

New Encyclical Praises Freedom and Enterprise

*Pope John Paul II builds on
modern social teaching*

By Robert Royal

On May 1, 1991, Pope John Paul II issued *Centesimus Annus*, an encyclical that

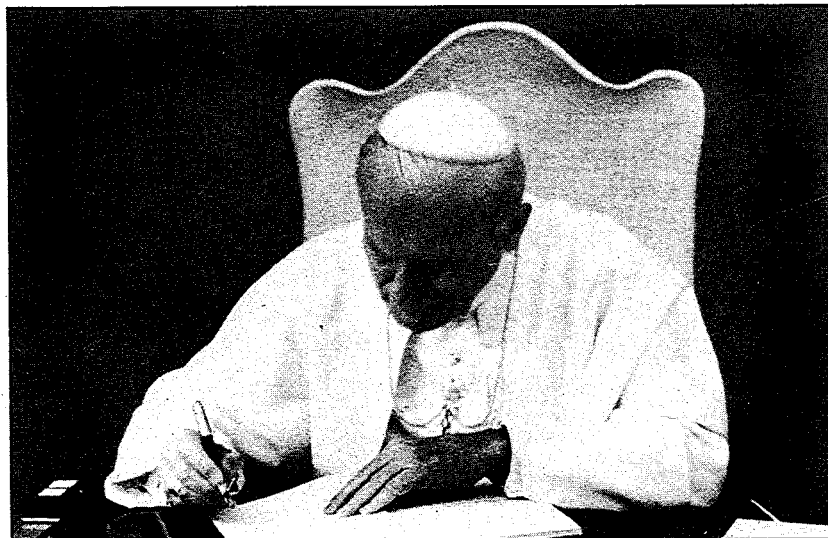
commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the founding document of modern Catholic social teaching, *Rerum Novarum*.

The new encyclical both repeats the moral principles of *Rerum Novarum* and extends them in a particularly fruitful way to a world that has witnessed the collapse of communism and that stands poised on the verge of the third Christian millennium.

Centesimus Annus affirms economic freedom and human rights, and sets a high moral standard for the development of public life.

The Catholic Church has been grappling for a century with the problems set for modern society by industrialization and the accompanying breakup of old patterns of land tenure and social structure. Even

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Pope John Paul II signs new encyclical Centesimus Annus, which deepens Catholic commitments to democratic development.

Episcopal Ethicist: *Centesimus Annus* Offers Guidance for Protestants

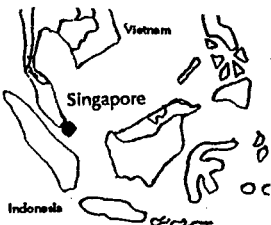
By Allan M. Parrent

The major thrust of *Centesimus Annus*, this very significant new document of Christian social teaching, is to affirm, more clearly than in some earlier papal encyclicals, the concept of a free market economy as opposed to a socialist economy. Such an economic system, however, must be set within a limiting framework that provides protection for other freedoms as well. That framework must be one that encourages strong social and cultural institutions (e.g. churches, families) as well as a democratic polity, so that these freedoms can be grounded in moral principles and laws that will guard against the misuse of economic freedom.

The purpose of this short article, however, is not so much to

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Singapore has an amazing array of ethnic and religious cultures. Its way of legally protecting "harmony" amidst this diversity, however, threatens the freedom of all faiths to proselytize. See page 4.



Two new IRD briefing papers show how various churches and their leaders handled the Persian Gulf crisis. For information on how to obtain these important reports, see page 8.

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before socialism had shown itself in any government, Pope Leo XIII, in the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, dismissed all socialist solutions to what was then known as the "workers question" with an observation that has since proved prophetic: "Were they [i.e., socialist solutions] carried into effect, the working man himself would be the first to suffer." Instead, the Church at the time, basing itself on a Christian view of the person and society, affirmed the right to private property, but also emphasized the need for unions, free associations, a family wage, and other safeguards to prevent unjust social imbalances.

