

# RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



The Institute  
on Religion &  
Democracy

June 1989

## U.S. Churches Take New Aim at El Salvador

Religious Activists Overlook One Factor: The Will of the Salvadoran People

***BRIEFLY:** The religious Left is turning its attention back to El Salvador. It believes it has essentially "won" in Nicaragua, with the cutoff of U.S. military aid to the contras. Now it seeks to duplicate this "success" by ending "U.S. intervention" in El Salvador, too. So what's the problem? All this ignores what the Salvadoran people themselves have said they want.*

El Salvador is hardly a new concern for church activists. In the early 1980's, many of them raised an outcry against U.S. support for the juntas which then ruled that bloodied nation. Some openly endorsed the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), who came close to seizing power.

Since, then, however, much has changed in El Salvador. While the U.S. church Left was busy defending the Sandinistas in nearby Nicaragua, the Salvadoran government was gaining legitimacy through five widely-attended, freely-conducted democratic elections. The insurgency has weakened, although the FMLN can still inflict great damage through acts of economic sabotage and political terrorism. Reported killings of civilians -- about 10,000 in 1980 -- have decreased to 200 per year. Formerly the Right was the chief violator of human rights; now it may be the leftist rebels.

Yet the oldline churches' prescription for El Salvador remains the same: stop U.S. assistance. And they are insisting on it with renewed vigor. In February a long list of oldline denominational leaders issued a statement urging "the U.S. Congress to vote 'NO' on any military or war-related aid package for El Salvador." (Note: "war-related" is a code word referring -- disparagingly -- to economic aid.) The statement thundered: "Our commitment to our faith partners in El Salvador requires us to call on the United States government, in the name of the God of justice and peace, to end its role in perpetuating violence upon the Salvadoran people."

On the other hand, the church leaders responded warmly to the latest peace offer from the Salvadoran guerrillas. They cited the report of a recently-returned ecu-



Photo courtesy of Barbara Futterman / Freedom House

In voting on March 19, many Salvadorans bravely ignored threats from Marxist rebels. Here some men who had come in from the countryside near San Salvador try to wash off the dye with which their hands had been stamped (as proof of voting). The men said local guerrillas had threatened to chop off the hands of those who had voted.

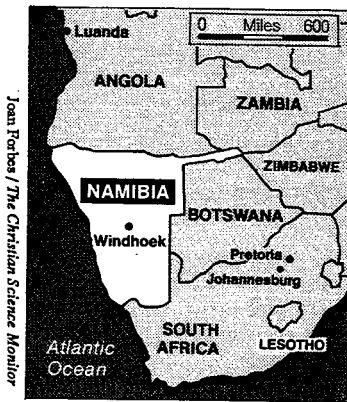
menical delegation to El Salvador: "We believe the people of El Salvador have been presented with a special opportunity [in the rebel offer], an opening to universal negotiations toward a just civil peace.... As Christians, we are committed to doing everything in our power to encourage the successful pursuit of this opportunity...."

Signers of the statement included: President Avery Post of the United Church of Christ; President John Humbert of the Disciples of Christ; General Secretary Daniel Weiss of the American Baptist Churches; Jerry Folk, director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Commission on Church and Society; the top Latin America mission officials of the United Methodist Church and the National Council of Churches; and seven Roman Catholic bishops.

The churches' cure-all formula -- cutting U.S. aid, in hopes of pacifying Marxist forces -- has not brought peace

(El Salvador, continued on page 4)

# Namibian Border Violation Condemned by All But Churches



**BRIEFLY:** When an internationally-condemned border violation threatened to scuttle the Namibia peace accord, the oldline churches did not speak a word of protest. Instead, the World Council of Churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America became the sole apologists for the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas who had attacked.

