

RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



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Episcopalians Seek Unity (at Least on Surface)

To me the greatest accomplishment was how we worked together...We were really concerned as we discussed those (sensitive) issues how we were relating to one another.

Edmond Browning, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church is getting to be like warm brie: crusty on the outside and mush on the inside.

Woman deputy to the triennial convention of the Episcopal Church

There you have it: two very different views of the same event -- the 69th General Convention of one of the nation's best-known mainline Protestant denominations.

It is all a matter of perspective.

Clear from the outset was the fact that the church's left-liberal senior management wanted a "unified" convention. The two items on the convention agenda that threatened divisive floor fights were entirely insider issues. These were whether or not Episcopal congregations who oppose consecration of female bishops would, if

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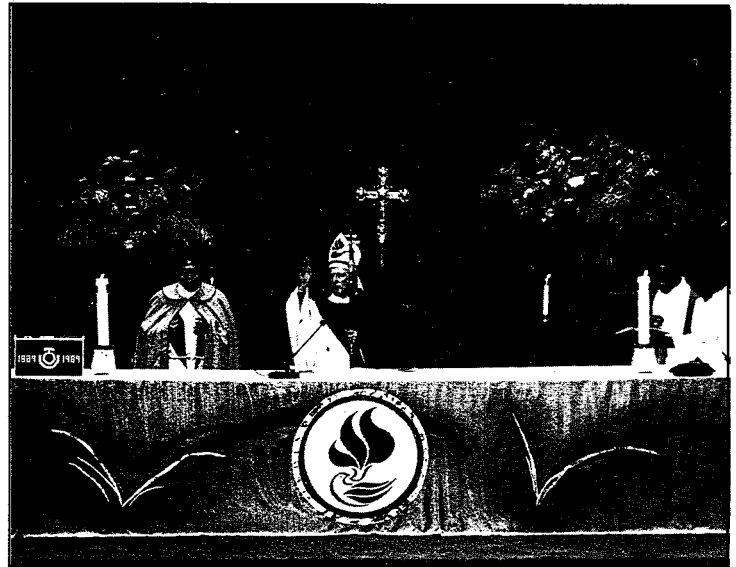


Photo courtesy of Neil Morgan

Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning (center) at the 69th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

Presbyterians Blunt "Resistance" Thrust

Presbyterian moderates and conservatives could find much to cheer in this year's General Assembly, June 7-15 in St. Louis. Notably, they could claim to have effected major changes in a denominational statement which would have offered support to those illegally "resisting" U.S. defense policies. Nevertheless, they also received more than a few reminders of how far they must yet go in restoring the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to theological focus and political prudence.

The statement on "Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age" (CONA, see *Religion and Democracy*, May 1988) produced the most dramatic debate at the Assembly. At the first meeting of the subcommittee considering the document, everyone in the room sensed tension. The statement itself seemed foreordained to provoke confrontation. It described the United States as a nation in the grip of "militarization," possessed by an irrational "ideology of the enemy." It denounced nuclear deterrence

as "immoral" and suggested instead a study of "civilian-based defense." Accepting law-breaking as an "honorable" way of "resisting" U.S. defense policies, on a par with legal means of protest, CONA recommended that the denomination pledge financial and other support to Presbyterian resisters.

Open public hearings had allowed members of the subcommittee to gauge the passions on each side of the issue. Representatives of the task force responsible for CONA presented their report as the ripe fruit of a careful five-year study process. To fail to act now, task force co-chairman Albert Winn argued, would be "terribly discouraging" to Presbyterian resisters who needed counsel.

But the overwhelming majority of voices at the hearings contested the fairness of the study process. Witness after witness rejected CONA as fatally flawed --

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they found themselves in a diocese headed by a woman, be allowed to receive the sacramental ministrations of a male prelate, temporarily, and whether or not to confirm the election of a traditionalist male bishop in a California diocese.