At various intervals (40, 80, 90, and now 100 years), subsequent Popes have added to these initial insights. Pius XI, for example, in his famous encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) promoted what he called the "principle of subsidiarity." Pius was writing after Soviet communism and German nazism had appeared on the scene and his idea of subsidiarity forbade any government from taking on itself the duties (and also prerogatives) that "intermediate institutions" such as free associations, churches, and families should perform. Subsidiarity would become the theoretical bulwark in Catholic social thought against centralizing tendencies ever after.

While the Church's rejection of socialism and totalitarianism was early and unmistakable, it has taken, at least until now, a more ambiguous stance toward Western-style democracies. Running through all the documents from *Rerum Novarum* on is a strong rejection of the materialism and practical atheism that exist even in the relatively free societies of the West. The Catholic Church has suffered since the French Revolution at the hands of militant ideologues who confused democratic and republican politics with a virulent anti-Catholicism. Even as late as the turn of this century, for example, French governments confiscated Church property and closed Church schools in violation of basic principles of justice. The

Church had concrete experience of what could happen to believers even in "liberal" (in the European sense) republics.

Happily, that type of anti-Catholicism has largely evaporated, but it left the Church wary of the economic system unleashed by "liberal democracies." The primary fear was that unbridled competition would lead businessmen, politicians, and others to neglect their less fortunate neighbors. The pursuit of wealth might become mere survival of the fittest untouched by Christ's commands to love our neighbor.



CNS Photo

Pope Leo XIII, author of Rerum Novarum in 1891, officially committed the Catholic Church to democracy and free associations.

As is the case in most papal documents, warnings were issued about these theoretical and practical questions without mentioning any country by name. In fact, though, the Church's experience after World War II with the Western European democracies in general and the United States in particular has been moving official Church thought about the moral status of democratic capitalist countries closer and closer to what most Americans would find just.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Vatican was caught up in the mood of overemphasizing the failures of the West and the responsibilities of the West to the

Third World. Since John Paul II's election in 1979, however, those failures and responsibilities have been put in better perspective. John Paul is a Pole and experienced first-hand the horrors of communism and nazism. He has never engaged in the absurd "moral equivalence" that paralyzed some observers toward the end of the Cold War.

Instead, as a philosopher and former working man himself, he began to emphasize the notion of "work" as a dimension of the God-given dignity of man. In the East, that dignity had been violated in various ways, not least in that the communist systems left little room for individual initiative and innovation. In the West, said John Paul, the situation was far better, but the Western nations had to try to do a better job for those out of work and other individuals who found

themselves in temporary difficulties. Work is not just an economic dimension for John Paul; it is a means by which God's creatures show their nature in caring for themselves, their families, and for one another. To balance the dynamic activities of free societies, we need what he has named "solidarity."

Solidarity and subsidiarity form the two poles of current Vatican thinking about society. In addition to private modes of mutual assistance, solidarity entails the creation of public safety nets such as unemployment compensation, welfare programs, and other state-sponsored measures to meet crises. But even solidarity does not override subsidiarity: this encyclical makes it clear that the "welfare state" has dangers of its own, both through the bureaucracies it creates and the dependencies it induces in the very people it intends to help.

Some confusion has existed over whether, even with structures of solidarity, the Church has endorsed capitalist systems. On May 1, the Pope ended all such confusions:

If by 'capitalism' is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a 'business economy,' 'market economy,' or simply 'free economy.' But if by capitalism is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong judicial framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative. (Paragraph 42)

This generally accords well with the kinds of democratic capitalist systems formed in the West, even if the Pope would like to see improvements in dealing with the poor within developed countries and in developing Third-World nations. John Paul also

criticizes the consumerism, materialism, sexual license, and irreligion that have eroded the very ethical bases of a free society.

