

## China

### Responding to Religious Repression Half a World Away

By Diane L. Knippers

How do you begin to give a bunch of wiggly, playful 12-year-olds a vision of compassionate concern for the Church around the world? I do it by reading stories about contemporary Chinese Christians to my sixth grade Sunday school class.

Out of the Chinese church have come dramatic tales of suffering and courage, of adventure and faith. My students have been sobered and committed to prayerful action on behalf of fellow believers half a world away.

Earlier this year, for example, we spent a class period making home-made Easter cards for a tent-maker missionary from our own congregation who serves in China. While the kids were elbow deep in construction paper, glitter, and glue, I read them the story of Brother Jonah, a 73-year-old itinerant Chinese preacher. The article, taken from a December 1990 News Network International special report, concludes:

It had been an amazing weekend. It had included nine hours of bicycle pedaling, 40 hours on a hard railway seat, and eight hours on a bumpy bus. Jonah had seen more than 50 Chinese come to the Lord in a remote village, founded a church, given an all-night seminar on Bible doctrine to 10 eager young people on the train, reconciled the leaders of 5,000 saints, and converted a high-ranking party cadre through the healing of his son -- and let us not forget near-capture by the Public Security Bureau ....

Earlier in the year, I read another story to my students -- an account of the arrest of a prominent house-church leader in Canton, Pastor Lin Xiangao. On February 22, 1990, Pastor Lin's home and church were searched, thousands of tracts, Bibles, hymnbooks and other materials confiscated, and he was interrogated for 21 hours. He has been hauled

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When the World Council of Churches puts forth the Holy Spirit as its Assembly theme, many rightly took notice. The result, however, was a number of serious theological questions that could result in a break in the ecumenical movement. See the second part of Lawrence Adams' reports on February's Canberra Assembly on page 4.

Have you ever been to the national meeting of your denomination?

Q. Whitfield Ayres tells about his first experience at the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly. What he found was discussion far removed from the concerns of local churches and little room for dissent. See page 3.

#### Religious Liberty Alert



Pastor Lin Xiangao

NN/D.Eng

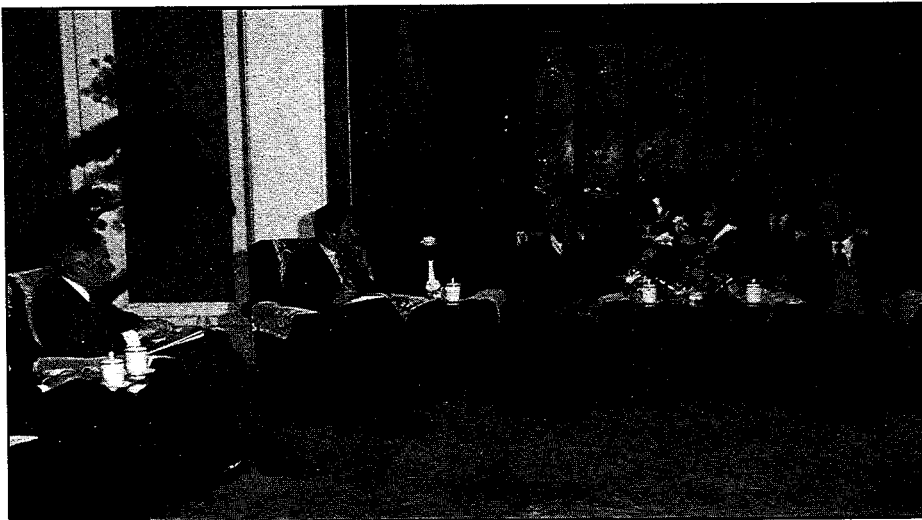
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before the Public Security Bureau at least eleven times since. But for Pastor Lin, all this is nothing new. From the mid-fifties through 1978 he served over 21 years in labor camps. At points, Pastor Lin's most recent narrative reads like a chapter from the New Testament:

[My interrogators] asked me if there really is a God and whether Jesus truly rose again. I said that God truly exists and Jesus actually rose again.... If I did not believe that Jesus truly rose again, when I was first arrested [in the fifties], I would have discarded this dead Jesus.... But after I was arrested twice, my faith was not only strengthened, but I proclaimed the risen Christ....

