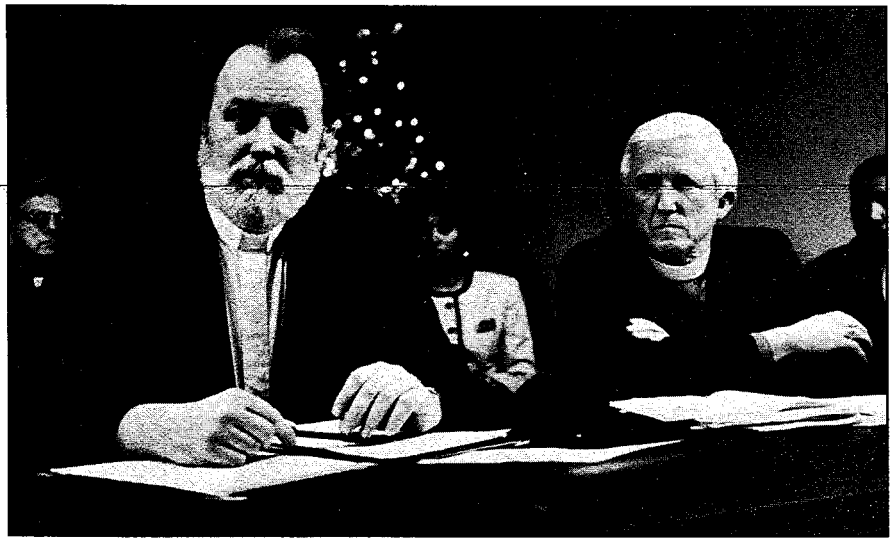
RELIGION & DEMOCRACY

The Institute on Religion & Democracy

February 1991

## *Church Leaders & War:*

# Are These Angels Really Heralds of Peace?



**December Report from Gulf Peacemakers**
*Leonid Kishkovsky, President of the National Council of Churches, and Edmond Browning, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, brief the press after returning from the Middle East in December. On their trip they were joined by Joan Campbell, General Secretary-elect of the NCC; Herbert Chilstrom, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; James Andrews, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA); Paul Sherry, President of the United Church of Christ; and several others. RNS PHOTO.*

By Lawrence E. Adams
and Fredrick P. Jones

A few weeks before "Operation Desert Storm" blew through Iraq and Kuwait, leaders of most major U.S. Protestant denominations journeyed to the Middle East because, as delegation member Jim Wallis of Sojourners fellowship declared, "Peace is too urgent a necessity to leave to political officials." When the delegation returned, they were as convinced as ever that the United States has been guilty of reckless aggression. They declared that the use of force in the Gulf is "theologically" illegitimate, illegal, and cannot be justified by any moral criteria. Does President Bush's decision to fight mean that no justice can come to the Middle East, as these leaders have predicted?

The December trek included religious leaders such as Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, National Council of Churches General Secretary-elect Joan Campbell, NCC President Leonid Kishkovsky, and others. From Cypress they split up to explore Baghdad, Amman, Beirut and Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Damascus. They went to find solutions to each of these crises, which they claim must be understood together as one crisis. They returned only with the message that war is not one of the solutions. They believed this before they left, and had it confirmed by the people they consulted. It seems that hearing from "the people" was supposed to add credibility to religious leaders' views. Interestingly, there was no mention of having met Kuwaitis.

It ought not take a trip to the Middle East to know that the people there didn't want a messy war and instead preferred a peaceful solution. Not even those who consider U.S. military action justifiable believe a war could constitute a "solution." What they believe is that military compellance was a necessary precondition for a just order in the Middle East. If religious leaders want to reject this view, they must outline a

→ *See Angels, page 2*

***Angels,*** *from page 1*

coherent case supporting their position.

There are two classic frameworks for rejecting the use of force. One is the just-war tradition, which historically has been followed by most of the churches these leaders represent. The other is pacifism. It is ironic that at the December 21 press conference, when asked to discuss the just-war criteria, the leaders present turned to the pacifist Wallis to answer. He asserted that the criteria have not been -- and cannot be -- met. He did not acknowledge that he believes the criteria to be irrelevant. For a pacifist, violence is never an option and always should be rejected.

