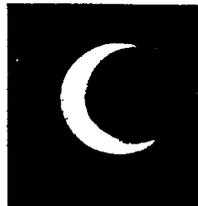


RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



July/August 1991



Islam & other Faiths

IRD Co-Sponsors Conference on Religious Pluralism in Muslim-Dominated Countries

Life as a Christian in an Islamic-dominated country can be dangerous. In converting from Islam to Christianity, you can lose your life.

Without democracy, guarantees of religious freedom are difficult to establish. Of all the countries with a significant Muslim population, only India has a long history of democracy. Lebanon succumbed to civil violence, and Algeria's movement away from authoritarianism has been stalled. The connection between the Islamic faith, Islamic-based politics and religious pluralism was the issue explored at a June 18 conference on Capitol Hill. The all-day session was sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Law and Religion Program (Catholic University of America), and the Trinitarians.

In opening remarks, IRD Executive Director Kent Hill noted that the lack of religious freedom in Islamic countries is one of the most neglected human rights issues of our time. Muslim

communities are growing in the West and enjoying freedoms here that are denied to non-Muslims in Islamic countries. Hill called for more serious dialogue between Muslims and Christians in order to advance full religious freedom.

The morning session was devoted to religious pluralism in Islamic countries today. The Rev. Canon Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo, director of the London-based

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What is it like to be a Christian in Japan? Though one of this year's National Council of Churches' mission studies takes this as a focus, a lot more is said about social issues than about the faith. For a review of the study materials, see **page 5**.

1991 is IRD's 10th Anniversary! While celebrating this milestone, IRD will sponsor a conference this fall to examine the challenges to faith and freedom in the decade ahead. For more information, see the notice on **page 8**.



Photo: Lonni Jackson

Majid Fakhry

"The problem of religious pluralism ... is not a purely theological or conceptual one; it is essentially the problem of human interaction ... in communities where diverse religious or denominational groups confront each other."

Islam, from page 1

International Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, addressed the thorny question of apostasy in Islam. Traditionally, any Muslim who renounces his faith or converts to another is to be punished by death according to Shari'a (Islamic) law, though in practice this is not always enforced. This punishment is rooted in the Islamic understanding of apostasy as the ultimate form of treason. Citing Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Sookhdeo underscored the right of every person to change his or her religion at any time. He surveyed the historical and Qur'anic records, and the tradition of Islamic law to illustrate the basis for mistreating of converts, including laws that deal with possessions and marriage contracts. Sookhdeo called for Muslims to move away from a focus on the Hadith ("tradition," or accounts of sayings or actions by the Prophet Mohammed) and back to the Qur'an, which exhibits more tolerance.

Wa'il Kheir, executive director of the Foundation for Human and Humanitarian Rights (Lebanon), dealt with case studies of abusive treatment of non-Muslims. He concentrated on the Middle East, specifically Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon. Islamic law is enshrined in the constitutions of all these countries, he said, with the exception of Lebanon. The implications for non-Muslims have been dire in most instances. Examples of human rights abuses mentioned by Kheir included: Asian migrant workers who endure sexual abuse in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait; Christians whose relatives died in Saudi Arabia and were unable to bury them because the official position is that non-Muslims contaminate the ground (administering the last rites to dying non-Muslims is prohibited in Saudi Arabia and is performed secretly under grave danger); and Christians who are not allowed to run Sunday schools in Syria (those that exist are run in a fashion reminiscent of the catacomb period of early Christianity). Kheir fears that religious freedom and basic human rights are endangered in Lebanon as a result of the recently signed Lebanese-Syrian agreement which in effect subjugates Lebanon to the militarily stronger and more authoritarian regime of Syria.

Dr. Sayyed Hossein Nasr of George Washington



Photo: Lonni Jackson

"In recent times the Muslim world took a virtually united stand with the rest of the United Nations against the illegal occupation of territory; is it not now time for the Muslim world to stand against those forces that deny the freedoms contained in Article 18 of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights?"

— Patrick Sookhdeo

University provided a Muslim perspective. "From the outset," he began, "I felt this conference was arranged by Christians for Christians...." He accused the two previous speakers of ridiculing Islam, and he contended that human rights, democracy, and religious pluralism emanate from the *secular* West. Nasr observed that the Islamic attitude toward Christian minorities is adversely colored by the relation of Christianity to Western civilization, which Muslims associate with Western imperialism.

During the heated discussion that followed, one participant noted that Muslims need to understand that many Christians also oppose Western secular humanism. Others claimed that historically Islam has been superior to Christian Europe in its treatment of religious minorities. When asked if he could at least agree that there were problems for non-Muslims in Islamic countries, Nasr conceded that there were, but that the dimensions of these problems "are not very great" when compared with the monumental economic, political and other human rights problems that face the Muslims. "The Islamic world right now is going through a very difficult period of history," he said. Many governments manipulate Islam for their own legitimacy and so violate Islamic law.