These are not isolated cases. Nearly two years ago, the Chinese authorities launched the terrible crackdown against Chinese dissidents during the Tiananmen Square massacre. This crackdown has been extended to the Christian church. Some China-watchers suggest that, even though many Chinese Christians are steadfastly apolitical, China's communist leaders view the role of the Church in the transformation of Eastern Europe with considerable fear.

According to a comprehensive report issued in March by the Washington-based Puebla Institute, 77 Christian leaders known by name are currently under arrest in China. These include 20 Catholic bishops, six arrested since July 1990. Some 400 Protestants have been arrested, with most detained for short periods. Hundreds of churches have been closed. Puebla charges that the government crackdown against religious leaders "involves mass arrests, detentions,



*Reps. Frank Wolf (left) and Chris Smith (next on right) meet with Chinese Premier Li Peng (far right) during a recent trip to Beijing. Wolf and Smith presented Peng with a list of Chinese prisoners of conscience that they said should be released.*

brainwashing, and torture, as well as church closings and confiscation of Christian literature." The Puebla report documents electric shock and other torture being used against some of the religious prisoners, resulting in four deaths since mid-1989.

Some prominent Americans are speaking out against the brutal repression of Chinese Christians. Former president Jimmy Carter, during a mid-April visit to China, strenuously protested the continued imprisonment of believers. Congressmen Frank Wolf (VA) and Chris Smith (NJ), in a late March visit to China, likewise presented Chinese Premier Li Peng with a letter signed by 110 members of Congress which asked for the release of religious prisoners of conscience. They warned high-ranking communist officials that China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status with the United States was in jeopardy if China did not improve its human rights record.

These timely protests stand in contrast to the relative silence of

U.S. church bodies on this question. Most reprehensible was the action of the February World Council of Churches' General Assembly. Assembly delegates voted overwhelmingly to accept the China Christian Council (CCC) -- the government-sanctioned and controlled Protestant movement in China -- as a full member of the WCC. At the same time, the Council neglected to say a word about the increasingly difficult status of persecuted Chinese Roman Catholics or independent Protestants, who vastly outnumber the membership of the registered churches. Indeed, one of the Chinese representatives welcomed by the WCC Assembly, Bishop Shen Yifan, actually attacked the independent churches at a CCC conference last November by calling their members "those who steal money, rape women, destroy life and health, spread rumors and destroy social order." The WCC's pattern of cooperating with the registered church and neglecting the plight of persecuted Christians is repeated consistently

throughout the oldline U.S. churches.

**Taking Action:**

1) **Information.** You may order copies of the stories of Brother Jonah and Pastor Lin (the latter includes related Bible references and discussion questions), both suitable for use with study groups for older children through adult, from the IRD, for \$3.00 per set, \$2.00 for orders of 10 or more. The Puebla Institute report is also available for \$3.00; write 1030 15th Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20005. Other excellent sources of information on the Chinese church and other cases of religious persecution include Christian Solidarity International, 12600 Billington Road, Silver Spring, MD 20904 and News Network International, P.O. Box 28001, Santa Ana, CA 92799 (\$75 for 16 news mailings per year).

2) **Protest.** Write (or organize drafting a letter from your local church) to the Chinese ambassador, protesting the imprisonment of Christians for their faith: The Honorable Zhu Quizhen, 2300 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20008. You may want to consider writing your members of Congress and encourage them to investigate both religious repression in China and the feasibility of conditioning the renewal of Most Favored Nation trading status on improvement of China's human rights record.

3) **Mobilize.** The relative silence of U.S. church bodies on this issue is a scandal. Write your church leaders and urge them to speak out on behalf of *all* believers in China. You may request a sample church resolution from the IRD office.

**From the Pews**

# Culture Clash

## *Different priorities, perspectives battle at national church conventions*

By Q. Whitfield Ayres

Attending a national denominational convention can be a culture shock. It was for me, a lay Presbyterian. Those who expect our church's General Assembly in June to address the concerns that consume local congregations are in for a rude awakening. The church harbors two clashing cultures with dramatically different agendas, values and ideas about the appropriate role for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The local church culture is dominated by efforts to offer a Christian perspective to those often overwhelmed by the secular pressures of modern life. Scratch the surface of outwardly happy and successful Presbyterians and you frequently find troubled souls searching for answers to life's fundamental questions. The local church culture sees a major part of its mission as addressing deep-seated spiritual and emotional needs of its members, and placing in proper perspective the temporal concerns of the world.

