Communist Party wants both for internal and external consumption."

What may have been a catalyst to the recent violence in Tibet was the September visit to the United States by the Dalai Lama, at the invitation of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, co-chaired by Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Rep. John Porter (R-IL). The Dalai Lama presented congressional leaders with a five-point peace plan which was intended to be a basis for negotiations with the Chinese. (The U.S. State Department is reluctant to accept the peace plan because our country does not formally acknowledge Tibet as a sovereign state.) The response of the Chinese to the peace plan was the public execution of two Tibetan nationalists, which sparked the demonstrations.

What can we do? As a result of the recent conflicts, the foreign press is not allowed in Tibet at present. For now, U.S. Christians can write to their congressional representatives to ask them to call on the Chinese government to allow the press back into Tibet -- for the protection of the Tibetan people. We can also write to our congressional leaders and the Administration to ask that, regardless of their views on Tibetan independence, they press to ensure religious freedom and human rights for the Buddhists in Tibet. To write directly to the Chinese, address your letters to:

Tang Shubei
Minister and Charge D'Affairs
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
2300 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20008

International pressure can make a difference.

— Lisa M. Gibney

NEWS BRIEFS

Distrust of Church Leadership Threatens Presbyterian Funding

Distrust of the denomination's national leadership has led to a "very non-Presbyterian" movement to keep contributions to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at the local level, according to the church's moderator.

In an interview Dr. Isabel Rogers said: "Probably the thing that I'm most grieved about is that there is a suspicion, there's a level of distrust, by people at the local level of the leadership at the denominational level."

Dr. Rogers, a professor of ethics at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, VA, expressed mixed impressions from her travels since being elected last June to a one-year term as moderator. On the positive side, she said she has found evidence that many Presbyterian congregations are growing, despite a loss of national membership in the church.

But, at the same time, "almost everywhere" she has heard complaints from church members who feel that the denomination's staff isn't listening to their concerns. Worse, some members even accuse staff members of trying to push church policy in certain political directions.

As long as such complaints go unanswered, there is a real danger to the church's financial health, Dr. Rogers said. "Because people want to control where their gifts go...they're keeping them at the congregational level. And that's very non-Presbyterian."

In addition, Dr. Rogers said, she has met many Presbyterians who are upset over a controversial pamphlet, titled "Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?" The pamphlet, prepared by a national church agency, appears to advocate civil disobedience by church members against certain U.S. government military policies, she said (see *Religion & Democracy*, March/April 1987).

Although the pamphlet is only a "study paper," she said, many conservative Presbyterians fear it will be used to influence church policy in a decidedly liberal direction. Because of their fears, Dr. Rogers said, the pamphlet is likely to provoke an intense debate at the denomination's General Assembly in June in St. Louis.

Latvia: "Rebirth and Renewal"

In the tiny Baltic state of Latvia, a "Rebirth and Renewal" movement originated in December 1986 among Latvian Lutheran clergymen. Their purpose is to work within glasnost and perestroika to renew the faith of church members. The movement is independent and meets openly, but without government approval.

At least a dozen clergy and theologians have stepped forward to align themselves with the Rebirth and Renewal movement. Despite their exclusively spiritual agenda, these men have met with immediate harassment — from both the government watchdog committee and the Lutheran Church hierarchy.

The Commissioner of the Latvian Council for Religious Affairs, Eduards Kokars-Trops, issued a threatening directive to leaders in the renewal movement — despite the fact that he is a state official and not a church official. He called the movement "distinctly anti-Soviet" and warned the clergymen that "if you and the members of your group wish to perform the functions of a pastor and carry out religious activities, then I recommend that you immediately cease to organize independent gatherings and meetings to spread biased, non-objective information...."

Archbishop Eriks Mesters, who serves on the Latvian Lutheran Consistory, is a focal point for government pressure on the church. Unfortunately, state pressure is proving to be effective once again. The Consistory had promised to meet with the Rebirth and Renewal leadership on January 7-8. However, as a result of a Consistory meeting on January 5, discussions with movement leaders were postponed until September 1988. Mesters and the Consistory are currently issuing statements to Rebirth and Renewal pastors informing them that they must leave their congregations.