The answer was affirmative in both cases, which, no doubt, indicated what Browning meant when he purred about unity near the close of the gathering. However, when hyper-liberal Bishop John S. Spong of Newark rose to speak in favor of a man (the controversial California bishop-designate) with whom he disagreed on any theological issue you care to name, it is clear that the church establishment had put the "fix" on. It chose to indulge the traditionalists, for a few years. Not a bad idea for a church that lost more than 20 percent of its membership in less than a generation.

However, among the some 500 resolutions considered by Episcopal bishops and convention deputies were the usual assortment of far-left economic, political and social positions with which the denomination's establishment is so enthralled. A few were watered down slightly to make them more palatable to the rank-and-file back home, but not many.

A new force at the 69th Episcopal General Convention were moderate to conservative organizations, mostly from the church's evangelical wing. This marked the first time in history that groups such as these actively lobbied on key resolutions. Among the organizations were the Episcopal Committee on Religion and Freedom (ECRF), National Organization of Episcopalians for Life (NOEL), and Episcopalians United for Revelation, Religion and Reformation. ECRF is affiliated with the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Resolutions supported by ECRF were passed by the convention, including:

- * Requesting that the National Council of Churches fully report to members its income and expenditures. Building on an Episcopal Church study of the NCC (see *Religion and Democracy*, February 1988), this action puts a major denomination on record calling for full financial disclosure.
- * Taking a forthright stand in support of religious liberty for believers in all nations.
- * Opposing political terrorism.

A major controversy erupted over a resolution calling for a boycott of Royal Dutch Shell and other petroleum companies doing business in the Republic of South Africa. Speaking for ECRF, David Shields testified at committee hearings that South African blacks will be the first to suffer economic hardship if international business firms are forced out of South Africa. It was also noted in floor

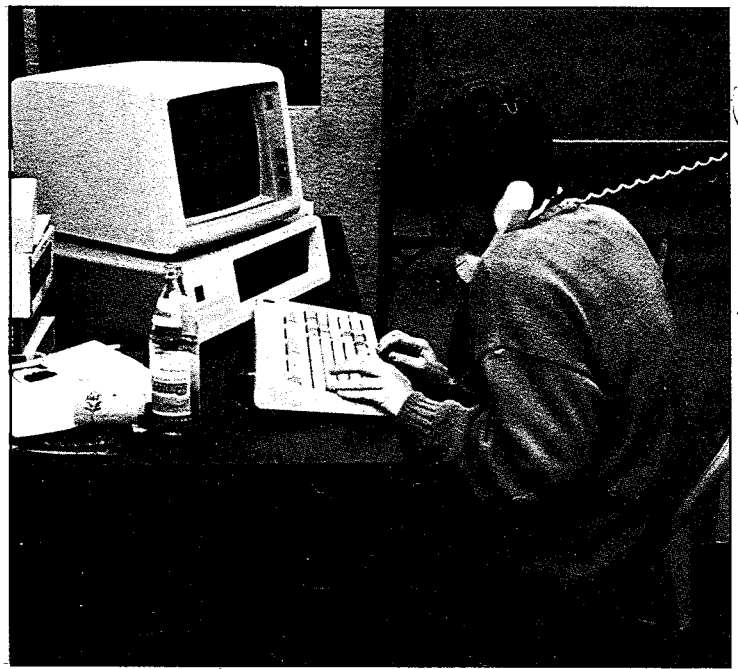


Photo by David Shields

IRD's summer intern, Rebecca Hubbard, works on the daily issue of ECRF's Anglican Opinion at the General Convention.

debate that American consumers are not likely to realize that while a successful boycott in the United States would hurt Shell dealers here, it would not undermine apartheid in South Africa.

The Shell boycott resolution was expanded to include "all international oil companies doing business in South Africa." The resolution listed Mobil, Chevron, Texaco, British Petroleum, and Total. The advocates of the boycott resolution did not address the fact that the greatest vehicle for undermining apartheid has been the economic sector. To attack the very sector that holds the most promise for a peaceful post-apartheid South Africa demonstrates a lack of understanding of the situation -- or reveals a more radical revolutionary agenda.