On April 1st over a thousand armed guerrillas of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) crossed from Angola into Namibia. This was a flagrant breach of the internationally-agreed process for bringing about Namibia's independence. SWAPO is an avowedly Marxist-Leninist "liberation movement" which has fought South African control of Namibia for over 25 years. SWAPO has enjoyed considerable church favor, receiving grants of \$1.7 million over the past 20 years from the World Council of Churches' Special Fund to Combat Racism.

Under the terms of a U.N. resolution and a treaty between South Africa, Angola, and Cuba, South Africa had promised to withdraw from Namibia under several conditions. One condition was that the SWAPO guerrillas would stay in Angola until they could return peacefully to participate in elections (scheduled for November 1) for a new, independent Namibian government. But SWAPO sent its men immediately into Namibia, where South African troops engaged them in numerous skirmishes.

The *New York Times* editors called the SWAPO invasion "a brazenly illegal infiltration." The U.S. State Department, the Angolan government, South Africa, and the United Nations observers (UNTAG) in Namibia all agreed. Friends and foes alike determined that SWAPO had broken the treaty.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, there was one voice in the international community that refused to condemn SWAPO's incursion: the oldline Protestant churches. They pathetically tried to shift all blame onto South Africa and the United Nations.

On April 4, a day after UNTAG reported SWAPO's illegal action, the World Council of Churches issued a statement on the situation. The WCC delicately avoided

any reference to the SWAPO infiltration, instead speaking vaguely of "the outbreak of fighting between South African occupational forces and the SWAPO forces." It offered a novel explanation of that fighting: a delay in the deployment of UNTAG forces had "created a void which has been exploited by the South African occupation forces." The WCC went on to call on the U.N. observers to "shoulder their responsibility," and on South Africa to fulfill its commitments. The council made no demands of SWAPO.

Presiding Bishop Herbert Chilstrom of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also assumed the role of a SWAPO apologist. In a letter to President Bush and Secretary of State Baker, Bishop Chilstrom made the incredible claim that "the SWAPO guerrillas (who crossed

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**It's a sad day when the WCC  
General Secretary demonstrates greater  
"socialist solidarity" than the  
Soviet General Secretary.**

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into Namibia) did not have hostile intent." (Are we to believe that SWAPO troops carried AK-47 rifles and limpet mines just for sport?) The bishop urged Bush and Baker to press the South Africans to return to their bases. He said nothing, however, about the SWAPO guerrillas going back to Angola.

Most of the SWAPO troops have now returned to Angola -- no thanks to the oldline churches. The pressure which brought SWAPO back to reason came rather from its communist allies in Angola, Cuba, and the Soviet Union. Only the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran Church turned a blind eye to the misdeed of their favored "liberation movement." It's a sad day when the WCC General Secretary demonstrates greater "socialist solidarity" than the Soviet General Secretary.

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# Religious Liberty Alert

## Poland: Freedom and Peace

On May 17 the Polish parliament adopted legislation granting full legal status to the Roman Catholic Church. The new laws allow the church to buy and sell property, run schools and hospitals without government interference, and establish independent newspapers and radio and television stations. Freedom of worship is guaranteed to all faiths. The new legislation opens the way for Warsaw to be the first East bloc government with diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The Polish Catholic Church understands the link between democratic values and religious freedom. This has compelled it to play a singular role in the effort to democratize Poland (see *Religion & Democracy*, March 1988). Examples of the church's role were evident in recent discussions the IRD had with Jacek Czaputowicz, a Polish church worker with longstanding ties to Solidarity who toured the United States in May.

Czaputowicz is a founding member of Freedom and Peace, an independent Polish youth movement which advocates democracy and human rights. Freedom and Peace began in 1986 in support of a student who refused to take the Polish military oath because it included a pledge to defend Poland's ties to the Soviet Union. Dozens of the young Polish protesters were jailed, including Czaputowicz himself. During his incarceration, the Catholic Church supported his family.

Freedom and Peace claimed its first success in June 1988 when Poland became the first Eastern bloc country to provide alternative service for conscientious objectors. Then, last July, the military oath was changed to delete the reference to the Soviet Union.