The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has filed a letter of protest with the Soviet government saying that the Soviet actions against the Rebirth and Renewal movement "deny the right of citizens to select their own religious leaders and threaten to remove, even exile, men who are so badly needed in their congregations."

ADL Challenges "Moral Equivalency"

Late last year the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish civil and human rights group, released a new secondary school curriculum designed to promote "a greater appreciation for" democracy among U.S. high school students.

Each of the 17 lessons in the ADL's new series, Government By The People, Government Upon The People, compares and contrasts the world's two leading political systems — American democracy and Soviet communism. For example, the lesson on economic systems finds that while "both governments hope to improve conditions for their people...most Americans believe their capitalist economy is very successful," while "the economic security of Soviet citizens comes at the expense of individual liberties and human rights."

Responding to criticism that this approach is the first step on the road to an uncritical indoctrination in democracy, ADL spokesman Tom Newman replied: "You can't say there is moral equivalency between them (the two systems). There isn't." He said that one can provide a balance of opinion and still reach the objective conclusion that democracy "is the better of the two" political systems.

(Episcopal, cont'd from page 1)

of the NCC, he said, "Arie Brouwer is not going to miss the major criticism."

The report calls for continued monitoring of the NCC restructure, "particularly as related to issues of accountability, credibility, and clarity." It further asks the NCC to develop a "more consultative and collegial style," and "to be more selective and intentional in the choice of public issues which it addresses, and more thorough in research."

The report urges improved Episcopal Church participation in the NCC, citing the "difficulties" of providing leadership while meeting "representation requirements" (a wide variety of quotas). Specifically, the report recommends that, among the Episcopal Church staff, only the Ecumenical Officer be appointed to the NCC Governing Board. This proposal might diminish the influence of interlocking networks of denominational and ecumenical bureaucrats.

Regarding the "perceived ideological stance" of the National Council of Churches, the report observes:

Just as the Episcopal Church General Convention sometimes adopts policies and statements which seem to some Episcopalians to be unreflective of attitudes at the grassroots of the church and insufficiently reflective of the complexities surrounding certain controversial issues so, too, the NCCC seems to be unrepresentative of the diversity of attitudes in its member communions. Part of the problem has been the media's tendency to regard as newsworthy only that which is controversial. However, the problem cannot be laid entirely at the media's doorstep. NCCC's statements do not always evidence a sufficient understanding of the moral, cultural and political ambiguities which surround sensitive public issues.

The Lawson committee again resorts to dry understatement when addressing NCC finances: "The NCCC budget appears complicated to persons trying to understand NCCC funding." The report requests "an annual summary report of how Episcopal Church money was spent." Religion and Democracy asked Mr. Lawson if the ECRF request for line-item financial disclosure had been considered. He said yes, but that the funding patterns of the NCC were so complex, that the committee considered its modest suggestions to be a more practical first step. (The ECRF plans to bring a resolution to the July General Convention of the Episcopal Church requesting full financial disclosure by the NCC.)

The W C C: Strengthen Communication and Ties

Most of the recommendations regarding the World Council of Churches are designed to improve communication between the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion as a whole, and the WCC. There is little hint of substantive change.

The report notes that "North American denominationalism...makes it difficult for WCC leadership to monitor the mission priorities and viewpoints of the North American churches." It calls for developing "appropriate channels for sharing with WCC leadership those mission priorities which are impor-

tant to the Episcopal Church." We asked Dr. Lawson: "What are the mission priorities of the Episcopal Church which the WCC is not representing?" Lawson's reply did not clarify his view of the WCC, but instead revealed more of his attitude toward the National Council. He said that the WCC tended to look to the NCC to interpret U.S. church mission concerns and that "this is not adequate."

The Lawson committee fumbled the ball regarding the WCC Special Fund to Combat Racism. The report cites only one 1978 grant -- to the Patriotic Fund in Zimbabwe, saying "it was this grant which provoked recurring attacks on the WCC" -- but does not mention continuing WCC grants to the African National Congress and to the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). Serious questions about the violent tactics and the non-democratic ideologies of such groups are glossed over in a reference to "the dilemma of responding to humanitarian needs in communities where civil war and terrorism are facts of life." After giving assurances that "no Episcopal Church funds have been designated for the Special Fund since 1972," the report goes on to suggest that "the church now renew such support!"