At the luncheon, an invocation was given by the Rev. Agostino Cacciavillan, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to the United States. Congressman Paul Henry (Michigan) delivered a substantive talk highlighting the religious roots of the American democracy. He argued that Congress was increasingly being sensitized to religious liberty problems, including those in the Islamic world, while criticizing the Bush administration for inadequate concern in this area. He said that in his research he had been hard-pressed to find examples from Arab Muslim history of respect for the

concept of religious pluralism, though in the non-Arab Muslim countries the record was a little better. He noted that Muslims often must rely on sources in the West (for example, Arabic newspapers published in London), for accurate news about their own countries because the media in their Islamic homelands are state-controlled.

The first afternoon session was chaired by Dr. David Little of the U.S. Institute of Peace. Dr. Majid Fakhry of the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University gave a paper on the Islamic theological framework for official attitudes to non-Muslims. In exploring the Muslim view of "the other," he made several references to the Qur'an, the Hadith, and other early Islamic sources. He described the *dhimmi* motif of second-class status for Christians and Jews under Islam. Traditionally, these "Peoples of the Book," as the Qur'an calls them, were required to pay a special tax; they had to don distinctive dress; they could not proselytize; their testimony against a Muslim in a court of law was invalid; they could not build new places of worship or repair the old ones; they were prohibited from marrying Muslim women; and they were generally deprived of many rights that their Muslim counterparts living in the same community enjoyed.

There were three commentators on Fakhry's paper. Dr. Sayyid Mohammad Syeed, editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, made the point that the reason apostasy was punishable by death in the early days of Mohammad was the perception that apostates were in reality dominated by political, not religious motives. He admitted that those reasons do not apply today and that therefore the laws on apostasy ought to be changed. This means, according to Dr. Syeed, that a Muslim who wants to

become a Christian should be allowed to do so freely. However, he depicted the traditional Muslim treatment of non-Muslims as largely humane and tolerant.

The Rev. Habib Badr of the Reformed Church in Beirut, Lebanon, discussed the special Muslim attachment to the Qur'an which, he said, differed qualitatively from the Christian outlook on the Bible. He explained that the Qur'an for Muslims is in reality parallel to Jesus Christ for Christians, and is regarded by Muslims as the literal word of God. For Christians Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He called for both textual and contextual interpretations of the Qur'an as the necessary prerequisites for accepting the principle of religious pluralism. But he wondered whether such reinterpretations would be forthcoming given the Islamic reluctance to engage in radical reformulations of existing Qur'an-grounded positions.

Rabbi Leon Klenicki of the Interfaith Affairs division of the Anti-Defamation League gave a Jewish view on the question of religious pluralism. He deplored the very category of tolerance as an appropriate Muslim response to other religions. He said people don't want to be merely tolerated, which implies a condescending and ultimately pejorative attitude; they want to be accepted as they are. He, too, called for a reinterpretation of the Qur'anic text to allow for authentic religious pluralism.

The final afternoon presentation was focused on the future prospects of religious pluralism within an Islamic context. Dr. Serif Mardin of American University in Washington, D.C., erected a model of what he called bounded and diffused periods of Islamic history. He spoke with evident nostalgia for the diffuseness of life and relationships that existed in earlier times (Spain, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia), but which has been all but lost in the modern world.

He said that there was vigorous debate among Muslim scholars today on many issues including religious pluralism, and he gave examples from his native Turkey. How can the pristine diffuseness of the past be recaptured in today's bounded world? He referred to a "good" Islamic fundamentalism, which would return to the purity of the Qur'anic text without an agenda of confrontation.

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Photo: Lonni Jackson

"... future historians may well look back on the twentieth century as the period when the false religion of communism rose and fell, whereas the religious freedom dilemmas which many believe to be inherent within Islam have been present for many centuries and will likely extend well into the future."

— Kent Hill

Islam, from page 3

Michael Arietti, the director of Bilateral Relations for the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, summarized some of the country reports issued annually by the State Department on human rights around the world. He reported that issues of religious liberty were receiving increased attention at the State Department because of the

Egyptian Converts to Christianity Jailed

Congressman Paul Henry, speaking at the June 18 conference, told participants that in the wake of the Gulf War "the issue of human rights in the Middle East is going to come up on the congressional calendar." As this issue of



Rep. Paul Henry

Religion & Democracy went to press, IRD learned that three Christian converts in Egypt who had been imprisoned since last January have recently been released from prison and all charges dropped. Several U.S. lawmakers who had appealed to

the government of Egypt for greater religious toleration, were instrumental in their release.