Rather than articulating a consistent pacifism, throughout the crisis Wallis's oldline traveling partners often have attempted to use just-war principles against those who actually believe in them. As background, they employ a particular interpretation of history -- one that shifts fault in the crisis from Hussein to the West. They also draw from liberation theology to deny the possibility of any virtuous action by western nation-states. They do not renounce violence per se, but simply claim that it can never be used toward a just end by western nation-states. Hence, they are selective, rather than principled pacifists. "Just-war" rhetoric is used, but the assumptions about international justice implicit in the tradition have been abandoned.

**Working over Just-War Principles**

How does this pseudo-pacifism affect these leaders' judgment on just-war principles? Three of the principles -- that war be a "last resort," that there be a "just cause," and that only "legitimate" authority may act -- are emphasized by religious leaders.

A November 15 resolution passed by the National Council of Churches charged the United States with "weak resignation to the illogical pursuit of militarism and war." This message is based on a belief that diplomacy and mobilized military force are necessarily incompatible approaches -- as if one were useful independent of the other. But is it reasonable to believe that Saddam would have responded to "good faith" diplomatic initiatives in the absence of any threat of force? It was Iraq which punted diplomacy by conquering and pillaging Kuwait -- against international law as embodied in the U.N. Charter, which upholds the sovereignty of all states and condemns aggression. He also arrayed his forces with offensive posture toward Saudi Arabia. In other words, *he started the war with his blitzkrieg.* Serious observers know that effective negotiated settlements, especially after aggression has begun, require balancing and containing power, not ignoring it.

Behind their concern that the United States would not view war as a "last resort," however, is the assumption stated by delegation member Melvin Talbert that America is the "real aggressor." Talbert, a United Methodist bishop who chaired the committee that drafted the NCC resolution, recently urged other bishops to demonstrate against U.S. aggression, saying that "it seems we haven't learned anything from Vietnam and Korea." Iraq, however, must have learned something from how the American public handled those conflicts. The Iraqi ambassador

## Early Responses to War

National Council of Churches' President Leonid Kishkovsky and General Secretary James Hamilton stated January 17 that "the resort to war reflects a failure for the human spirit" and that their opposition to military force was based on "the deepest roots of our Christian faith." They emphasized the church's pastoral and humanitarian work during the crisis.

World Council of Churches' General Secretary Emilio Castro issued a statement the same day deploring the "US government's decision to initiate hostilities." The WCC "regrets" that the U.N. failed to find a peaceful resolution and that Iraq did not respond to international appeals. He called for a cease-fire and talks toward "a just, equitable and peaceful solution."

Speaking for the National Council of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk wrote President Bush on the January 15th deadline that war "likely" would violate just-war principles. In contrast, Archbishop James Cardinal Hickey preached January 17 about the "duty not to abandon a nation that is attacked," saying that "our moral tradition does not sustain peace at any price." Ralph Bohlmann, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, said that it is "our duty as Christian citizens to support the responsible actions of our government," though we "must recognize the consciences" of those who may disagree with the war. Many church leaders called for moral limits on the military, especially regarding the protection of civilians.

Pax Christi, a Roman Catholic group, and Sojourners fellowship urged non-violent protests against the war. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Pax Christi called on Catholic leaders to further analyze the moral questions involved and to "give the kind of leadership that ... [they] are supposed to give" -- instead of getting behind the President and avoiding divisions in the church.

extensively cited the NCC resolution -- which he considered to reflect his concerns -- during the November 29 U.N. Security Council debate.