Freedom and Peace is now calling for a reduction of the two-year term of military service, charging that the function of the military is one of ideological indoctrination. "The army wants to change people's characters, to create socialist citizens," said Czaputowicz. "It is wrong." Czaputowicz further charged that "religious practice in the army is almost impossible." Soldiers have few opportunities to go to church, he said, particularly in the early months of service. Freedom and Peace is also demanding that military personnel have access to religious literature.

The guiding ideology of Freedom and Peace is captured in its name. "There is no peace without freedom, without human rights, without democracy," said Czaputowicz. "This was something new for the Western peace movement. They were mainly concerned for disarmament."

Czaputowicz said that the April 4 agreement between the Solidarity trade union and the Polish government "is the only chance" for the country to survive. Polish Roman Catholic authorities are supporting the new accords and



Pope John Paul II embraces Solidarity leader Lech Walesa.

asking people to participate in the June 4 elections. Pope John Paul II received Solidarity head Lech Walesa in a highly symbolic audience in Rome on April 20. The Pope said he offered his prayers that "the country will have a new chance and transformations in the social, political, economic and moral life of the entire society can take place."

Czaputowicz explained how the church was helping in a practical way. He said that the Solidarity Citizens' Committee, the political arm of the opposition movement, decided to use Polish churches as the sites at which to collect signatures for opposition candidates. Three thousand signatures -- accompanied by the signers' addresses and identification numbers -- are necessary to put a candidate on the ballot. Czaputowicz suggested that the church setting will make Polish citizens less "afraid" to commit themselves publicly to a candidate.

The Polish Catholic Church, like its counterparts in Chile and the Philippines, walks a tightrope in its political involvements. Sometimes the price to be paid is severe indeed. As recently as January of this year, a priest who openly sympathized with the Polish opposition, Fr. Stefan Niedzielak, was murdered under suspicious circumstances.

Now there is evidence that, with increasing openness, the role of the church may be changing. For example, some in the opposition are splitting with Catholic officials because the latter have started to push for a change in Poland's liberal abortion laws. While totalitarian repression tended to unite the opposition, greater freedoms will allow opposition differences to emerge. If democratization continues, the Polish Church may become less the lone "defender of the persecuted" and more a voice for particular Christian values in a pluralistic society.

-- Diane L. Knippers

## Who "Lacks Accuracy"?

*The labeling of those who have taken up arms against the government in El Salvador [the FMLN] as "communists" or "Marxist-Leninists" enables those who oppose them to gain substantial support in the United States.... But, in the judgment of the task force, these labels lack accuracy.*

**-- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) task force report**

*It would be dishonest and ridiculous to deny the influence of Marxism and Leninism within the FMLN.*

**-- Joaquin Villalobos, FMLN leader**

(El Salvador, continued from page 1)

and justice to Nicaragua. But church leaders seem confident it will work in El Salvador. The more likely result, however, would be to undermine the democratic government there. A polarization would ensue, strengthening the hands of those -- on the Right as well as the Left -- who seek a violent solution.

### A Political Holy Week

The church statement on El Salvador, distributed by the National Council of Churches' Information Office, was put together by the Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America. The Task Force was founded under the NCC, operates out of 475 Riverside Drive, and is supported by NCC member denominations. In 1981 the Task Force declared the FMLN's political front to be the "legitimate representative" of the Salvadoran people.

This year the Inter-Religious Task Force coordinated a week of demonstrations, liturgies, and other "educational" events focused on El Salvador. March 24 to April 2 may have been Holy Week for the rest of the western Christian world; however, for Task Force activists it was "Central America Week."

