

Columbus A 500-Year Legacy Revisited, Rewritten

Columbus Day on October 12 marks the 500th anniversary of the voyage that resulted in contact with what are now known as the Americas.

Though not the first European to reach these lands, Columbus has become the focal point of criticism for having inaugurated a legacy of injustice that continues to this day. Many American churches and ecumenical groups have called for setting aside celebration of Columbus Day in favor of repentance. Robert Royal, Vice President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, DC, discussed these issues in a recent interview. Royal is the author of *1492 and All That: Political Manipulations of History*, a just-published analysis of the Columbus controversy.

Many churches have spoken harshly about the Columbus legacy, and have condemned celebrations of the 500th anniversary of his voyage. Is there anything justified in this?

ROYAL: Let me start by saying that there certainly are things in the record that are simply evil. I wouldn't put it any other way. Some of it was not merely "ambiguous" or "culturally determined." I want to apply good and evil categories to the things that Europeans did, as well as the things that indigenous peoples were engaged in.

But that said, there is a funny quality to the repentance called for by the churches. C.S. Lewis once said of people who repent in the name of the nation that it is really detraction masquerading as humility. When they say "we" have done such-and-such, they don't mean that they themselves have oppressed Native Americans or Africans who were forced into slavery. What they mean is that the

society as a whole has done something. So it's an often politicized critique that looks like Christian humility.

Now, what is odd to me as I read through statements and talk with the church people is this idea of respecting other peoples' cultures. After you read this "respecting cultures" rhetoric enough, it starts to sound false and hollow, especially coming from Christians. No Christian group, for example, would say that the culture of ancient Canaan was a culture that ought to be respected. No Christian group would say that ancient Roman paganism at the time of Christianity's expansion through the empire was a culture that should have been respected. Quite clearly the first Christian concern in those circumstances should be a transformation of culture in light of Christian principles.

The situation in the Americas is quite a bit different, because the European culture, the so-called Christian culture, arrived as technologically dominant. It dealt with peoples whose lifestyles were disrupted, not solely due to military impositions, but because of European diseases. All

of this upset the normal way their lives had been. But as you start to look into the indigenous peoples, you see that there is no indigenous tribe that could be reconstituted today -- the way it was in 1492 -- without raising a ruckus. There was torture, slavery, hierarchy, human sacrifice, cannibalism. Just about every tribe or group that I've studied has some aspect of life that is left out of the equation in these church discussions.



Christopher Columbus, as painted in 1519 by Sebastiano del Poimbo. RNS Photo.

In other words, the view of evil white men vs. peace-loving Indians lacks some historical accuracy?

ROYAL: There's been a debate among the politically sensitive that we should not call what Columbus did a "discovery" because indigenous peoples were already here and knew where they were. That's true up to a point, but it's also false in a major way. There was no indication of any Native American high culture or tribe having the

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On Trial in Peru: Democracy, the Church

By Alan Wisdom

Is there any hope for democracy in Peru? If it fails totally, what price will the churches have to pay?

On April 5 President Alberto Fujimori suspended Peru's constitution and dissolved the Congress. He alleged his need for a free hand to fight the Maoist insurgency called the Shining Path. But continuing terrorist attacks by the guerrillas demonstrate that they will not be easily defeated. It remains unclear how Fujimori will fulfill his promises of a restored and strengthened democracy.

Peru's churches have suffered heavily since Shining Path took up arms in 1980. The most horrifying incident of this little-noticed persecution took place last year. On February 23, 1991, in the Peruvian mountain village of Ccano, the small congregation of the Pentecostal Evangelical Church was gathered for an all-night prayer meeting. About 11:00 p.m. they heard several trucks drive up. About forty men -- guerrillas of the Shining Path -- jumped out and entered the church. They locked the doors. Then they sprayed the congregation with machine-gun fire. Finally, the guerrillas poured gasoline on the benches and set the building afire. As they ran out the door, they yelled, "This is how dogs die!" The dead numbered 33, mostly women and children.

More than 500 Peruvian evangelicals have been murdered since 1980, according to the National Evangelical Council. The Roman Catholic Church has lost seven priests, two nuns, and numerous lay leaders. Last year brought a concentrated series of attacks against the Catholic diocese of Chimbote. Three priests were assassinated, another was almost killed, and the bishop was threatened.

Shining Path's hostility to the church springs from its uncompromising ideology. The group's founder, Abimael Guzman, studied in China during the Cultural Revolution. He was inspired by Mao's brutal use of "revolutionary violence" to purge society of all "bourgeois" elements. Guzman has no interest in reform or negotiation or collaboration with other groups. In his own words: "Violence is the only way to take power." Shining Path envisions a decades-long struggle costing perhaps millions of lives. Starting in the Andes and closing in around Lima, the guerrillas aim to spread fear among the people, paralyze the government, and finally strangle it with "cords of iron."