Central to these pronouncements is the church leaders' belief about western imperialism, a belief which both denies the possibility of a "just cause" for U.S. involvement and denies the legitimate authority of the political leaders who must decide and act. Wallis told IRD that American complicity in prosecuting the Cold War removed its moral qualifications for world leadership. Others, including the NCC, cite previous American inconsistencies in dealing with Iraq, as well as failure to respond to other injustices around the world, as proof that President Bush is incapable of leading a responsible effort -- even though he is backed by virtually the entire world community.

Further, some religious leaders claim that the conflict is all about oil and the western consumptive lifestyle. Oil, said Wallis, is "a modern idol" that "demands human sacrifice" which the U.S. government is willing to offer. Thus, the possibility of fighting for these "economic" reasons -- regardless of how many lives around the world could be held hostage by a Hussein-controlled oil cartel -- has been ruled out by the American religious elite. This position was articulated even *before* President Bush mobilized for a possible offensive strike against Hussein's forces.

True, the United States and other powers have not always acted in the Middle East in ways that lead to peace and justice. But this fails as an excuse for inaction over Iraqi aggression, or as a reason to handcuff cooperative efforts. Nor does it prove that imperialism rather than principle is the sole source of U.S. action. Danger and injustice would not disappear automatically with the removal of U.S. leadership.

U.N. resolve, to which oldline leaders typically defer, no longer is enough for them. Our church peacemakers keep raising the ante. The November NCC resolution called for the immediate removal of all U.S. troops that had not been "explicitly recommended" by the U.N. Security Council. The Security Council's approval for the use of force after January 15 does not satisfy church leaders' demands. The delegation insisted upon its return that truly legitimate U.N. action requires convening an international conference to resolve the entire range of problems in the Middle East, including the Palestinians.

But the NCC and denominational leaders misunderstand the nature of the U.N. in their view of "legitimate" authority. Multilateralism is good and necessary both for effectiveness and to check capricious national interests. But the U.N. cannot, in the midst of crisis, suddenly become something it was never created to be. The Security Council was not designed as the foundation of a legitimate world government with an independent life. It is a forum between states and especially "great powers," in which they determine how they, *as states,* should act collectively.

Oldline religious leaders apparently will accept U.N. leadership only if it acts according to their idealized view of the institution which no operative international principle or law supports. In fact, by so

RNS Photo

*Though all oldline leaders denounce Hussein, many in the oldline attempt to shift the blame for the crisis from Hussein to the West*

frequently linking resolution of the Kuwait invasion to the Palestinian question in Israel (an important but truly separate issue), these leaders only promise to deadlock the diplomacy they advocate.

**The Need for Christian Reflection**

U.S. policymakers ought to consider Christian reflection on issues of war and peace. That is why official religious voices have potential to be helpful. But oldline U.S. religious leaders issued their injunctions in this situation quite early, building on clear ideological assumptions, before the nature of the U.S. response was fully known. Voices so suspicious of the U.S. taking responsibility in the world are not -- and in most cases do not deserve to be -- taken seriously by U.S. policymakers.

Policymakers must, of course, answer questions before God about the prudence of any strategy adopted. More will be expected than a legalistic

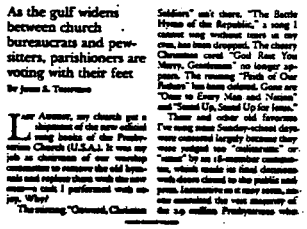
→ *See Angels, page 7*

# What about Those Old Songs, Gang?

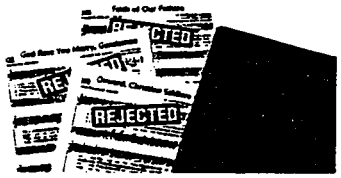
The December, 1990 issue of *Reader's Digest* carries an article by John Tompkins, former correspondent for *Time,* the *Wall Street Journal* and other publications of note. The article, "Look What They've Done to My Songs," recounts Mr. Tompkins' surprise over the outcome of the recent Presbyterian hymnal revision process, in which many of the old favorites were eliminated. Tompkins, a member of Madison Avenue Presbyterian in New York, decided to investigate why these hymns were taken out. He reports a number of discoveries -- ideological tests for what stayed in and what went, a record of closed-door meetings, and unbalanced panels doing the bulk of the work. His article describes other developments he learned of in America's churches -- the National Council of Churches' condemnation of the discovery of America by Columbus, the strength of "gay caucuses," the decline in belief in God's existence in seminaries. The article gives the address of the IRD as a source of information about renewal efforts within the historic denominations.