Although Egyptian law does not prohibit religious conversion, social pressures and legal maneuvers can pose problems for Christian converts in Egypt. Since their imprisonment, the three converts, members of the Coptic Evangelical Church, had been denied private meetings with lawyers and family members, subjected to severe torture during their first months of imprisonment, and pressured to recant their conversions. Mustafa Mohammad Said al-Sharqawi, Mohammad Ahmed Mohammad Selam and Hassan Mohammad Ismail had been charged, according to reports, with "opposing religious doctrine" and "actions against a heavenly religion." The three had also been accused of "slandering Islam" and "threatening Egypt's national security." The Egyptian government had said that the men were being detained "to protect social peace and national unity." They were being held under security laws without a trial date having been set. This indefinite holding was prolonged when new, trumped-up charges were brought against them at a mid-June hearing.

frequency of reported violations from many countries, including Islamic ones. Dr. Abdel-Aziz Hammouda, from the Egyptian Embassy's Educational and Cultural Bureau, asserted that most religious intolerance in the Islamic world was basically political and not religious. He added, however, that the Mubarak government in Egypt was coming under increasing pressure from fundamentalists to take a hard line with respect to non-Muslims in Egypt.

The final commentator was the conference coordinator and Middle East Associate at IRD, Dr. Habib Malik. Optimistically, he stated that aside from truth, *nothing* is beyond change and improvement. He hailed the reforming developments outlined by professor Mardin involving enlightened Muslims. The pressing issue, he emphasized, was the degree of legitimization that such bold efforts in rethinking receive throughout the Islamic world. The few historical precedents are not very encouraging, he said. In fact, the highly acclaimed Millet system in the Ottoman Empire was not genuine pluralism, but rather a form of tolerated segregation, a kind of Islamic apartheid. He expressed concern that generations of non-Muslims will be born, will live in persecuted conditions, and will die before appreciable reforms alleviate their suffering. According to Malik, neither a wholesale embrace of modernity, nor insularism in today's intricately interconnected world are options for the Islamic world. The international community, on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), must press the Islamic states to grant full freedoms to non-Muslim minorities. The Islamic states which hitherto have withheld their signatures to the historic document need to be urged to sign.

Religious freedom problems in Turkey and the case of three imprisoned Egyptian converts from Islam to Christianity (see opposite column) arose toward the end of the day, as pressed by John Hanford of Sen. Richard Lugar's staff. Dr. Hammouda insisted he did not know of this case.

Few religious freedom issues today are as complicated and tense as the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim religious minorities. Solutions will not come easily or quickly, but one fact is certain. There can be no progress without dialogue and an active commitment to understand competing perspectives. Ultimately, of course, for creatures created in the image of God, full human dignity requires religious freedom. At present such freedom is but a distant goal in most of the Islamic world.

religion & economics

Quarterly

report & reflection
on economic
development that
strengthens
democratic
societies

Reviving a stagnant South
African economy for the
benefit of all

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Community action at
Yoluntu in South Africa:
Getting past white, black
fears, while empowering
people

-- page 4

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Summer 1991

South Africa: From Sanctions to Economic Recovery

Privatize or Nationalize -- Which Road, and How?

By Lonni Jackson and

Wendi Richardson

As the world watches the South African government and the African National Congress (ANC) play power politics like an endless game of "tag," the debate over the future shape of the South African economy remains surprisingly overlooked. Any agreement that comes from the negotiations between President F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela will be moot unless the South African economy is turned around -- and soon. Here in the United States, debate once again rages over whether sanctions should be lifted. Yet this debate obscures the difficulties black South Africans face as they seek economic as well as political emancipation.

Presently, the state of the South African economy can be described as stagnant, at best. Sanctions, disinvestment, and an economic system of nationalized industry protecting the white minority have taken their toll. Over the past decade, the gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of only 2%, not enough to provide jobs for the unemployed and the increasing numbers entering the workforce. Unemployment climbed to 50% at times, and currently remains near 40%, though it is much higher in black areas. From 1980 through 1989, inflation maintained an average rate of 14.6%.

Though highly nationalized in the past, the current government's privatization program has shifted many industries to white-owned monopolies. Most observers agree that if South Africa is to move

ahead on the road to social and economic justice in post-apartheid South Africa, then blacks must be empowered to participate fully in the economy. The debate is over *how* blacks gain substantive access to a productive economy. Should the productive base of the country return to nationalization, as the ANC seems to indicate, or should industry continue to move towards more privatization, as the current government policy indicates? As with most issues related to South Africa, there are no easy answers. However, an equitable economic system will ensure long-term economic benefit for all. A policy of privatization that encourages (and provides for) the participation of blacks appears to be the best hope for economic growth and political stability.