When the local church culture reaches beyond the immediate needs of its members, it normally focuses on meeting community needs for shelter and food, advancing missionary work, stimulating new church development, and providing greater support for ministers and struggling congregations.

A lay commissioner to the Presbyterian General Assembly will find most of these concerns to be obscured. The culture of the national church is dominated, instead, by efforts to promote the agenda, values, and ideas of the radical political left. The most recent evidence is a report from the Task Force on Human Sexuality that countenances extramarital sex and calls for the ordination of homosexuals, but the tone and perspective of that report are replicated in numerous other General Assembly statements.

One example occurred when I served as moderator of the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee at the 1986 General Assembly. Among the reports we considered was a statement proposed by the Advisory Council on Church and Society that condemned U.S. aid to the *contra* army in Nicaragua. The draft included an emotional diatribe against the U.S. government for its support of the *contras*, along with an amazingly sympathetic treatment of blatant human rights violations by the Marxist-Leninist Sandinista regime.

To provide another option for consideration, I drafted an alternative statement that opposed all outside intervention in the region by the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. It also called on the Sandinistas and the *contras* to  
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*NOTE: In the April issue of Religion and Democracy, Lawrence Adams reported on the political results of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, held February 7-20 in Canberra, Australia, with the theme: "Come Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation." In this second part of his report, he focuses on theological and ethical issues.*

## 'Spirit' not Always Linked to 'Truth' at Recent WCC Assembly



By Lawrence E. Adams

A major report of the WCC Assembly, titled "Giver of Life, Sustain Your Creation," brought the WCC into the center of the environmental ideology now sweeping the ecumenical churches. The report lays out a "theology of creation," then elaborates an "ethic of economy and ecology" and ends with specific demands for action. Its claims are sweeping regarding the "theological failures of the past" and in its certainty that the ecological balance is in deep crisis.

The ethical program envisions an "alternative model of society" in which "people of different faiths ... learn from each other's spirituality" to create "a world in which the needs of all creation are integrated...." Beyond the reform of current institutions, the report calls for revamping "the International Economic Order" and a reconception of economic thinking that is based on "sustainability." Most specifically, an "Earth Charter" modeled on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights -- known as the Universal Declaration of Human Obligations Towards Nature -- is to be enacted.

The report calls for the alteration of global education in order to proliferate a "sustainable spirituality" based on "global interdependence." "Only the recognition on a worldwide scale of the oneness of creation can provide the critical global consciousness necessary to chart a new course for a sustainable future," according to the report.

This new vision requires a "critical examination of the church's faith, polity and structures ... if the spiritual and organizational resources of the church should meet human and ecological needs. This implies a redirection of church policies, priorities and programmes." Further, "the understanding of creation theology and of

an ethic of economy and ecology should be reflected in the life and work of the church, through its study of the Bible, its teachings, hymns, liturgies, prayers, the institution of the sacraments and through its witness." The statement goes on to give marching orders to churches in specific regions for political action. As a WCC staffer said, the WCC does speak to the churches.

### Spirit and truth?

It should be no surprise then that the crucial concerns of Assembly deliberations turned on basic theological questions. Focusing on the Spirit was a new departure for the WCC. It was deliberately undertaken in response to a wider demand in the churches for spiritual reality and to the historic emphases of the Orthodox churches. Other purposes were also at work, as seen in efforts to expose delegates to "aboriginal spirituality." The uniqueness of Christ and the compatibility of Christianity with the "truth" found in other religions inevitably became points of contention in Assembly discussions.

The question that emerged at Canberra was basic. What determines the definition of truth: revelation or experience? How do we know when and in what ways the Spirit is at work? What are the signs? Is it a true Word from a certain authority, or self-defining perception of need and crisis? To summarize, WCC leadership apparently wanted the Spirit without the Logos. They wanted Energy without the Word to define and delineate, and without the Incarnation to give substance. They wanted grace without the body and the blood.

The two keynote addresses on the theme, which set up the major debates of the Assembly, were in great contrast. The first, from Parthenios, Ecumenical (Oriental) Patriarch of Alexandria, carefully argued the Orthodox perspective on the nature of the Spirit and his

work. Parthenios asserted, "When we speak about the Holy Spirit, we are speaking about the Holy Trinity. There is no Holy Spirit apart from the Holy Trinity. We live in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We do not separate them. Our God is One." It was polished and careful, delivered in Greek, serious and restrained, yet boring to many participants.