An early alarm was sounded by Marj Carpenter of the Presbyterian News Service. She became aware of the article when the *Digest* called her for standard fact-checking; before the issue hit the streets, she had issued an all-points bulletin to presbytery executives. Carpenter, according to her own account, acknowledged to the*Digest* some of the political positions taken by the Presbyterian General Assembly and the Washington Office. She was told, in response to her inquiry, that the article was written by a "concerned Presbyterian from a New York City church [who] loves his church but hates the direction it is going." To which Carpenter replied: "It sounds like a man who says he loves his wife and beats her each night." Three days later she asked *Reader's Digest* not to run the story. They ran it anyway.

The simple, four-page *Digest* story really got the attention of oldline leaders. The Presbyterian


As the gulf widens between church bureaucrats and pew-sitters, parishioners are voting with their feet

Look What They've Done to My Songs




Church (U.S.A.) was especially sensitive, perhaps since Tompkins identifies himself as a Presbyterian. David Stoner, Executive Director of the Presbyterian General Assembly Council, responded with an eight-page defense of the hymnal process and of the positions of the General Assembly and the NCC on which Tompkins comments. Stoner at least took Tompkins' concerns seriously enough to respond without spousal-abuse analogies. Reports and responses to the *Digest* article also were issued by the other leading denominations.

We at the IRD noted that many commentators took opportunity to pounce on the brief reference to us in the article. Stoner's response warned Presbyterians that "any reader who is generally concerned that the church should concentrate on spirituality rather than politics" should be aware that the IRD (which is not a church, by the way) has a "well defined social philosophy" and a "strongly political agenda." We take that as something of a compliment, because we do affirm that faith relates to public life, and that Christians should be careful to approach that responsibility biblically and prudently.

Less charitable, however, was the "analysis" in the December 12 *Christian Century,* the premier ecumenical journal, by Editor James Wall. After accusing Tompkins of hooking unsuspecting, unsophisticated readers with "tired old complaints" about favorite hymns that are missing, Wall himself trots out some old placards of his own that have marched around our block a few times. Wall says Tompkins picks IRD as "a handy clearinghouse" for the disaffected. He goes on to complain that the IRD "was created in those heady days when Ronald Reagan came into office promising to eradicate 'the evil empire' with history's largest military buildup. Since that propitious start, IRD has indeed served as a clearinghouse for anyone disenchanted with mainline Protestantism, and may have fostered some of that disenchantment with its constant call to arms against mainliners and the NCC."

Talk about interesting logic. Apparently, along with commencing operations in the early 80s, the

connection between the Reagan policy against the "evil empire" (and where is that empire now, Jim?) and our critique of the mainline (to which we should attribute similar results?) is the location of "IRD headquarters a short distance from the Reagan White House." And that our positions "bear a remarkable resemblance to the anticommunist policies of the Reagan-Bush administration." We suppose these are to be taken as serious charges. We wonder how the hundreds of organizations with offices closer to the White House than ours (the AFL-CIO, for example) would respond to the idea that proximity equals complicity in the Reagan agenda. And how can we take seriously the idea that it is a flaw to "bear a resemblance" to opposition to totalitarianism, such as was also shown by many Democrats and the people of Eastern Europe?

But how do we respond to such inferences? Have we stopped beating our wives? Wall continues with a litany of accusations which we have heard before. He hints at the "evidence" floating around for years about IRD secret funding, about our being a front for funneling funds to the contras, and the like. These charges have appeared in such sources as *People of God* by Penny Lernoux and the recent *Spiritual Warfare* by Sara Diamond. They are totally fabricated, and based on "research" which did *not* include interviewing the leadership of IRD, or reviewing our annual funding report or quoting reliable sources. Wall also never mentions our programs in advocating religious liberty and in economic development.