Several years ago, the South African government began to privatize state-owned industries such as the transportation, telecommunications, and mining sectors. The ANC objected, however, claiming that privatization without a means by which blacks can invest in private industry will simply entrench wealth in the hands of the white population. Furthermore, as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) fears, privatization could quite possibly mean the loss of jobs in the short term, as companies modernize towards greater efficiency. Realizing the futility of promoting a policy which seemed unpopular in the black community, the government recently suspended
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South Africa, from page 1

new privatization initiatives, explaining that it made little sense to move forward given the fact that its main political opponents were still committed to nationalization.

There is considerable hesitancy on the part of South African blacks to accept that free market capitalism could aid in their liberation. For so long, apartheid laws prevented blacks

Third World economic structures. The country boasts a well developed infrastructure that, prior to the imposition of sanctions, served operations for hundreds of Fortune 500 companies and multinational corporations. Furthermore, South Africa is abundant in natural and land resources, possessing over 50% of the world's gold, chrome, and platinum reserves, as well as large quantities of other

government and the ANC need to establish credibility both domestically and overseas. The government needs to continue to prove that it is serious about reform and serious negotiations, and the ANC needs to demonstrate to white South Africans and the international community that it has a viable economic policy.

Second, the government's domestic agenda needs to include a major emphasis on black education. Perhaps the most devastating blow the apartheid system has leveled against its black population is the low priority given to education in black areas. While significant efforts have been made to narrow the gap between blacks and whites, the government continues to spend nearly five times as much on white school children as it does on black. This, coupled with the fact that nearly a generation of black youth are lacking formal education because of school boycotts, creates a dangerous combination of frustrated expectations among the black youth, and a lack of educated blacks entering the work force. The only realistic hope for meeting the expectations blacks now have for economic empowerment is aggressively to pursue black education and technical training. Public schools formerly reserved for white students need to be opened to all races, and full integration of the separate school systems needs to occur as soon as possible.

Third, it should be noted that private industries, recognizing that the future South African economy will include blacks as an integral part of the labor force, have begun to invest both time and resources in educating blacks in business. "Para-statals" (part government, part private organizations) are involved in a variety of development projects as well, training blacks in business management, and eventually turning the entire business over to its employees. National Sogum Breweries is one company for which



Photo: Lonni Jackson

Properly educating the next generation of black children will be a necessary investment in post-apartheid South Africa.

from attaining substantive positions in the work place, that now many view capitalism as a means that the white minority government uses to oppress them. For example, in the mining sector, blacks were prevented from obtaining jobs higher than that of laborer, because they were not allowed by law to be trained in the use of explosives. Unfortunately, these apartheid laws, and an economy that has been nationalized and skewed to favor white business interests in the past, are often equated with free markets -- a view that is based on an erroneous understanding of capitalism, which places fewer restrictions on labor and property.

Despite the economic stagnation that South Africa is presently facing, there is great potential for the economy to bounce back. South Africa displays a unique combination of First and

strategic minerals.

The road ahead for the South African economy will not be an easy one. Certainly the political instability the country has experienced has been at least as damaging to its economy as overseas sanctions. And when sanctions are lifted it is not expected that overseas companies will be eager to reinvest, given the current political uncertainty.

Consequently, for the economy to begin to make a comeback and attract overseas investors, several things need to happen. First, the South African government and the ANC need to work harder at reconciliation, not only politically, but economically. Unless the major political players in South Africa can begin to agree on the general shape the economy should take, investors will remain wary, and capital flight will continue. The

the Industry Development Corporation, a para-statal, supplied financing. A large portion of shares were reserved for blacks, while business training also was provided. Eventually, the remaining shares were turned over to the black employees, many of whom held management positions. Many such ventures have been successful.

Finally, a massive cooperative effort on the part of the international community is needed to invest in black entrepreneurship in cooperation with the South African government and the major black political parties. Without some consensus on what sort of investment should be made, however, these efforts are likely to fall prey to political posturing by various interest groups.

As President de Klerk dismantles the final pillars of apartheid, the argument that sanctions need to remain in place is becoming increasingly more difficult to justify. (In fact, most European countries have already lifted sanctions, and both the U.S. and Japan are seriously considering it.) Consequently, the barriers to international investment and trade will likely be lifted soon. The danger South Africans now face is thinking that an end to sanctions will mean an automatic end to their economic slump. This is not necessarily the case, however. Only a determined effort on the part of all South Africans to address honestly their situation will change the course of the South African economy.

Privatization alone, without providing the means for blacks to participate meaningfully in a free market system, will breed only more resentment and mistrust. As the political climate moves towards legitimate black participation, it is important to remember that without economic emancipation, political emancipation will merely free blacks from one form of bondage to remain in another.

Yoluntu: *A Ray of Hope in a Divided Society*

By Lonni Jackson

In spite of the dramatic reforms South African President F.W. de Klerk has made in his country over the past year and a half, it is still easy to become skeptical about the possibility for peaceful change in South Africa when one looks at the present socio-political climate. The country is plagued with political violence that has claimed thousands of lives in recent years. Government efforts to quell the unrest and institute reform have been met with even more violence, and negotiations between the government, the African National Congress, and other political factions keep getting side-tracked. The economy continues a decade-long decline, while expectations of a quick transition to political power and wealth continue to rise within the black community.