The boycott was defeated -- by the church laity -- on the second-to-last day of the convention. However, massive overnight lobbying by the Left resulted in the measure's reintroduction and passage on the last day, when a number of deputies had already left for home. Proponents made the issue a test of support for Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. On a related matter, moderates received unexpected support when the Committee on National and International Affairs deleted from the resolution a call for the United States to sever diplomatic relations with South Africa. A spokesman for Tutu surprised the committee by stating that the bishop does not favor such an action.

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Other good news was the defeat of a resolution that would have had the church eliminate its military chaplaincy. The proposal was made by so-called "peace activist" groups.

After a heated hearing on whether the Episcopal Church should declare that "conscientious objection" is the only "normative" response to military service, the convention adopted a diluted resolution stating that conscientious objection is a "faithful response" to Episcopal doctrine, but not the only option.

"If this resolution passes as written, I wonder if all the fellows I knew in seminary will give back their GI Bill money," testified the Rev. Richard Kim of Detroit at a committee hearing. Kim, an ECRF board member, is a retired Army officer.

ECRF and others opposed a resolution adopting an NCC policy statement on reunification of North and South Korea. The statement identifies the presence of U.S. military forces in the south under the United Nations auspices as the major barrier to reunification. The NCC statement also conveniently omits any discussion of repression of human rights in North Korea. The resolution was passed.

In an action that seemed to ratify the Reagan agenda of private help for the poor, the convention approved a resolution calling for a \$4 million Episcopal grassroots program aimed at improving the lot of low-income Americans. The resolution was submitted by the Diocese of Michigan, considered one of the most liberal in the denomination. The Michigan Plan, perhaps the social action centerpiece of the 1988 gathering, will have the church underwrite and provide seed money for *self-help* programs.

At a hearing on the proposal, Diane Knippers of ECRF, while not criticizing the plan's concept, did urge deputies not to overlook the social and moral causes of the "feminization of poverty" -- divorce, single-parent families, etc. "If the church doesn't address these root causes of poverty, who will?" she asked.



Photo by Frank Watson

ECRF and friends protest outside Detroit's Westin Hotel, where Miguel D'Escoto, Foreign Minister of Nicaragua, accepted an award from the Episcopal Church Publishing Company.

What remains to be seen is the sorts of groups that receive funding through the program. "I hope this program is not another one that will merely provide work for hacks, incompetents and consultants in its administration," commented a liberal priest at the hearing.

At one point late in the convention, a bulletin board message stated that the convention would consider more than 500 resolutions. But an effort to reduce the deluge of resolutions at future conventions was defeated.

The sheer volume of resolutions, along with vast clutches of amendments, that bounced back and forth between the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies confused deputies and observers alike. Efforts to clarify actions under consideration were often met by baffled looks and shrugs of shoulders, both from the men and women voting on them and from reporters covering the event.

Attention of the secular media focused almost entirely on the issues of women bishops and human sexuality. Once these issues had been dealt with, daily press briefings were largely attended by reporters from various church publications, both official and independent.

A convention low-light was a dinner sponsored by the unofficial Episcopal Church Publishing Company, part of the highly visible Left lobby. The principal speaker was Miguel D'Escoto, Foreign Minister of Nicaragua, who accepted an award from the company. D'Escoto is a Roman Catholic priest suspended from administering the sacraments, due to the Vatican displeasure at his participation in the Marxist-Leninist regime. The event, attended by some 300 well-dressed convention-goers, including several bishops, and held at Detroit's swank Westin Hotel, was picketed by ECRF members and pro-freedom students from the University of Michigan.

Among the many signs of conservative and moderate resurgence at the 1988 convention was the ECRF booth in the massive exhibit area. ECRF members distributed literature and talked to hundreds of deputies and other visitors who dropped in. *Anglican Opinion*, the quarterly ECRF publication, was published daily during the convention and distributed in the halls and at hotels.