The other keynote address was that of Korean theologian Chung Hyun-Kyung, accompanied by drums, gongs, dancers and delivered in energetic voice. This by far proved to be the most controversial event of the Assembly. Chung began by reciting the names of many who had died, then burned the list of their names, supposedly offering their spirits release. She went on to refer to Korea as a land full of spirits "who were killed or died unjustly [and] became wandering spirits... Without hearing the cries of these spirits we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit." Chung then indicated that the Asian goddess *Kwan In* serves as the best "image for the Holy Spirit," and called for re-reading the Bible from the point of view of mountains, trees and birds.

Chung's speech resurrected the ancient debate over "syncretism" -- the degree to which the Christian faith can and should accommodate other religious practices, and whether other faiths have sufficient truth without being troubled by the gospel of Christ. This question is of course crucial in defining the nature of mission and the identity of the church. These concerns were prevalent in the debates over the "integrity of creation" -- in response to the idea that other religions offer a better basis for a new "theology of creation." Syncretism also affected discussions which dealt with unity, dialogue with "other living faiths" and determining "what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

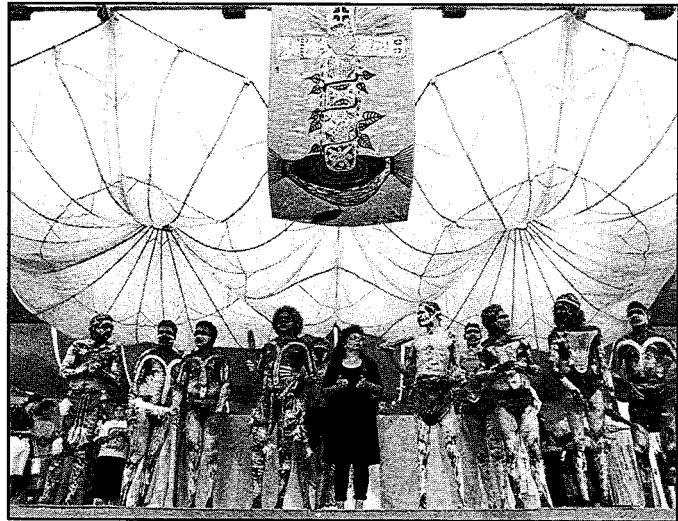
The final reports, however, issued at the end of the Assembly after all the debates, did contain some positive affirmations, in great part due to Orthodox and evangelical efforts. The report of Section IV, on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, states: "Spirits must be discerned. Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. The primary criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Holy

Spirit points to the cross and resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ."

Some participants felt their concerns about these developments "were heard" and in some cases incorporated into Assembly reports. In the final days, the policy debates became more lively and diverse as participants began to react to the directions being pushed by WCC staff. However, one evangelical leader noted: "Liberal Protestant experiential pluralism clearly is in

### **In various ceremonies at the WCC Assembly aboriginal spirituality was held up by some as a model of authenticity**

WCC Photo



control here" and "speculative theology" was indeed the norm. Some were disturbed by a disconnection between the -- on the whole -- trinitarian, confessional worship and the political and moral rhetoric.

An evangelical caucus formed in the early days of the Assembly under the leadership of non-western evangelicals such as Vinay Samuel of India and Rene Padilla of Argentina. The caucus -- a WCC Assembly first -- issued programmatic recommendations to the policy committee with demands for greater representation on commissions of the WCC. The caucus also released a letter to churches and fellow evangelicals regarding their experiences.

The evangelical letter insisted that the "ecumenical movement needs a theology rooted in the Christian revelation as well as relevant to → see WCC Assembly, page 6

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contemporary problems. At present, there is insufficient clarity regarding the relationship between the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to Scripture, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and legitimate concerns which are part of the WCC agenda." The evangelicals were the only participants to point out that "very inadequate attention was given in the Assembly to the dramatic and far-reaching changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe." That fact "raised questions about the way in which sections of the ecumenical movement supported the ruling ideologies in Eastern Europe."

Orthodox participants, whose churches have been members of the WCC since its formation, also issued a statement of concern to summarize their vigorous responses during Assembly debates. They noted the "increasing departure from the Basis of the WCC" -- which they defined as primarily to restore unity to the Church -- and cited "a growing departure from biblically-based Christian understandings of" the Trinity, salvation, the gospel, the doctrine of human beings as created in the image of God, and the nature of the church. They indicated they were asking themselves, and would be considering further, "Has the time come for the Orthodox churches and other members to review their relations with the World Council of Churches?" It was a thinly veiled threat to withdraw.