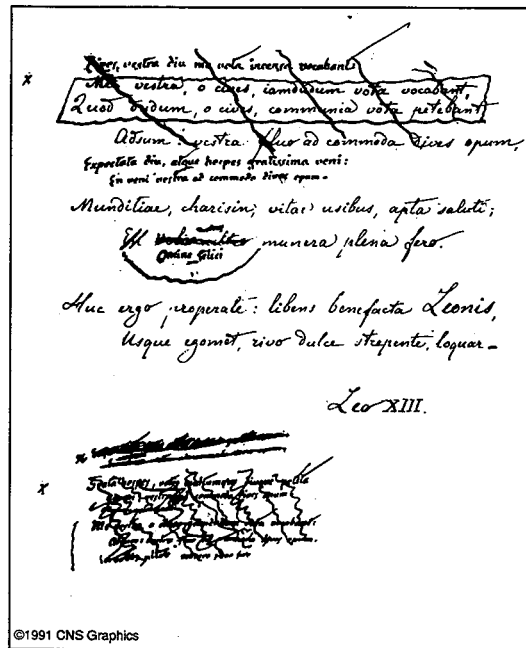
All these concerns have immediate practical importance to Central and Eastern Europe, as well as to new democracies in Latin America and elsewhere. The nations of the former Soviet Bloc showed great virtues in throwing off the communist yoke. Now, however, they must create sound institutions while keeping the evils of liberty in check. (*Playboy* magazine, for example, has just inaugurated a Prague edition and the pornography business is booming in

countries such as Poland and Hungary.) Latin Americans, too, have an opportunity to shed centuries-old patterns of oligarchy and monopoly that have stifled individual and collective energies. John Paul explicitly calls on the prosperous countries to support promising new initiatives, but he refrains from prescribing the often-failed "developmentalist" approaches of the past. The people of each nation must take the initiative, he says, if they are to make good use of aid from outside.

The new encyclical gives no specific instructions to nations, even the newly freed nations around the world, about how to

govern or to reconstruct their societies. Instead, it provides a remarkably rich moral reflection on the nature of the human person and the contours of a good social order. These two subjects are a Pope's business, John Paul says repeatedly, because they do not simply belong to the realms of economics and politics. Human persons and human society depend on God's revelation of what is good for his creatures. In that sense, far from being an unwarranted intrusion in the public realm, says John Paul, the Church's social teaching is an integral part of Christian evangelization.

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This copy of an early version of *Rerum Novarum* shows Pope Leo's handwritten alterations.



Singapore Pursues Harmony, Restricts Religious Practice

By Lawrence E. Adams

The tiny Republic of Singapore is known to many westerners as an economic jewel, a port and industrial city-state which has stood at the head of the prosperity boom seen in some parts of Asia. It is known to many western Christians as an Asian crossroads, with strong churches, many prominent Christian citizens and the headquarters of large institutions such as Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the World Evangelical Fellowship. Christians from all over Asia and Africa receive theological education and ministry training there. It is the home for 2.7 million people of all major religions and many cultures (Chinese, Malay, Indian, European, and many others) which manage to coexist in relative harmony.

Many westerners are surprised to learn, however, that along with Singapore's prosperous, clean, "progressive" economy comes a highly structured society, ruled virtually by one party headed by one man ever since its emergence as an independent state in 1965. While structured as a western parliamentary democracy, the leadership emphasizes Confucian concepts of order, harmony, submission and uniformity. Singaporean lives are regulated and "guided" well beyond the level which would be tolerated by most in the west.

Singapore is now the site of a new development in church-state and inter-religious relations with the adoption late last year of the "Religious Harmony Act." It is possible that this act may provide a model for other governments with religiously pluralistic societies. This act, promoted as necessary to prevent the outbreak of conflicts between the disparate established religious groups, can also serve to control evangelism, education and the political activity of religious leaders. A very few religious leaders have touted it as an important contribution to order in a pluralistic and potentially conflictual society (and perhaps to protect their own turf). But on the whole, the religious

community worked together in an unprecedented way to oppose the bill before it passed. The act is at best a preventive, anticipatory measure, as religious harmony rather than conflict has been the rule in Singapore; it seems to many an effort to stifle dissent and intimidate institutions which can "compete" with the government for loyalty and as sources of guidance.