Mr. Wall's dusty charges against the IRD show how little he has to offer in response to concerns like those of Mr. Tompkins. He can only huff that "people with more impressive theological credentials than the Reader's Digest" have seen similar problems, and that some leaders have been pursuing spiritual renewal "long before the IRD and the Digest wrapped religiosity in the Reagan banner." So much for the "inclusiveness" and "dialogue" so often touted in the oldline.

*From the Pews*

# Aiming to Serve Methodist Women with Integrity

By L. Faye Short

As I read the first two chapters of *Mythmakers: Gospel, Culture and the Media,* tears fell upon the open pages of my book. Here in this 1990 National Council of Churches mission study book (which will be used by many Methodists) by William F. Fore was a deliberate attack upon traditional Christian doctrine. Dr. Fore teaches that our experience of the gospel is more determined by culture than by the gospel's objective reality or truth. Scripture is merely something "we are indebted to" rather than authoritative for Christian living.

This was not the first time my heart had been heavy for the women of our church. As Secretary of Program Resources for United Methodist Women in my annual conference, I had reviewed, displayed and sold much material which I found to be detrimental to Scriptural Christian faith and practice. Some of these books espoused radical theologies, promoted leftist political causes, and undermined personal moral values. It was a difficult place to serve in, but I endeavored to do so with integrity, taking it as an opportunity to understand the direction of UM Women and to come to love and appreciate the women with whom I've worked.

How I do value United Methodist women! Almost without exception, those who serve on the local, district and conference level are sincere, competent Christian women. But I have observed that many times, loyalty to UM Women blinds some to the direction which the Women's Division has taken the organization over the years. The necessity to conform to Women's Division policy in order to advance in UM Women has caused some women to put aside legitimate concerns about this organization which belongs to them.

That's why I'm now Co-Director of the Evangelical Coalition for United Methodist Women. Through this organization I'm finding hundreds of women who are questioning the liberal theological and left-wing social and political agenda reflected in the programs of the Women's Division. We are working together for renewal and accountability in the UM Women. Why? Because we love it -- and particularly because we love Christ and the women of our church.

*Faye Short is the co-director of the Evangelical Coalition for UM Women, which is sponsored by Good News, the Mission Society for United Methodists, and IRD. For more information, write Faye: Rt. 2, Box 490, Commerce, GA 30529.*

Religious Liberty Alert

# Burmese Dictator Denies Democracy

## *Buddhist Monks Object, Dissent Stifled*

By Steve Beard

As the cries for democratic reform became reality in much of Eastern Europe and Central America, they fell on deaf ears in totalitarian countries in Asia. Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and China continue to be ruled by brutal dictatorships. Add to that list Myanmar, more commonly known as Burma, where democratic foment has caused religious liberty infractions.

For 26 years, Myanmar has been controlled by the iron-fisted policies of General Ne Win's military dictatorship and the economically destructive "Burmese way to socialism." What once had the potential to be one of the most prosperous nations in the region has seen its future squandered by brutal and inept leadership.

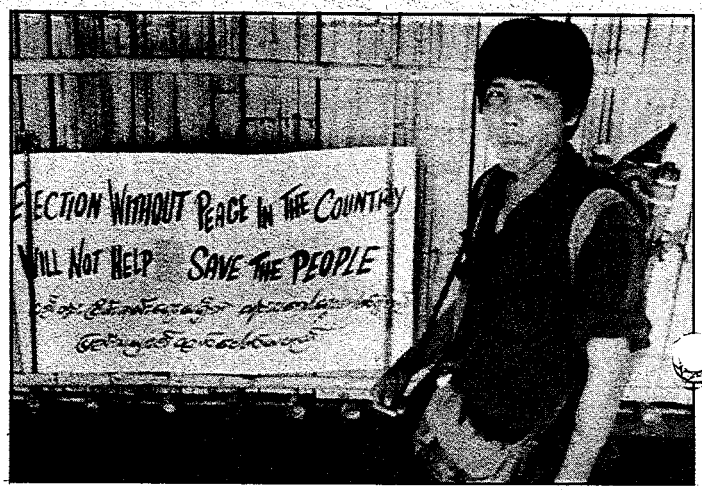
In August 1988, thousands of unarmed pro-democratic demonstrators, mostly students, were killed at the hands of their own government for peacefully expressing their political beliefs. In many ways, Burma foreshadowed the massacre in China's Tiananmen Square.