While other Christians were remembering the crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday, the Task Force suggested observing a "Stations of the Cross" ceremony directed toward more political ends. For example, the reader at the third station, where Jesus falls for the first time, was to tell the congregation: "In Central America, so called agrarian reform has articulated the longing of the people, but in practice has brought them to their knees." Likewise, the Task Force liturgy for the eighth station provided an updated version of Jesus' admonition to the daughters of Jerusalem: "The message of Jesus is 'Weep for yourselves and your children who as U.S. citizens are part of the sin of U.S. complicity in the suffering of the Central American people.'"

Where do these church activists get their inspiration? They claim it comes from Christians in Central America.

Indeed, the NCC and the Task Force could find ten like-minded Central American churchpeople to sponsor on a speaking tour during Central America Week. And their message was what the NCC wanted to hear: a one-sided denunciation of U.S. policy. But none of the NCC's guests was a top official of a large Central American denomination.

U.S. church activists frequently appeal to a document entitled "The National Agenda for Peace in El Salvador," which they tout as representing the views of the Salvadoran Catholic Church. But this agenda, in fact, clashes repeatedly with the clear statements of the Salvadoran bishops. Far from being "national," it is largely the product of a narrow segment of the Salvadoran Left. (See *Whose National Agenda?*, page 6.)

### What the Salvadoran People Might Know

Where, then, are we to find the true voice of the Salvadoran people? Most naturally, it would seem, in their elections. And the message from the presidential election of March 19 was quite clear. Despite dozens of rebel at-

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**Asked their opinion of the FMLN, only six percent of Salvadorans said "good" or "very good." An overwhelming 61 percent said they had a "bad" or "very bad" view of the rebels.**

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tacks which blacked out power and halted travel on the roads, almost 55 percent of the registered voters cast their ballots. That turnout -- higher than in U.S. elections -- demonstrated an impressive commitment to democracy among Salvadorans. The result of the election, a peaceful transfer of power from one civilian party to another, was equally impressive. The new Salvadoran president, Alfredo Cristiani of the conservative ARENA party, received a strong 54 percent mandate. Foreign observers almost unanimously judged the election free and fair.

The election was a sharp rebuff for the FMLN. While its attempts at sabotage failed to stop the voting, they did undercut the rebels' political allies in the "Democratic Convergence." The Convergence was permitted to run a full campaign, but still could garner no more than 3.8 percent of the vote. Convergence leaders admitted the reason for their poor showing: public revulsion at their ties to the violent guerrillas. A poll by the left-leaning University of Central America confirmed this analysis. Asked their opinion of the FMLN, only six percent of Salvadorans said "good" or "very good." An overwhelming 61 percent said they had a "bad" or "very bad" view of the rebels. (By contrast, the Salvadoran military -- much reviled abroad -- won the approval of its fellow citizens by a 59 percent to 18 percent margin.)

Could it be that the Salvadoran people know something about the FMLN that many U.S. churchpeople do not? Perhaps it is that Salvadorans have seen the true face of the guerrillas in their own harsh words and deeds, whereas U.S. activists often hear only the smooth presentations of

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**If our churches would but listen to Salvadorans and stop denigrating their young "democracy"... they could make a far more helpful contribution to peace and justice in El Salvador.**

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rebel apologists. Maybe, then, we should pay more attention to the insurgents' franker expositions of themselves.

FMLN commander Joaquin Villalobos, for instance, says: "It would be dishonest and ridiculous to deny the influence of Marxism and Leninism within the FMLN.... The FMLN understands Marxism-Leninism as a scientific discipline for analyzing reality and as an organizational theory for struggle" (*Foreign Policy*, Spring 1989). A 1987 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) task force asserted that the label Marxist-Leninist "lacks accuracy" when applied to the FMLN. Perhaps those Presbyterians should have checked with Villalobos before making such a ridiculous statement. Consider, too, a 1988 document in which the rebels set forth the duplicitous strategy behind their peace proposals:

*The dialogue is not an end. It is a means. Whatever form a negotiated political solution takes does not mean that we cease the struggle. Even the best negotiated solution ..., in the most likely event, would mean the continuation of the struggle in all its forms -- political and military -- but now from a position of legitimate and recognized power....*