ECRF Chairman Frank Watson commented:

"When an Episcopal convention features a dinner honoring the winner of the Lenin 'Peace' Prize (D'Escoto) and the Bishop of Michigan declares that being a Christian requires a commitment to 'class struggle,' it is clear that those of us who love the Church enough to fight to recapture it from the Left have our work cut out for us.

"However, we were able to make some positive impacts in 1988. This is a hopeful sign. This convention also gave moderate organizations a chance to get to know each other. A number of us agreed that the time is ripe for a conference to see how we can work together in the future."

-- David Apker

(David Apker is a deacon in the Episcopal Church and edits ECRF's *Anglican Opinion*.)

(Presbyterians, continued from page 1)

the product of biased study materials evaluated by an unbalanced task force. They complained that the document had been released too late for consultation with local presbyteries. Charging that CONA's conclusions did not reflect the views of most Presbyterians, they warned that it would, if adopted, cause great division in the church.

What remained unclear was how the subcommittee would respond to this outpouring of controversy. Would there be a majority willing to push the statement on, unchanged, to the full General Assembly? Or would most members prefer to give it a quiet burial? The first meeting revealed a group delicately balanced between those two courses. So, rather than give a simple "yes" or "no" to CONA, the subcommittee sought a compromise, by amending the report line by line.

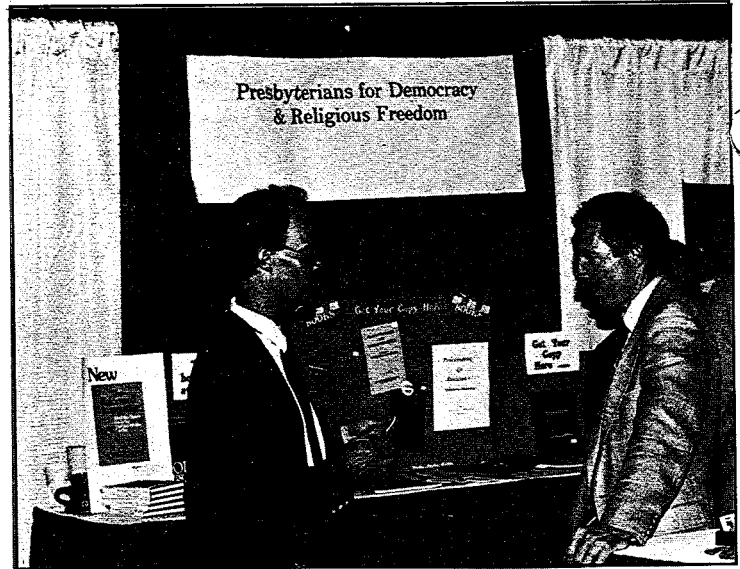
A Document Greatly Altered -- for the Better

This arduous effort at last-minute revision resulted in a document greatly altered -- indeed, stripped of many of its objectionable features. Nuclear deterrence was no longer absolutely condemned; rather, it was declared to be "in danger of being regarded as an adequate, permanent means to national security rather than an interim measure of self defense." The provision for a study of civilian-based defense was deleted.

The amended statement also clarified that "the General Assembly does not believe resistance is normative," eliminating wording which suggested a moral equivalence between resistance and obedience to the law. It included a new passage commending the "many Presbyterians (who) have decided that obedience to God leads them to participate in the military." Resisters were now promised only the church's "emotional support," not its financial aid. And dissatisfaction with the CONA study process was implicitly registered, in a request that all such statements in the future be submitted to the commissioners 120 days before the convening of General Assembly.

After the adoption of these major amendments, the subcommittee united behind the document. Commissioner T. LaFontine Odom (Charlotte, NC), initially a CONA opponent, later hailed the revision as "an act of peacemaking" which "allows strong divergent views to be contained without judgment." CONA task force co-chairman Arnold Come also gave his approval: "I believe we have a strong document -- in some places stronger, in some weaker, but a strong document." With such diverse endorsements, the statement passed easily, by a 502-68 vote, in the full General Assembly.