Western diplomatic and economic wrist-slapping caused the government to feign "free and fair" multi-party elections on May 27, 1990. Most observers scoffed at the government's cynical attempt to gain public relations points with Western governments. This election facade was completely discredited by the fact that the leading dissident candidate, Aung San Suu Kyi, the co-founder of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the daughter of a famous Burmese hero, was under house arrest. Tin Oo, chairman of the NLD, had been sentenced to hard labor.

Nevertheless, the League scored a landslide victory, winning fully 80 per cent of the seats of the National Assembly. After the military's initial shock, it looked briefly as if it might actually transfer power. That proved to be a fleeting notion when the military insisted that a new constitution must be written, submitted to referendum, and approved by the army before the NLD could assume leadership. In other words, this process would carry on indefinitely.

Protesting the human rights record and the failure of the military government to transfer power, Burmese Buddhist monks in the city of Mandalay refused to accept alms from soldiers or their families. (Giving alms to monks is considered to be a very important step in earning merit in the life to come.) In retaliation, government troops raided monasteries, arrested hundreds of monks, and threatened them with hearings before military tribunals.

This boycott of military alms began last August when student protesters and monks held a small demonstration commemorating the two-year anniversary of the brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators. This protest led to clashes with soldiers in which at least one monk was killed.




**Little Hope for Freedom**

*A member of the All Burma Students Democratic Front stands next to a poster urging a boycott of the Burmese elections last May because of repression against the opposition. The opposition still prevailed in the vote, but the results were nullified by the government. REUTER.*

Since that time, the boycott has been ended, dissident Buddhist sects have been disbanded, and elderly abbots and senior monks have been televised accepting alms and gifts from military leaders. It is interesting to notice, however, that an army invulnerable to physical attack is nevertheless deeply concerned about religious sanctions against it.

**Taking Action:** *IRD supporters should address all appeals for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, other political prisoners and pro-democratic monks to: General Saw Maung, Chairman, State Law and Order Restoration Council, Yangon, Union of Myanmar. Be sure to send copies of letters to President Bush, The White House, Washington, DC* 20500.

***Angels,*** *from page 3*

listing of how moral criteria have been met in order to justify war. There is, however, no evidence that President Bush and his allies have attempted, morally and practically, to eliminate options so that only war involving allied forces remained. The most just and peaceful solution to this unresolved war was left wide open for five months: for Hussein to leave Kuwait as a step in reversing the injustice. Diplomacy and sanctions, as means consistent with just-war requirements to avoid war, were implemented.

Good questions -- from the just-war tradition -- do challenge the wisdom of a massive land war under the current circumstances. But from the beginning it was necessary to consider the possibility of various kinds of hostilities, and to be prepared for them if the necessity arose. Military preparation against Iraq did not make further war inevitable, as some religious leaders have argued; instead, it served to make credible the world community's concern for justice and open the way for a peaceful, negotiated settlement.

*The most just and peaceful solution to this unresolved war was left wide open for five months: for Hussein to leave Kuwait as a step in reversing the injustice*

British theologian Philip Crowe recently suggested that religious leaders have a weighty responsibility in deliberating and speaking publicly on such matters: "The job of the bishops is to provide strong, serious and challenging support for political leaders in the decisions they have to make." A British bishop added, "It is sometimes wise to remain silent. Chattering about everything is a trap into which many religious leaders have fallen." Perhaps our religious leaders would benefit from such counsel, and weigh carefully their calling and the impact of their words and actions.