In the midst of such societal turmoil, the work of countless individuals and organizations to promote reconciliation, hunger relief, and economic development is often overlooked. Yet it is precisely these efforts that offer the best hope for South Africa's future. While these organizations do not receive much publicity, many have had a tremendous impact on the communities in which they are involved.

Yoluntu is one such success story. Started in 1983 by Rev. Chris Spies, a white Afrikaner minister working out of his church in the township of Eureka, Yoluntu has grown to become a gentle force for change not only in Eureka, but in the larger town of Burgersdorp, a

farming community long known for its conservative politics. The organization now boasts a new community center in Eureka, from which a management staff of 16 oversees projects ranging from counseling and health care, to a community garden and pre school classes. Yoluntu also serves as a resource for many projects in the surrounding area.

Reverend Spies' vision for Yoluntu began with a desire to help people in the community served by his church through training to empower them to help themselves. Although he had little formal training in community development, Rev. Spies has sought to address the needs in Eureka by building relationships, and entrusting the management of specific projects to those who show aptitude.

From the beginning, Rev. Spies made it a priority to develop leadership from within the community to assume responsibility for the various projects he began. For example, in 1985 he was able to obtain from a white farmer a plot of land adjacent to the township for use as a community garden. An irrigation system was donated, and agronomists from a local university visited to instruct the gardeners on ways to increase their crop yields. At each stage in the development of the garden, Rev. Spies consulted the committee of gardeners, and individuals were elected to administer the garden's resources (i.e., irrigation, tools, seeds, etc.) available for use by each individual plot caretaker.

With funds Rev. Spies solicited from organizations like the Canadian Embassy, World Vision, and the Presbyterian Church (USA), a community center was built to enable Yoluntu to serve the needs of Eureka. This method of facilitating the development of specific projects, and enlisting the support of a committee drawn from church and community leaders to administer them, has been the key to

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Yoluntu, from page 3

Yoluntu's success. Recently, Rev. Spies had the satisfaction of seeing his vision fully realized, as he helped appoint a successor from the community to take his place as Director of Yoluntu.

Besides the work in Yoluntu, Operation Hunger and Africa Enterprise are excellent examples of groups in South Africa that are successfully working towards economic empowerment and development. In doing so, they begin to bridge gaps between different communities and racial groups. It is not an easy task, as apartheid has created a legacy of mistrust, resentment, and fear. One of the most difficult barriers Rev. Spies had to overcome was suspicion not from the black community in which he worked, but from the white community where he lived.

After many years of painful struggle with the white community in Burgersdorp, Rev. Spies was finally able to make a breakthrough. Early this year, at a meeting in the church in Burgersdorp, Spies shared his vision for his work with the white townfolk. Almost overnight, the suspicion and resentment he faced from his white neighbors gave way to broad support for Yoluntu, and a deep sense of regret over time lost because of misunderstandings. It comes as no surprise, then, that Rev. Spies' next project will be to head up an organization that trains church and community leaders in conflict management skills.

For more information on how you can be involved in the ongoing work of Yoluntu, please contact Lonni Jackson at the IRD.



Briefs

Church Lobbies with Economic Focus Merge

Two oldline church-sponsored lobbying organizations, Interfaith Action for Economic Justice and National IMPACT merged in January 1991 to become INTERFAITH IMPACT. The agency represents over 35 national religious organizations (Protestants, Jewish and Roman Catholic). In March, INTERFAITH IMPACT held its annual issues briefing in Washington, D.C. Some 600 people participated in legislative workshops examining the New World Order, social and economic justice, environmental issues, free trade with Mexico, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.



U.S.-Mexico Trade Issue Draws Church Eye

Free trade with Mexico has become a high priority issue for INTERFAITH IMPACT. The organization opposed "fast-track" approval of the legislation because it would require Congress to take a yes or no vote on the trade agreement without allowing for debate on individual items in the pact. INTERFAITH IMPACT is particularly concerned that the agreement will perpetuate further environmental destruction in Mexico and that widespread unemployment will result from U.S. companies seeking cheaper labor in Mexico.



Coffee Boycott Continues against El Salvador

Procter & Gamble, the largest U.S. buyer of Salvadoran coffee, continues to be the target of a boycott. Now, 16 religious organizations have filed shareholder resolutions for the company's annual meeting in October. They

urge P&G to explain its continued purchases of Salvadoran coffee. The related boycott was initiated by Neighbor to Neighbor in 1989 to force the Salvadoran government into a negotiated settlement with leftist guerrillas, and to end human rights abuses. The boycott has been opposed by El Salvador's Roman Catholic bishops. The resolution does commend P&G for its earlier "human rights leadership" in the case of Uganda in the 1970s, when the company refused to purchase coffee beans from Uganda while the repressive Idi Amin was still in power.