Yet no series of late-night subcommittee meetings could remove every questionable clause from CONA. Even after amendment, it still opened some opportunities to resistance advocates among the denominational staff. In particular, the document authorized them to set up a "Fund for Obedience to Higher Authority," through which voluntary contributions by Presbyterian individuals and congregations could be channeled to needy resisters. The church's Peacemaking Program, moreover, was directed to organize a network of Presbyterian resisters. Despite the voluntary, unofficial nature of these new undertakings,



IRD Research Director Alan Wisdom (left) and PDRF Executive Director Paul Scotchmer confer in front of the PDRF booth. PDRF led the fight against "resistance."

staff efforts to promote the fund and the network could create an impression that the Presbyterian Church does support resistance.

Moving toward Middle Ground?

The revision of CONA was therefore a victory -- though far from a total victory -- for the forces of reform within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Looking at this year's General Assembly as a whole, many journalists detected a shift away from the theological and political Left. The church is "at least moving more toward more middle ground," said Marj Carpenter, head of the Presbyterian news service. Besides the compromise on CONA, she and others pointed to Assembly actions such as: the call for a new study of the denomination's pro-choice stand on abortion; the expansion of a task force on human sexuality (probably to include more conservatives); a special allocation of \$15 million over the next five years for evangelism; and the election of the Rev. C. Kenneth Hall, widely trusted among evangelicals, as Moderator of the Assembly.

The Rev. Matthew Welde, Executive Director of Presbyterians for Biblical Concerns, exulted over the trend: "I think Presbyterians are handling diversity better than many other denominations. Presbyterian leaders are beginning to integrate conservatives, even sharing leadership with them." The reaction from John Boone, President of Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom, was positive too, but more sober: "General Assembly commissioners can no longer be counted on as a rubber stamp for the social and political agenda of the professional staff. There seems to be a growing awareness of the problems that need to be addressed if we are to see a reversal of the disaffection that marks the relationship between the people in the pews and the General Assembly staff."

Indeed, this year's Assembly gave abundant evidence of the deeper structural problems to which Boone alluded.

Moderates and conservatives won victories only where they had focused their energies. On issues where renewal groups had publicized their concerns, set forth concrete proposals, and organized their supporters in advance of the Assembly, commissioners often were persuaded to accommodate their concerns. Even these victories, however, represented merely a braking of the radicalizing drive -- not a turn toward a mainstream course. The left-leaning church staff retained the initiative. And on most issues -- where there was scant publicity, no specific alternative, and little organized advocacy -- staff-generated resolutions moved swiftly through the Assembly.

Generally, the Railroad Runs on Time

Several General Assembly measures relating to foreign policy illustrate the problem. A resolution on disarmament called for a unilateral U.S. renunciation of strategic defense and chemical weapons. A resolution on the Middle East delivered a harsh, one-sided denunciation of "Israel's repressive and expansionist policies and practices affecting the Palestinians." By contrast, the resolution only briefly and weakly urged the Palestine Liberation Organization to "control acts of violence." An amendment asking the PLO to recognize Israel was defeated.

A resolution on Central America lauded the Esquipulas peace accords, but found only the United States and its allies lacking in the requisite pursuit of human rights, democracy, and diplomacy. There was more direct criticism of Costa Rica's social-democratic government than of the Marxist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. In fact, the resolution suggested that any condemnation of Sandinista policies would be an infringement of Nicaragua's sovereignty. "The power of the vision of the (Sandinista) revolution for democratization is very much alive," the resolution asserted.

On none of these radical, unbalanced resolutions was there any serious or extended debate. In fact, most members of the committees considering them seemed to have little knowledge of the topics being addressed. When doubts were raised, the staff "resource persons" -- often themselves the authors of the resolutions -- assuaged them with advice favorable to the proposed text. Thus the Assembly structure gave a built-in advantage to staff-coordinated motions which was not available to petitions from the grassroots.

Religious Liberty Side-Track

One sad example will show what too often happens to overtures from local presbyteries or individual commissioners. Several commissioners submitted a simple request: that Presbyterian leaders and agencies cooperate in a mildly-phrased ecumenical "Appeal for Religious Freedom in the Soviet Union" (see *Religion and Democracy*, June 1988). When the resolution was first introduced and explained, the subcommittee approved.