**What future for the WCC?**

The responses of Orthodox and evangelical participants contain clues to the future patterns of ecumenism. The WCC is facing a decline in funds, members and resources, with a concomitant need to cut staff and programs. The bureaucratic approach of the past seems likely to wither away. This trend may be accelerated as the majority of the world's Christians in the growing Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and evangelical communities find they have little in common with a movement which abandons belief in the uniqueness of its Lord and his work of salvation. Why be a Christian if these affirmations do not matter?

WCC leaders and staff want to capture the energy of Pentecostalism, the assurance and growth of evangelicalism, the authority of Catholicism, and the satisfying and mysterious depths of Orthodoxy. Nearly all the final documents of the Assembly stressed the importance of "incorporating" (or domesticating?) these groups. It would seem that the accommodations to

modernity of liberalism have accomplished their effects in the Protestant churches of Europe and North America, resulting in unwieldy bureaucracies and declining parishes. But the spiritual hunger of church members, and the need for institutional survival, have forced some new directions. On the other hand, those so insistent on stamping political correctness on the churches apparently now find themselves more comfortable with the spirits of the age, or the "new age," than with the Paraclete. For His actions do not always conform to the agendas of those in earthly structures.

**Epilogue**

I went immediately from Canberra to Singapore, where I visited friends serving the church there as seminary teachers and preachers. I visited churches filled with new believers, many who came out of animist or Buddhist upbringings, often alone in their families, to confess faith in the risen Christ. The ambiguity over the nature of the gospel in the WCC -- in contrast to its elaborate world order visions -- could not be in starker relief to the clarity and assurance (without smugness and with much charity and mercy) of those missionaries and national Christians I visited in Singapore. Nor was their faith without learning or indifferent to their pluralistic culture; to the contrary, their scholarship and concern for effective proclamation seemed far more profound than the blurred lines of Canberra. They knew of *Kwan In* in Singapore, too -- she is found on tea mugs, t-shirts, and family altars. People buy joss sticks and burn small sacrifices on street corners or anywhere to earn a little favor from her. Pursuing perpetual obeisance to her -- and paying "lion dancers" to drive evil spirits out of homes and shops, and burning "hell money" to appease ancestors -- is that from which many believers in Singapore and all over Asia have found deliverance in the grace and mercy of the gospel of Christ. It is not dissimilar to the deliverance from empty, hopeless secularism that some in the West have experienced. They have forsaken the idols who are but wood, clay, silver and gold for a living God. If this seems to lack in inclusiveness, or in sensitivity to "other living faiths," perhaps it is only part of the offense that has always come when the gospel is truly preached and practiced.

*Adams' full report on the WCC Assembly, published in the June issue of First Things, is available from IRD for \$2.*

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declare an immediate cease-fire, end all repressive actions, and support the Contadora peace process.

Not surprisingly, the more balanced alternative statement was overwhelmingly defeated by a vote of 40 to 14. For the alternative ran afoul of many of the precepts of the national church culture. Unless the upcoming General Assembly differs from those in the past, new commissioners must be prepared for:

- A tendency to start with the latest cultural trends and evaluate the Bible in light of those trends, dismissing the Bible when the two conflict, rather than starting with the Bible and using Scripture to judge the world.
- A claim that General Assembly reports are the product of a "representative" process, despite ample evidence that the allocation of seats and the process for producing reports makes Assembly decisions anything but representative of the views of most lay Presbyterians.
- A greater influence of church staff than elected commissioners on General Assembly decisions. There is also a penchant for stacking task forces to produce the desired outcome, as though the leaders of the national church know that a truly open and representative process would produce dramatically different outcomes on key issues, a result they cannot tolerate.
- A perversion of "prophetic witness" to serve as an all-purpose and uncritical excuse for leftist political and ideological predispositions. This is often coupled with a visceral dislike of

American values and Western ideals. The result is a willingness to divert the donations of lay Presbyterians to causes that most donors would find abhorrent.