Features of the Legislation

The "Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act of 1990":

- Establishes a "Presidential Council for Religious Harmony," all members of which are to be appointed by the President of Singapore, and subject to dismissal by the President at any time.
- Gives the Minister of Home Affairs the authority to act on recommendations from the council (which meets secretly) by issuing orders directly prohibiting violators from preaching, speaking, publishing, holding office or serving religious institutions without



An economic jewel that looks much like a Western city, Singapore, nonetheless, is ruled by Confucian notions of "harmony" rather than democratic tolerance of dissent.

the minister's permission. The minister's decisions are final, and "shall not be questioned in any court." Imprisonment or fines can ensue if the orders are violated.

- Specifies that "any priest, monk, pastor, imam, elder, office-bearer or any other person who is in a position of authority in any religious group or institution" can be cited by the minister for: (1) "causing feelings" of hostility, or somehow upsetting harmony between religious groups; (2) involvement in any political cause or party "under the guise of

propagating or practicing religious belief"; (3) "carrying out subversive activities" under the same "guise"; (4) "exciting disaffection against the President or the Government of Singapore."

Indicates that "any other persons" found by the minister to have violated these same provisions can also be restricted by him from such activities and from many forms of participation in religious groups.

Silencing Opponents

The government of Singapore has long had at its disposal the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the Sedition Act with which it has silenced opponents and other "troublemakers." The government took special notice of some Christian groups in 1987, employing the ISA to imprison 22 Catholic activists accused of "Marxist conspiracy." The government also expelled the Christian Council of Asia (CCA), the regional ecumenical body with ties to the World Council of Churches (WCC), which had been headquartered there for many years. The government pointed to CCA and WCC support for liberation movements and "funding of pro-communist organizations."

The government also notes the record of inter-religious conflict throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Singapore sits between Indonesia and Malaysia, which have large Muslim populations and governments which are becoming more assertively "Islamic." These governments are especially sensitive about Christian evangelism. Demographic data indicates Singapore's population to be 28.3% Buddhist, 18.7% Christian (all affiliations), 17.6% non-religious, 16% Muslim, 13.4% Taoist, 4.9% Hindu, 1.1% other. Some feel the Christian and Muslim figures are actually underreported; these two groups are rapidly growing through conversions and immigration.

Conservative Christian groups who cared little for the CCA, and found few reasons to object to its expulsion, now have found themselves subject to the newly restrictive law. These typically docile groups, Catholic and Protestant alike, know they are of special concern to the government -- evangelism and conversion to Christianity, especially among immigrant Malay Muslim workers, have aroused some ire. Yet there is little record of open dispute between religious groups. The fear seems to be that social harmony (a profoundly Confucian notion) will be disrupted and Christians will become politically powerful (perhaps upsetting the current power

arrangement) if the church is allowed to grow any more. This in spite of the fact that many Christians work in government, and 40% of the members of parliament identify themselves as Christians. They have not been considered disruptive.

A Serious Problem?

A few Christians in Singapore have felt that this new law represents, rather than a threat, simply a new situation which calls for new strategies. According to



Old signs from the East remain: This enormous statue stands above Singapore harbour.

one evangelical leader, this law has no effect on "friendship evangelism" or other low-key approaches to religious witness. Conversion is not prohibited absolutely, although the law is clearly designed to discourage major shifts in the current religious balance. They seem to feel that the law is a reasonable price to pay for social order.

Few observers expect the current government, with its great sensitivities to the social climate, to exploit this new law in a way which arouses the anger of large numbers of people. Currently, religious leaders and activists expect that past approaches will continue -- essentially mild forms of intimidation and control such as monitoring sermons, review of publications, calling preachers in for official "discussions" of certain themes picked up in sermons, and other ways of letting one know he or she is being watched. Yet many commentators in Singapore fear what a future, more aggressive government might do with this new authority.