Then other forces went to work. An unsigned memorandum on church agency stationery had appeared, casting some doubt upon the proposal. Backers of the resolution who questioned staff members about the memo were met with insults. When the resolution came before the full committee, several commissioners quickly rose to speak against it. An "ecumenical delegate" from Czechoslovakia alleged that it projected an unwarranted tone of U.S. moral superiority. Others attacked the proposal as a provocation to the Soviets, offering criticism of their failings at a time when our churches should be encouraging Gorbachev's reforms. Among the rest of the delegates, few of whom had received a copy of the "Appeal," none rose to defend it. Furthermore, the committee refused to hear an outside witness in favor of the resolution.

In this atmosphere of confusion and suspicion, the committee voted the resolution down. The committee report explained that endorsing the Appeal "would cause serious interference with our current ecumenical conversations with churches in the Soviet Union." Thus can an ensconced opposition kill a measure that almost all Presbyterians would have endorsed.

Clearly, therefore, mainstream Presbyterians ought not crow too loudly over having turned back the drive toward resistance. Radical staffers can still find grist for their mill in the amended CONA text, and they still hold the upper hand in pushing other parts of their political agenda. Hardheaded reformers realize that they will not gain a fair hearing until major changes are made in General Assembly procedures and personnel. And only a work of the Holy Spirit can make that hearing an occasion of true renewal.

-- Alan Wisdom

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Religious Liberty Alert

In September 1986 a 36-year-old man was put on trial in a secret court session and sentenced to seven years in a Soviet concentration camp and five years of internal exile. His crime? Writing a history of his church -- the Russian Orthodox Church -- and criticizing the too-close relationship of the church leadership to the Soviet authorities.



Photo courtesy of Open Doors

Vladimir Rusak worked in the editorial office of the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*, which is the main publication of the Russian Orthodox Church, where he concentrated on church history. It was during this time that Rusak discovered information in the archives of the Russian Orthodox Church which documented that some church leaders had compromised their beliefs in order to maintain their positions of authority within the church. When Rusak revealed this information, he was dismissed from his job.

The KGB searched his home and seized his historical manuscripts. Eventually, the Russian Orthodox Church itself stripped him of his right to serve as a deacon.

During the 1983 World Council of Churches meeting in Vancouver, the Archbishop of Canterbury received a letter from Rusak. In this letter Rusak charged that "the Soviet authorities" used the church in a "purely propagandistic way." He also stated that he was being persecuted for his writings on church history. The WCC staff was

instructed not to allow discussion or publication of Rusak's appeal for help internationally. One Russian Orthodox spokesman even went so far as to say that Rusak should not be listened to because when he was a child he had been kicked in the head by a horse!

Rusak felt that in order for him to be able to serve the Church, he must emigrate to the West. However, after the WCC episode, he was unable to obtain an exit visa. His latest arrest took place in April 1986. His trial followed in September; none of his friends or relatives were notified. His sentence: 12 years of labor camp and internal exile.

Deacon Vladimir Rusak remains in labor camp during the Gorbachev era. His health is poor; his ears and one eye are damaged. Please pray for Rusak's health and his speedy release.

One benefit of *glasnost* has been the release of many religious prisoners of conscience in the U.S.S.R. We are rejoicing over reports of the release of Alfonsas Svarinskas, a Lithuanian priest, and Viktor Walter, a Pentecostal pastor from eastern Siberia. Also significant are the releases of Hanna Mikhailenko, a Ukrainian Catholic, Vasili Shipilov, a Russian Orthodox believer, and Gederts Melngailis, a Latvian Lutheran (see *Religion and Democracy*, April 1988).

Nevertheless, over one hundred Christians like Vladimir Rusak remain in Soviet prisons -- incarcerated or in internal exile for practicing their faith. Now is the time to renew our prayers and public advocacy on their behalf.

-- Lisa M. Gibney

You can write to Rusak at his camp address:

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