# NCC Draws Criticism on November Statement

Critics of the November National Council of Churches' resolution on the Persian Gulf crisis have come from several sources. According to Religious News Service, some American Jewish groups have questioned the resolution's criticism of American selectivity in implementing United Nations resolutions. The NCC accused the United States of pressing the U.N. on the Kuwaiti issue, while neglecting resolutions on Israel's occupied territories.

The Jewish groups said that the two situations are quite different. U.N. resolutions on Kuwait call for immediate Iraqi withdrawal. The resolutions on the occupied territories call for negotiation with Arabs, which officials from the Anti-Defamation League said has not been achieved "because of Arab resistance to the resolutions."

In response to these concerns from the ADL and others, NCC President Leonid Kishkovsky told RNS that "we have sometimes not found the best way to state things." The NCC General Board might have expressed better their concerns for Israel if they'd had more time, Kishkovsky added.

A group of activists from a Czechosolovakian research center also criticized U.S. church leaders. A statement, addressed "to the Protestants of the United States of America" and signed by 25 people, said that did not trust church representatives "who in the name of peace hamper the Gulf-area initiative of your president." U.S. religious leaders, they added, first underestimated the criminal nature of Marxist regimes, and now they underestimate Hussein. "They defend peace in their speeches, but ... they help prepare a terrible war in the same way as Chamberlain and Daladier perpared war in 1938 by giving Czechoslovakia to Hitler in the foolish belief that they were saving peace."

*Spoke To Soon?*

# World Methodists Pick Gorbachev for Peace Award

*"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ...."*
*-- 1 John 4:1*

In light of Soviet Red Army and "Black Beret" mid-January strikes against dissident Baltic republics, presenters of the 1990 World Methodist Peace Award were put into an awkward position of defending their choice of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev as the "one person who accomplished most for world peace" in 1990.

The Rev. Joe Hale, World Methodist Council (WMC) General Secretary, emphasized after the January 1991 ceremony that the award had been bestowed upon the Soviet leader for accomplishments made in the late 1980s and in 1990 -- rather than this year.

"The Soviet crackdown in Lithuania violates the award and must be condemned," he told United Methodist News Service.

According to the citation, the award was granted to Mr. Gorbachev because of his "courageous, creative and consistent actions beginning in the late 1980s."

Since the Council officers voted in September to give the "Peace Award" to Mr. Gorbachev, pro-independence groups in the Soviet-occupied Baltic republics have faced stiff Kremlin resistance, including bloody crackdowns against mostly unarmed protesters in Lithuania and Latvia.

United Methodists should have a special interest in the Baltic republics. With 2,000 official members, the small but flourishing Estonian branch of the United Methodist family has 2,000 official members. The 700-member church in Tallinn, Estonia's capital, is the largest Methodist church in Europe.

The Rev. Emilio Castro, a Uruguayan Methodist and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, strongly protested the crackdown in Lithuania. "We view with profound disquiet the measures by your government over the past few days in Lithuania," Castro told Gorbachev in a Jan. 14 telegram.

"At a time when you are seeking a new world order in the Soviet Union, respecting the dignity and legitimate aspirations of the many diverse republics, we must protest strongly at the deployment of troops and military action in Lithuania," he added.

***Religion & Democracy***
monthly publication of the
Institute on Religion and
Democracy
1331 H Street, N.W., Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005-4706
(202) 393-3200

**Kent R. Hill**
Executive Director and Editor
**Diane L. Knippers**
Deputy Director and
Executive Editor
**Lawrence E. Adams**
International Affairs Associate
**Alan F. Wisdom**
Senior Research Associate
**Fredrick P. Jones**
Research Associate and
Managing Editor

IRD membership is $25 per year (includes newsletter); newsletter subscription, $15 per year. Tax-deductible contributions in any amount are welcome.

*Religion & Democracy*
1331 H Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005