### **The Consequences of Scoffing at "Democracy"**

Why can't our church leaders hear the voices of Salvadorans? Perhaps it is because they are consumed with contempt for Salvadoran democracy. Fastening on its many shortcomings -- the strong military influence, the persistence of unpunished human rights violations, the weakness of the economy, the dependence upon the United States -- they refuse to give any respect to its election results. This blind hostility emerges undisguised in *Sojourners* magazine, the premier organ of "radical Christianity." A January 1989 *Sojourners* editorial derides El Salvador's government as "our government's . . . pet 'democratic' project," "death-squad 'democracy.'" It demands that the United States "withhold any and all aid from El Salvador, at least until the government stops killing its own people in cold blood."

This scoffing at an imperfect democracy has very serious consequences. It has yielded a church campaign on El Salvador which is ill-founded and unwise at every point. U.S. oldline leaders denounce our government as the funder of genocide in El Salvador, when in fact our aid has made possible striking progress in democracy and human rights. They flatly reject a Salvadoran government which is the clear choice of the people. They have already decided that

Alfredo Cristiani is a death squad stooge. They would deny him all aid, military as well as economic, without even giving him a chance to fulfill the untested promises -- of human rights, peace negotiations, and economic freedom -- which got him elected.

These U.S. religious leaders would grant the FMLN a share of power which it has never earned, and could not earn, in a fair election. And they give unrestrained applause to rebel offers which should be explored with caution. Salvadoran churchpeople, and Salvadorans in general, know that this approach holds no solution for their nation's problems. If our churches would but listen to Salvadorans -- and stop denigrating their young "democracy" by always enclosing the term in quotes -- they could make a far more helpful contribution to peace and justice in El Salvador.

-- Alan Wisdom



Poll-watchers in the town of Cojutepeque. They represent, from left to right, the Authentic Christian Movement (a Christian Democratic splinter), the Christian Democratic Party, the Party of National Conciliation, and the National Republican Alliance (ARENA).

# Whose National Agenda?

A centerpiece of the church Left's Salvador campaign has been a document entitled the "National Agenda for Peace in El Salvador." Notably, this document has shaped the texts of several overtures to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly in June. The National Agenda is a condensation, by U.S. religious activists, of the consensus conclusions of a September 1988 meeting in San Salvador. That meeting, called the "National Debate" in El Salvador, is characterized simply as a broad convocation of social groups under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. Strangely, though, the conclusions the National Agenda draws from the National Debate seem rather one-sided.

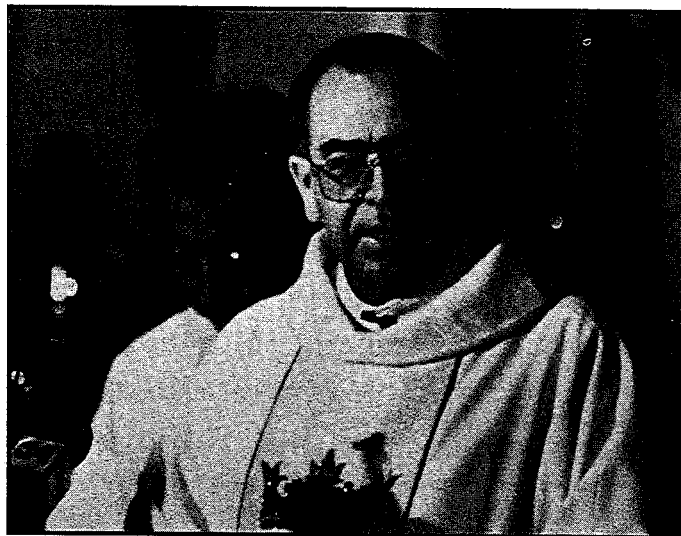
Of the organizations represented in the "National Debate," 95 percent were said to attribute El Salvador's problems to "the failure of the Reagan administration's project," and 98 percent faulted "the bankruptcy of the agro-exporting dependent capitalist model." Similar percentages criticized Salvadoran elections as having had "major flaws" -- chief among them their being "a key element of the United States' counterinsurgency program in its attempt to legitimize the war and neutralize the popular movement." By contrast, the FMLN insurgency was deemed by 88 percent to be "a legitimate form of struggle to overcome an intolerable situation."