Yugoslavia Resource Available from IRD

The current civil strife in Yugoslavia is difficult to understand. For clues, an IRD Economic Studies briefing paper by Dana Preusch, "The Church and Democracy in Eastern Europe" (January 1991), can be obtained from IRD for \$4 (members receive a 10% discount).



Shareholder Resolutions Focus on the Environment

A shareholder resolution seeking the Amoco Corporation's acceptance of an environmental code of conduct, the Valdez Principles, garnered only 8.6 percent of all votes cast at the company's annual meeting in April. Environmental activists were encouraged because any resolution which receives more than three percent of all votes cast can be resubmitted for discussion at successive annual meetings. This was the first time the resolution had been offered for approval at Amoco. The company was commended for its environmental track record over the last decade and other corporations such as AT&T, Dow Chemical and Ford Motor Company were also credited as being "serious" about environmental accountability.

Culture and Church in Modern Japan

Carolyn Bowen, Francis and John Masaaki Nakajima, *Christians in Japan* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991) 160 pp. \$7.95.

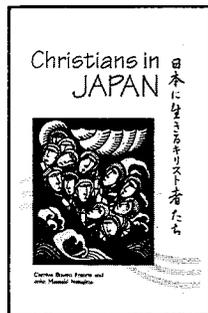
Patricia J. Patterson, *The Way of Faithfulness: Study Guide to Christians in Japan* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991) 46 pp. \$5.95.

By Thomas W. Burkman

It is highly appropriate that ecumenical Christians across North America should be studying the church in Japan. Japan is a post-industrial culture which in many ways points the way to life in the future for other populations on the planet. At the same time, it is a highly traditional society where an animistic religion (Shinto) retains mainstream status and where deviation from social norms evokes strong retribution from family, workplace, and neighborhood. Nor does the state side intentionally with minorities or individualists. In both its futuristic and traditional character, Japan sometimes moves at cross-purposes to the faith of Jesus Christ. The experience of those who follow Jesus as Savior and Lord in this context is highly instructive for Christians in the West.

The main text for the 1991-92 National Council of Churches mission study, *Christians in Japan*, is written by Carolyn Francis, a United Methodist missionary in Okinawa, and Masaaki Nakajima, a United Church of Christ clergyman in Japan with Pacific-wide ecumenical ties. The book offers a sound and engaging treatment of Christian efforts in Japan since the 16th century. Vignettes portraying the life experiences of Japanese Christians show how society colors church life and how Christians find themselves in conflict with practices commonly followed by their neighbors.

Most admonishing for North Americans is insight into what it means to be a minority in a thoroughly non-Christian environment. Christians everywhere are strangers in the land, but Japanese Christians since World War II are acutely aware of their alien character. The authors are particularly sensitive to



those times in recent history when the state has instigated politics and practices regarded among Japanese Christians as sinful. Church compliance in ultranationalism and militarism during World War II is a particularly painful and divisive issue among many of the faithful in Japan. (More evangelical church bodies, plus groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, suffered persecution during this period, while the more mainstream ecumenical Christians ignored their plight.) This study in effect warns Christians the world over to be wary of the identification of the cause of the faith and the interests of the state. In North America, where the danger is also present, Christians have much to learn from the painful experience of their sisters and brothers in Japan.

Fully two-thirds of the book is "issue-oriented," addressing such problems as discrimination against minorities and women, the environment, Japan's relation to its Asian neighbors, and abortion. (The study criticizes excessive dependence on abortion for contraception, linking this problem to the fact that the pill is illegal in Japan.) These issues are sometimes explicitly tied to questions of the faith and sometimes not. The reader would benefit more if there was increased attention to how Japanese Christians apply Biblical principles to these issues.

The "Study Guide" is inseparable from the textbook. It provides discussion formats, bibliography, and film resources useful for groups involved in the study. Biblical references are given but are not discussed. Like the text, the guide misses an opportunity to direct the church's attention to the Scriptures as the primary sourcebook for the treatment of social issues.

Both publications are creative and full of information the church should know. But many Christians will wish that the books dealt more with Japanese Christians' personal struggles with -- and affirmation of -- the tenets of Christianity. The books leave the impression that faith derives from grappling with social issues. While ethics is an important crucible for faith, orthodox Christians -- including those in Japan -- know that applying the faith in the thorny questions of life is not the whole story. The church in Japan has much to teach about matters of belief. These books miss the chance to convey this rich story.