• A cavalier attitude on the part of many church leaders on the declining number of members and churches in the denomination, in part because they know that by removing moderate and conservative members those remaining will be less critical of the radical causes the national leadership embraces. Indeed, some Presbyterians see decline as confirmation that they are truly being prophetic, for true prophecy in their view drives away most of those who hear it.

Attending a Presbyterian General Assembly can be an enriching and enlightening experience, for the event draws a great many dedicated and committed Christians from around the country. But the clash of cultures can also be a radicalizing experience for both lay people and pastors.

I believe more laypeople should attend their national church assemblies, read task force reports, and stay informed about the activities of the denominational committees and their staffs. The more who do so, the sooner we will develop the critical mass of people necessary to take back the national church organizations from those who have appropriated it for their own ideological ends.



*Q. Whitfield Ayres is the chairman of the board for the IRD-affiliated Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom. He is the budget and policy director for the governor of South Carolina.*



## **IRD Asks Bush to Make Democracy a Gulf Goal**

IRD Deputy Director Diane Knippers was one of 18 religious figures who met with President George Bush on March 7. Also participating in the meeting were IRD board members George Weigel and Carl F.H. Henry, and Bishop Maurice Benitez, a member of the advisory board of the IRD's Episcopal committee. The President wanted to thank those who had offered public support for U.S. actions during the Persian Gulf crisis. The religious leaders, in turn, took the opportunity to press their concerns for human rights, religious liberty, and humanitarian efforts during the post-war period.

IRD leaders sent a follow-up letter to the President on March 12 which said, "We urge you to add a fifth key challenge to the four challenges for peace in the Middle East that you outlined in your address to Congress. *The fifth challenge would be to assist and encourage the development of democratic liberties, including religious freedom, throughout the Middle East ....*"

## IRD Co-Sponsors Conference on the Middle East

On Capitol Hill June 18, IRD, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Interdisciplinary Program on Law and Religion (Catholic University), and the Trinitarians will hold a one-day conference on "Islam and Religious Pluralism."

The conference will explore the significant problems faced by religious minorities in Islamic countries and consider prospects for improvement. Prominent Christian, Islamic, and Jewish figures, as well as U.S. government and Arab embassy officials have been invited to address the issue of religious pluralism. Dr. Habib Malik, IRD Middle East Associate, is the conference coordinator. For details, call or write the IRD office.



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## **IRD Briefing Papers**

Requests for briefing papers can be made to *The Institute on Religion and Democracy*, 1331 H St., NW, Suite 900, Washington DC 20005-4706. With payment enclosed there is no postage charge. IRD members receive a 10 percent discount.

**Churches in the Crossfire: A Report on Religious Liberty in El Salvador.** Alan Wisdom, who visited El Salvador in January 1990, analyzes the relationship between political strife there and what some U.S. church leaders have called religious persecution by the government. The connection is not as these church leaders assert. (June 1990, \$4.00)

**Stewardship in the 90s: Two Views.** Lawrence Adams and Fredrick Jones compare two manifestoes dealing with, among other things, environmental concerns: the World Council of Churches' "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" and the evangelical "Oxford Declaration on Faith and Economics." (July 1990, \$2.00)

**Other Voices: Economic Alternatives in Latin America.** Amy L. Sherman presents a study challenging Christians to listen to the message of the emerging "neo-liberals" in Latin America and to consider the relationship of their free-market policies to the development of democracy and social progress. (December 1990, \$4.00)

**The Church and Democracy in Eastern Europe.** Dana Preusch analyzes how the Church contributed to the collapse of communism and explores its potential impact on the reconstruction of democratic societies in Eastern Europe. (January 1991, \$4.00)

**The Churches and War in the Gulf.** George Weigel discusses how many Protestant and Catholic church leaders took stands on the Persian Gulf crisis, with criticism based on the just war tradition. Reprinted from *First Things*, March 1991. (\$2.00)

**The World Economy After the Cold War: A Symposium.** A variety of voices in the Christian community reflect on the current state of the international economy, free trade and how politics and economics relate to the building of international institutions. (May 1991, \$4.00)

**"And the Wall Came Tumbling Down!" The Role of Religion in the East German Revolution, 1989-90.** In the remarkable collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe during 1989 and 1990, the church or religious figures often played a major role in the demise of the old order. IRD Director Kent Hill examines this phenomenon in one of the most important of the communist satellite states. This briefing paper is an expanded version of a presentation Hill made at a conference at Harvard in 1990. (May 1991, \$4.00)