There were a few results of the National Debate which the National Agenda condensers did not see fit to report. For instance, Salvadorans at the National Debate said, by a 2-to-1 margin, that the human rights situation had improved. A similar majority opined that the economy was a worse problem than the war. These conclusions might have challenged the U.S. activists' stereotypes of El Salvador.

Not surprisingly, the National Agenda's five-point plan for peace in El Salvador looks like a rebel manifesto. The key point urges "political negotiations leading to the formation of an inclusive government which includes the political and armed opposition." Thus the FMLN would be given a share of power without ever having to prove its support in a free election. The National Agenda also demands that the United States "cancel all war-related aid to the current government of El Salvador." An attached analysis indicates that "war-related aid" means all aid, for "even U.S. aid that appears to be straightforward economic assistance serves, first and foremost, to further the war effort."

How could such an unbalanced document be linked to the Salvadoran Catholic Church -- well-known for trying to mediate the Salvadoran conflict and for endorsing democracy as part of the solution? When the Salvadoran bishops do draw moral distinctions between the two sides, these favor the government. The bishops' August 1985 pastoral letter stated unequivocally:

*We have here, on the one hand, a constitutional government, arising as the fruit of a democratic process, accepted by the massive attendance at the polls in four successive elections*



Arturo Rivera y Damas, Archbishop of San Salvador

RNS Photo / Tidings Photo

*which have been practically a repeated 'referendum' in favor of democracy; and, on the other, we have the FMLN/FDR, which arrogates for itself the title of the people's representative, which it cannot clearly certify, and, moreover, resorts to violence and sabotage as an essential tool of its struggle, by which it puts itself in a situation which we cannot approve.*

Salvadoran Catholic leaders do hope for a cutoff of U.S. military aid, but only when the Soviet bloc will simultaneously end its support for the FMLN.

What happened at the National Debate was that, although Archbishop Rivera y Damas had indeed invited a broad range of over 120 organizations, only about 60 actually sent delegates. Perhaps unwisely, all groups on the Right and most centrist bodies stayed away from the debate. This boycott left a heavily leftist rump; about half of the participating organizations were recognized FMLN fronts. Seeing this unintended result, many of the Salvadoran bishops disassociated themselves from the debate.

That the National Debate had fallen completely into the hands of guerrilla sympathizers became quite obvious when its "permanent committee" endorsed the January 1989 FMLN peace proposal without qualification. Archbishop Rivera y Damas took a very different tack. While urging negotiations on the basis of the FMLN offer, he cautioned that it was "a political proposal" which "has unacceptable points" that would have to be changed. A week earlier the bishops' conference had strongly condemned the guerrillas' practice of assassinations, car bombings, and mines targeted at civilians. The bishops commented: "The FMLN and the rest of the country's violent groups assert that all their actions have their origin in a desire to seek people's liberation. It is, however, clear that people reject 'violent acts abusively conducted on their behalf' (John Paul II)."

U.S. churchpeople might consider which approach provides the best basis for their own statements on El Salvador: the National Agenda's or the Salvadoran bishops'.

-- Alan Wisdom

## The Book Shelf

### *Grey is the Color of Hope*

In 1983, at the age of 28, poet Irina Ratushinskaya was considered dangerous, charged with "anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda," and sentenced to seven years' strict regime camp plus five years' internal exile. She was released and allowed to emigrate in 1986. The recipient of the IRD's 1987 *Religious Freedom Award*, Ratushinskaya has now written of her experiences in *Grey is the Color of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1988, 355 pages, \$18.95).