The major religious communities in Singapore responded with objections and recommendations on the law which did result in some modifications before final passage. The National Council of Churches, the Catholic bishops, the Evangelical Alliance, the various Protestant denominations, and the influential Graduates Christian Fellowship all made official

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comment on the content of the new encyclical as it is to say a word of appreciation for Roman Catholic social thought in general as seen from a Protestant perspective. The social thought of each of these two traditions has historic strengths and weaknesses, and each can learn (and has learned) from the other. As has been noted elsewhere, especially by the Protestant ethicist James Gustafson, a major strength of the Roman Catholic moral tradition, rooted in natural law, has been its ordered pattern of moral thinking, based on relatively clear philosophical and theological principles. This has allowed it to arrive at clear and precise judgments on moral issues which have behind them the weight of the magisterium -- the teaching authority of the Church. Conversely, this tradition can be, and at times has historically been, rigid and closed, unable to take adequate account of new empirical data and human experience. It has therefore often seemed excessively bound to narrowly "physicalist" interpretations of its own rich natural law tradition.

In contrast, a major strength of the Protestant moral tradition, if valid generalizations can be made about it at all, has been its freedom to respond contextually to the ever-new demands and moral dilemmas of modern life. It has appealed more directly to scripture than to any specific tradition of moral reasoning, a practice which affirms the "sola scriptura" conviction of Protestantism over any humanly constructed philosophical system that might be given precedence over God's command. But this same practice has opened the door to proof-texting and eisegesis and a resulting corpus of moral teachings that lacks coherence and consistency. Principles, rules, and norms can easily become captive to such elusive sources as individual sensitivity to what God is doing in the world, to feelings and intuitions, or to prevailing ideological commitments dressed in the guise of prophetic biblical witness.

The historic Catholic natural law tradition offers an understanding of several key things: God's rational design for human life, our ability to discern God's design and its moral implications, and our ability to recognize God's design as the goal toward which we are inclined by our created nature to move. Yet the Catholic tradition is in need of greater openness. The Protestant moral tradition, conversely, is in need of greater structure and coherence and a renewed

appreciation of moral law, while maintaining its commitment to the primacy of scripture and its profound insights into human sin and the dangers of works-righteousness.

The new papal encyclical is one of several examples indicating that the Roman Catholic Church is able, at least on some issues, to adapt its natural moral law tradition to deal with the always-evolving social, political and economic problems of modernity. The encyclical is clearly not unrelated to the events in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 which revealed clearly the moral bankruptcy of socialism. The issuance of the encyclical coincides with the collapse of Marxism, an event which fulfilled empirically what the 1891 encyclical had warned against.

Protestantism has not been as clear in its response to these recent events. This might be related not only to its more unstructured moral tradition but also to its bifurcated moral attitude toward Central and Eastern European regimes during the whole postwar period. Within Protestantism could be found both a self-righteous anti-communism and, especially from its mainline leadership, a too-uncritical attitude of accommodation that never came fully to grips with the tyrannical and anti-religious aspects of those regimes. Church leaders in the East today have in fact expressed bitterness about this latter fact.

This expression of appreciation for *Centesimus Annus* is perhaps an appropriate occasion for this Protestant (albeit Anglican) to offer both a confession and an appeal. The confession is that over the past 400 years many Protestant ethicists seem to have spent much time and effort trying to recapture under other rubrics some substitute version of what they historically rejected, namely the natural law moral tradition. One need only refer to such structure-seeking concepts as "orders of creation," "orders of preservation," "emergency orders," "divine mandates," "general revelation," "natural justice."

The plea is that more Protestant ethicists admit this fact and, if they (we) wish to avoid the dead-end road of situation ethics, antinomianism, emotivism and ideologically-based social teachings, embrace the effort to achieve that rapprochement perceived some years ago by James Gustafson in his *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics*. In a review of that book, Lewis Smedes described in short compass the theological bases for engaging in such an effort: "Human life has both order and freedom. There is

design and accident in nature. Human beings have both an abiding nature and a changing history, though we cannot be dogmatic about where to draw the line between them. The moral life is created in harmony with moral law and through improvisation in response to historical change. God is both the Creator of an ordered world with an end that is implicit in its nature, and at the same time, the free improviser who engages in ongoing responses to the creative acts of its free creatures."