Thomas W. Burkman is a Japanese historian and former missionary teacher in Japan. He directed the Institute of Asian Studies at Old Dominion University (VA) 1987-90 and currently is Adjunct Associate Professor of History at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Letters

Remembering Columbus Accurately

Minus Sentiment and Ideology

Dear Editor,

I want to commend you on the recent issue of *Religion & Democracy* [March 1991] and the article regarding the celebration of Christopher Columbus' voyage to the Americas. I share the sentiments expressed by the writer Wendi Richardson completely.

I was at the NCC [National Council of Churches] meetings where this issue was discussed and frankly [I was] quite disgusted with the attitude of the majority that affirmed the NCC resolution not to endorse the discovery of America as a joyous occasion.

I feel more and more the NCC is used as a platform for too many ways to exploit personal feelings. The reasons presented to 'deny' the recognition of the discovery of America -- because it engaged in conflicts and confrontations of a different time and world -- certainly are absurd. I don't mean to minimize the nature of the concern regarding the issue at hand but I'm disappointed in the attitude of church leaders who were led astray by emotion rather than logic.

Many of us -- the Orthodox caucus -- were bothered by this gross misjudgment....

Thanks for putting it all together so well.

Sincerely,

Fr. Garabed Kochakian
St. Mesrob Armenian Apostolic
Church
Racine, Wisconsin

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your excellent lead article in the March *Religion & Democracy*. I am shocked by the NCC leadership's lack of knowledge about serious problems in the world and the ease with which they blame United States and the west for all the serious problems in the world. Also, their romantic and uncritical view of primitive societies deserves criticism.

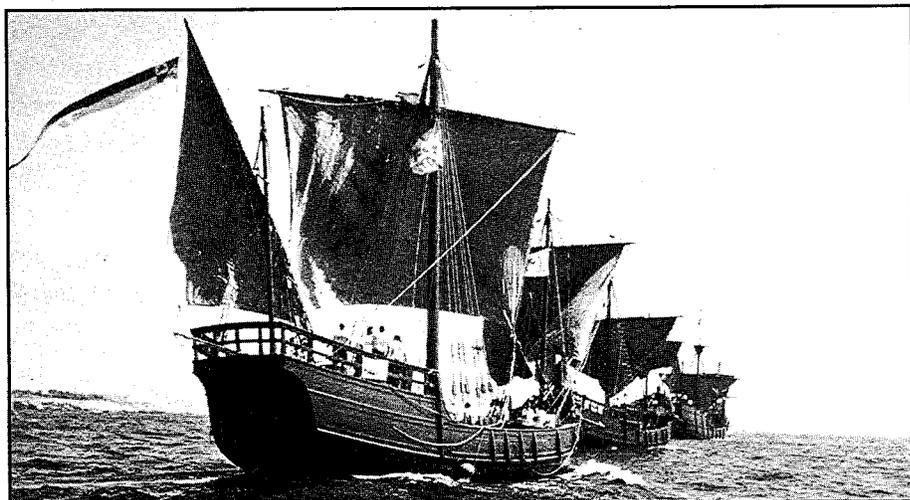
I was fortunate to have studied under Dr. Lucy Stebbins, Professor of English and American Philanthropy and Social Reform at the University of California, Berkeley, in the 1930s. She traced the history of man's inhumanity to man through the ages and how over the years humane changes came, largely through the influence of individuals or small groups of Christians for change.

Slavery was a way of life in most all societies.... It was in the late 1700s that a movement started in England led by the Quakers, Thomas Clarkson and Lord William Wilberforce in Parliament that condemned the slave trade and all forms of human bondage. Through "correspondence societies" the idea

of the evil of slavery became an issue throughout Europe so that by the 1820s the slave trade and bondage were abolished in Europe. Sadly slavery continued in the United States until the 1860s. But in much of the world, people "owning" other humans was an accepted way of life. One of the good things that came from the evil of European colonialism was the abolishing of slavery in India by the British, in Indonesia by the Dutch and in Indo-China by the French. [Ending] the evil of the slave trade began with small groups of Christians in Europe until whole societies and the whole world found slavery repulsive as it is today.

Sadly our ignorant national religious leaders and the NCC have such a romantic vision of life in the third world and primitive cultures generally that they see all evils as imported from the west, which has little to do with reality! Surely there are evils in the west, but to blame Columbus and the west for bringing slavery to America is idiocy!

Very truly yours,
Marc W. Scherbacher
San Pedro, California



Coming in 1992: a re-creation of Columbus' westward sail in 1492

UM Layman Studies Missions Problems

What can one person who is concerned about the direction of his church do?

Edward King, a United Methodist from Virginia, wanted his fellow church members to know that he saw serious problems, particularly with the General Board of Global Ministries, and that he could document these problems. So he prepared a 71-page report to distribute to his Administrative Board. The report begins with a discussion of theological perspectives and then highlights six issue areas, including the National Council of Churches' Columbus Day resolution and a section on the Mission Priorities of the Board of Global Ministries.