Turning to "the perceived ideological stance" of the WCC, the Lawson committee notes that, since its founding 40 years ago, the council has expanded to include churches from the developing nations of the southern hemisphere as well as Orthodox churches from Eastern Europe. This change in membership has created "a shift in leadership and power," making the WCC "far more reflective of the tensions in the world." On the one hand, such a sociological analysis ducks the fundamental theological issues in question. And such a breathtakingly superficial evaluation also ignores the reality of compromised church/state relations in much of the world, relations which produce the WCC's regular identification with the politics of the radical Left.

Nevertheless, the report goes on to suggest a useful corrective. It notes that the WCC is likely to make public statements concerning the policies of the United States because our "democratic freedoms" increase the likelihood of such statements being heeded. The "only way to influence public policy...in authoritarian regimes (whether of the left or right)...is to deal with the regimes directly and privately," the report says. (One is compelled to object that the WCC is rarely private in its criticisms of right-wing dictatorships, and those criticisms have had some effect.) The report then suggests: "When the WCC issues public statements critical of the U.S.A., it would help to find points to affirm as well, including the freedom to be critical. If the WCC is seen entering into the U.S.A. public process with appreciation as well as criticism, its statements are less likely to be perceived as unfair and the WCC's credibility will rise."

This latter tactic is apparently the one adopted by the Episcopal Church -- addressing the ecumenical councils with appreciation as well as criticism. Sadly, it is doubtful that substantive changes will follow from such a modest critique focused on distinctly secondary concerns.

— Diane L. Knippers

There are a limited number of seats still available for the

**Millennium Tour of the Soviet Union
March 26 through April 11**

The IRD, along with the Slavic Gospel Association, is planning a two-week special tour of the Soviet Union. The trip includes visits to historical centers of religious cultural life as well as other major tourist attractions of the contemporary Soviet Union. This "Millennium" tour will occur in 1988 -- the year in which we commemorate the coming of Christianity to the Eastern Slavs in Kiev in 988.

The cost of the tour is approximately \$2,250.

If you are interested in more information please immediately call **Randall Tift** at The Institute on Religion and Democracy -- (202) 393-3200.

CLARIFICATION

In our January 1988 issue we reported on a trip to Central America organized by the IRD. Though we referred to the "IRD trip" and the "IRD-sponsored delegation," it should be understood that non-IRD staff participants paid their own way and represented themselves or their own organizations, not the IRD. In addition, Randy Frame of Christianity Today went on the trip not as a member of the delegation of church activists, but as an independent journalist.

SEND AN EASTER CARD TO A SOVIET CHRISTIAN PRISONER!

If you are a participant in the Adopt-a-Prisoner program of the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the U.S.S.R., please send an Easter card (in **RUSSIAN**) to your prisoner. They are available individually (\$.35/card or \$.15/postcard) or by the dozen (\$3.50/cards or \$1.50/postcards) from Holy Trinity Monastery, P.O. Box 36, Jordanville, NY 13361-0036 (add 10% for postage and handling).

Please specify that you wish the card to be in Russian. (When mailing your Easter card to your prisoner, use an 88-cent stamp for each card or a 33-cent stamp for each postcard.)

You might also copy the following Scripture verse (1 John 4:4) onto your card:

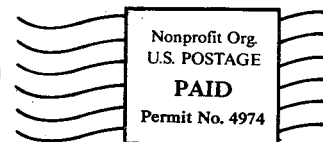
"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

ТОТ, КТО В ВАС, БОЛЬШЕ ТОГО, КТО В МИРЕ.

If you have not yet adopted a prisoner, you can participate by sending a card to an imprisoned Russian Orthodox priest:

618801 Permskaya oblast
Chusorskoi raion
st. Polovinka
uchr. VS-398/37
RUSAK, Deacon Vladimir
U.S.S.R.

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



Address Correction Requested