The book opens with her being sent to a strict regime camp in Barashevo, Mordovia, and placed in a "Small Zone" where the "especially dangerous" women prisoners were kept; they were confined to their own quarters because they were "political" prisoners. At the time of Ratushinskaya's arrival, the Zone population was four. Over the months as the number of women in the Zone increased, the reader becomes vividly aware of the unique relationship that these women developed, a relationship very distinct from that among others (criminal prisoners) in the camp.

Despite different nationalities, backgrounds, and denominations, these women were united under the same motto: "Back to freedom with a clear conscience." Human dignity was maintained at all costs. Ratushinskaya writes, "The need to conduct incessant, enervating battles for the most trivial rights is the main feature of daily life in the camp." If, for example, one prisoner was denied a meeting with her husband, the entire Zone embarked on a hunger strike. For such a matter as too much salt in their swill (which causes half-starved bodies to swell), the women would return their dinners untouched and write letters of complaint to the Procuracy. The combination of a number of complaints with the fact that women had built a network of communication with the outside world would encourage camp authorities to give concessions for fear of reproach from higher-ups.

Even the threat of "SHIZO" (punishment cell) was not a deterrent for the women of the Zone. "She [one of the guards] cannot grasp that not one single one of us would ever change places with her. For we have breathed freedom -- if only freedom from fear."

The book offers a compelling look at the lives of women who command our respect and admiration. Despite relentless battles with camp authorities, they did not waver in their demand to be treated as human beings with dignity. Ratushinskaya writes: "Yes, we are behind barbed wire, they have stripped us of everything they could, they have torn us away from our friends and families, but unless we acknowledge this as their right, we remain free...."

*Grey is the Color of Hope* captivates both the expert in Soviet studies as well as the novice. Some have argued that Ratushinskaya's prose is superior even to her poetry. The book itself is beautifully designed with an elegant type, deckled edges, and a cover evocative of prison grey.

-- Lisa Gibney

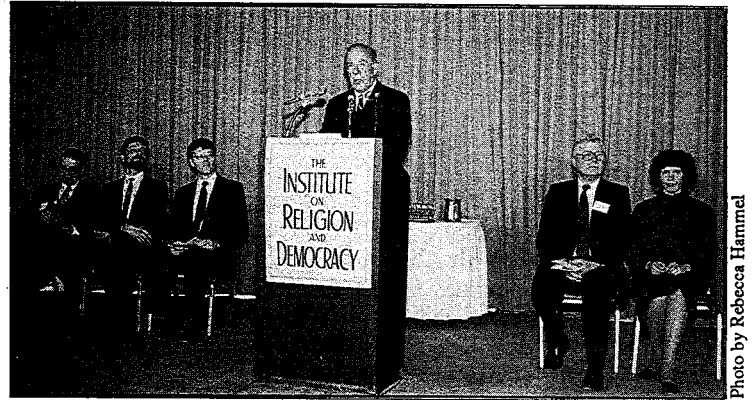


Photo by Rebecca Hammel

Then Secretary of State George Schultz speaks at a reception honoring Irina Ratushinskaya (right) who received IRD's 1987 *Religious Freedom Award*. From left, IRD Board member Carl F.H. Henry, human rights activist Igor Gerashchenko (Irina's husband), IRD Executive Director Kent Hill, and IRD Chairman Ed Robb look on.

### On Film: Soviet "Repentance"

In 1986, an amazing film called "*Repentance*" was produced in Soviet Georgia. It is ostensibly the fictional story of a tyrannical mayor in a Georgian town. But the mayor clearly represents Stalin. The movie tells the story of his destruction of a Christ-like young artist and his wife -- and the artist's daughter's compulsion for vengeance. It is a gripping tale of how the mayor's sins -- and guilt -- are visited upon his son and his son's son.