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responses. Unfortunately, many of their concerns were not addressed in the final version of the law. These include:

- the ambiguity of the nature of offenses, such as "causing feelings of hostility," upsetting "harmony," and using the "guise" of religion for "political causes." These are not defined in the law and are subject to governmental ruling.
- that absolute authority is given to the Minister of Home Affairs to interpret the law and issue prohibition orders. There is no judicial review of his ruling, nor is the violator tried for the initial offense. The judiciary only gets involved in determining if a *prohibition* has been violated. This clearly contradicts the separation of powers established in the constitution of Singapore.
- that the law serves to stifle dissent, and inhibits the checks on power that can come from independent sources of authority, such as the church. "Disaffection against the President or government of Singapore" is a broad and ill-defined category of offense, which could stymie any political references by religious leaders. Surely Christians, who understand that Christ is Lord of all of life, must discuss with each other how their faith affects politics and economics along with all other aspects of life.
- that the churches may be prohibited from addressing even issues of conscience and shared values which have a public effect, such as abortion, marriage, family size.
- that the human right "of each Singaporean to profess, practice and change his religion,"

guaranteed by both the constitution of Singapore and international law, is affected by the law. The government obviously has an important interest in maintaining internal order, and in good relations with its powerful Muslim neighbors. Yet the churches believe this can be better fostered through dialogue, and as a last resort, through the use of existing laws which are sufficient for the task. Special focus on religious affiliation as a source of regulation for these ends risks violating internationally-recognized human rights. It also risks creating the animosity that the law is designed to stifle.

The Religious Harmony Act is beginning to receive attention globally from those who are deeply concerned for religious freedom. Notably, Pope John Paul II alluded to the situation in Singapore when he received the new ambassador to the Vatican on January 24 of this year. "Civil authorities have an obligation to permit believers and communities to witness to their faith publicly and without fear, and to live out all its demands, including its ethical and social demands," the Pope said to Ambassador Jayalekshimi Mohideen. It is to be hoped that the ambassador dutifully delivered this message to her government, and that it will heed the Pope's concern.

Taking Action:

1. Consider taking to your church council, regional or diocesan body a resolution calling attention to this development in Singapore. Contact IRD for a sample resolution.
2. Share this information with your church mission board, your class or study group, or other interested Christians. Discuss how these restrictions will affect churches related to your own, or mission agencies you support. How might such restrictions limit your own ministry if you were subject to them?
3. Ask your representatives in Congress to investigate. Such inquiries to the Singapore embassy could have the effect of alerting the government that their actions are being noted. The government seems to be quite sensitive to the perceptions of others, particularly the United States.

IRD's International Affairs Associate Lawrence Adams visited Singapore while on a trip through Asia earlier this year.

IRD Hosts Visiting Scholar

IRD is pleased to announce that Matthew F. Murphy, of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), is serving as Visiting Scholar for War and Peace Studies during the spring and summer of

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since 1974. He is the author of numerous articles and essays, and the 1987 book *Betraying the Bishops: How the Pastoral Letter on War and Peace is Being Taught*. He holds degrees from Holy Cross, the University of London, and Boston University. His work for IRD includes an analysis of the way the churches employed just-war criteria in their responses to the war in the Persian Gulf. Other projects include an analysis of prospects for conventional arms control in the Middle East.



Religion & Democracy

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

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Two New IRD Briefing Papers Discuss the Churches' Involvement in the Persian Gulf War

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By Matthew F. Murphy

Matthew F. Murphy examines oldline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox church statements about the war in the Persian Gulf. He documents the misuse of just-war thinking in the churches, which he suggests undermines the moral authority of religious voices.

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**Documenting the Oldline/Ecumenical
Anti-War Movement:**

Consistent Themes, Faulty Premises

By Fredrick Jones, Dana Preusch, and Lonni Jackson

An introductory essay by Fredrick Jones tells the story that can be found by studying this paper's appendices. These offer the most comprehensive chronology available of how oldline/ecumenical church leaders spoke to oppose the U.S. role in the Gulf War. Included are sections on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Methodist Church.

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