Edward King has offered to send a free copy of his report to interested *Religion & Democracy* readers. Write Edward King, 6916 Rosemont Drive, McLean, VA 22101.

NCC to Discuss Shape of 'New World Order'

President Bush's vague references to the post-Cold War period as the beginning of a "new world order" have drawn many responses: some pundits eager to fill in the details, and others believing there's nothing new under the sun. The National Council of Churches now wants a say, since discussion of this "new world order" will be "an important element in the national debate as the 1992 elections approach."



Photo: Lonni Jackson

IRD has been served well this summer by an excellent group of interns. Pictured above, from left: Kelly Davis, a junior at Davidson College; Marcy Carlson, a recent graduate of Gordon College; and Michelle Anderson, a graduate student at Regent University.

So said a "draft concept paper" that was presented to the NCC Executive Coordinating Committee in March. While asserting that the NCC "has played a substantial role in helping to inform such discussions which have deep moral, ethical and spiritual implications for our own people and the world," the paper confessed that the NCC of the 1990s "does not reflect the cultural dominance its member communions exercised in the 1950s." Such decline need not diminish the NCC's obligation to offer moral discernment at "critical junctures." The paper suggested that "many rely on such leadership." The evidence: the role of the churches in the Persian Gulf crisis.

The paper called the NCC to "discover a new freedom for cultural critique and thereby offer a more authentic voice in behalf of those whose aspirations for the future have so long gone unmet." The stated concern, however, was that talk of new orders will "mask the intention of the 'old' to resist change at all cost." The NCC's "intimate experiences" with the impact of that old order, the paper

continued, "uniquely qualifies" it to assess the promise of a new order. The NCC is planning a November "theme conference" in conjunction with its General Board meeting.

Follow-up "probes" will be spread from November through June 1992. Prospective topics include: world economic realignment; urban crisis; the dynamic of racism; security, arms, and peace; U.S. social policy; regional probes; the world ecosystem; and communications and mass media.

Greek Orthodox Suspend NCC, Episcopal Ties

Longstanding concerns over "liberal leanings" in the National Council of Churches and the Episcopal Church have resulted in a suspension of relations with those two bodies by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. The 1.9 million-member archdiocese is the largest of the Orthodox churches in the NCC.

Issues regarding the ordination of practicing homosexuals in the Episcopal Church and the NCC's dialogue with the predominantaly gay Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches apparently influenced the decision. The suspension will hold pending a review at the fall meeting of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas.

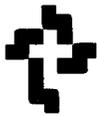
In response to the suspension, NCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell said in a *Religious News Service* report that to lose the Orthodox involvement "would diminish us and cause us to lose an important perspective on the faith."

10th Anniversary Conference Set

The IRD observes its 10th anniversary this year. It's been a remarkable decade for the advancement of democracy and religious freedom, although we can claim to have played only a small part in recent events. Nevertheless, this role is gratifying and is, we believe, worthy of celebration.

We want to invite every IRD member to help us launch another decade of fruitful challenge to the churches. We are planning special events and a campaign to provide the necessary resources for the IRD's work in the coming crucial years.

To that end, we are pleased to announce a 10th-anniversary conference, to be held in Washington, D.C., on October 8, 1991. The conference will explore the prospects for the continuing development of religious freedom and democracy and will chart a course for constructive involvement by the churches. Mark the date on your calendar now.



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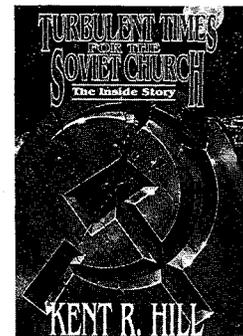
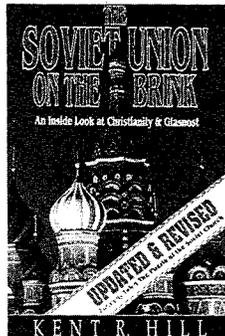
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IRD membership is \$25 per year
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Available from IRD:



The Soviet Union on the Brink: An Inside Look at Christianity & Glasnost

In this significantly expanded and revised edition of *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church*, Kent R. Hill, Executive Director of the IRD, surveys the relationship between believers and the state in the USSR, with a special emphasis on the status of the church under *glasnost* and the prospects for the future in light of the political and economic instability. Appendices provide valuable information on how Christians in the West can assist fellow believers in the Soviet Union. Index. (Multnomah Press, 1991, 520 pp., hardcover, \$19.95.)

Turbulent Times for the Soviet Church

Also by Kent R. Hill, this is an abridged version of *The Soviet Union on the Brink*. Appendix lists organizations involved in ministry, evangelism, exchanges. (Multnomah, 1991, 184 pp., paperback, \$8.95)

There is a 10 percent discount for IRD members. If orders include payment, IRD will pay for the postage.