On one level, the movie is an awful portrayal of the horrors of the Stalinist period. The movie shows men and women being sent into exile without their families knowing where they were or, indeed, if they were still alive. In one powerful scene in the movie, a child searches through a vast muddy timberyard next to the railway station. She is hoping to find the name and location of her exiled father carved into the end of one of the massive logs shipped from Siberia to her town. The desperation, the fear, and the terrors of totalitarianism are stunningly revealed.

One reason this message is so compelling is that this movie is also a fine piece of cinematography, reminiscent of the work of Bergman and, at times, Fellini. The photography and acting are magnificent.

*Repentance* is fundamentally a movie with a Christian message. As its title suggests, it explores the subjects of repentance, guilt, and judgment. And it finally leaves no ambiguity about the centrality of the Christian faith. The merely good, humanitarian opponents of the tyrant are not able to withstand him. It is only Christianity, embodied in the Church, that can answer such evil. And so the film teaches, the Church is worth struggling to preserve, even to the point of suffering exile and death.

- DLK

If "*Repentance*" is not available at your local video store, you may borrow IRD's copy for a week. Just drop us a note and a \$10 check to cover postage and handling (you pay return postage).

# Readers Respond

To the Editor:

As Methodists, we are very much concerned about some of the positions which Bishop C.P. Minnick has taken.

We are learning that there are Methodists in our church and in some other churches within the North Carolina Conference who feel that some of the Bishop's positions do not reflect those of the local church people or the teachings of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church.

Sometimes we learn of his positions second hand, even though we hold positions of leadership within our church. If we hadn't read a recent issue of *Religion & Democracy*, we might not have learned of the Bishop's recent trip to Nicaragua. Thanks for keeping us informed.

Mr. and Mrs. Horace A. Smith  
Raleigh, NC

To the Editor:

Thanks for your book on South Africa [*South Africa: Revolution or Reconciliation?*]. I am very supportive of the IRD and thank you personally for your fine work and leadership. One feels often so surrounded by the liberal-left church lobby that receiving your fine newsletter raises my spirits every month and informs my mind as well.

Dr. Clark Pinnock  
McMaster Divinity School  
Ontario, Canada

To the Editor:

I have just read your January edition of *Religion & Democracy*. You and your colleagues have done an excellent job presenting the situation in which the NCC has gotten itself. I don't think that the organization will fold but its capacity for any positive contribution will not be significant. Keep up the good work.

Dr. Robert L. Wilson  
Professor of Church and Society  
Duke University Divinity School

To the Editor:

Your productions would have more content credibility if you did not undermine your procedural credibility.

Item: the May 1989 issue of *Religion & Democracy*. In this informative paper, Amy L. Sherman's facts about economic analysis lose 98% of their effect because of the epithet use of the term "oldline," twenty times in one article!

I realize that the term "oldline" (or even "sideline") is *au courant* this spring, or even *de rigueur*, in conservative circles. But you would be more persuasive with us middle-of-the-roaders if you avoided pejoratives in referring to Christian denominations whose membership still approaches twenty million.

Mr. Theodore L. Agnew  
Stillwater, OK

To the Editor:

I am writing because I would like to know more about the [Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the U.S.S.R. and its] Adopt-A Prisoner program. I read an article on it and I found it very interesting. I am in seventh grade and when I showed it to the others at one of our junior high meetings we were all excited. We would like to help by "adopting" a prisoner. We are waiting to hear from you. We will also pray for your organization. God bless you.

Miss Hannah Hildebrandt  
Placentia, CA

For readers interested in information about the Coalition for Solidarity with Christians in the U.S.S.R. and the Adopt-A-Prisoner program, please write: Ms. Lisa Gibney, Coordinator, Adopt-A-Prisoner Program, 729 15th Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20005.

*Religion & Democracy* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must be signed and may be edited due to space limitations. Please type or write legibly. Thank you.

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