Unlike other Marxist movements that have tried to co-opt the church, Shining Path treats it as a deadly rival.

The director of the Evangelical Council, Caleb Meza, explains: "The only social institution which has remained among the isolated masses is the church. The church not only models the spirituality of a community, but also its political conduct." Shining Path propaganda accuses the church of "putting consciences to sleep" with its preaching and its charitable work. Foreign missionaries are branded as "agents of imperialism."

Trouble arises particularly when the Peruvian army tries to organize a "civil patrol" to combat the guerrillas. If



In June, Romulo Saune received World Evangelical Fellowship's first religious liberty award. Saune is a Quechua minister from Peru; his people have been caught in the crossfire between revolutionaries and the government.
Photo: Fred Jones

church members in the community join the civil patrol, the guerrillas may try to attack the church. (This appears to have been the case in Ccano, where many men in the Pentecostal church belonged to a civil patrol.) But if church members refuse to serve, then the army may strike back. There have been several massacres and numerous disappearances at the hands of government troops.

There has been a lull in attacks against churches this year, perhaps due to Shining Path sensitivity to the public reaction against last year's attacks. Or it may be concentrating its fire on the government. In either case, the danger to the church has not diminished. Caritas, the Catholic relief agency, has received threats recently. And Shining Path literature has always boasted that after it consumes the government, it will "eat the church for dessert."

In one sense, the churches are merely sharing in the common suffering of the Peruvian people. Over 23,000 have died as a result of the insurgency and counter-insurgency. This civil strife is a projection of a rift in Peruvian society that runs all the way back to the Spanish conquest. Ever since then, a small Hispanic elite in Lima has held the reins of political and economic power. Meanwhile, the masses of Indians in the highlands have had little participation in and derived little benefit from the power structures.

The advent of elections during the past decade has not changed the basic pattern. Most Peruvians consider the legislature and the judiciary hopelessly corrupt and inefficient, and the executive power seems distant or insensitive.

Shining Path is not truly the champion of these grievances. It appears to have little support beyond a hard
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slightest idea about its place in a larger world. In a sense, as much as this may sound Euro-centric, Columbus did not prove that the world was round to the Europeans. Educated Europeans were aware of it. He did prove it to the Indians. He also led to their thinking of themselves as a group. All of a sudden they knew that they were in one large world, and they were in contact with other peoples. It was only later, after combat with whites, that a pan-Indian agenda got going -- where Indians were said to be all on one side and white men all on the other side. In fact, Indians were often at odds with one another. One of the reasons the Conquistadors (only about 450 men) were so easily able to take what is now Mexico City, a city of several million, is that 20,000 of the subject peoples in the Aztec empire fought alongside Cortez and the Europeans. Even without the European presence, Indians fought each other, displaced each other, and committed what we today call injustices.

All of that can't be an excuse for denying the Indians their humanity, can it?

ROYAL: It has been said again and again in recent church documents that Christians and Europeans denied humanity to indigenous peoples. Now, the question about their humanity caused a rather serious debate. There were some people who thought that the level of civilization was too low, particularly in the Caribbean, and that therefore these people were what Aristotle called "slaves by nature." But there were many people who argued on the other side, and I would say that the Spanish record on this is actually quite remarkable. Within those first 60 years, from roughly 1492 to 1550, there's a steadily growing appreciation that these indigenous people are human beings. They had very different cultural norms, but there's no question that the theologians and missionaries came to a basic agreement: if it was not exactly cultural respect that they should practice, then certainly just war theory applies. You cannot just attack people and take their land -- even for violations of natural law or for resisting evangelization. It was a definite theological step forward that these people were seen to have rights and that they could not simply be imposed upon by Europeans. Now, what happened, in fact as opposed to theory, is a different story. Spaniards continued to do much of what they had always done. The settlers were violent in terms of resisting any attempts to limit their own activity.

Let's go back to the notion of "respecting culture." That sounds so simple and uncontroversial. Yet is there more implied in this than Christians should be comfortable with? What are the Columbus critics really saying?

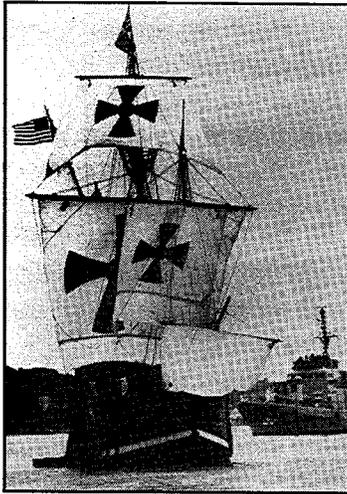
ROYAL: Well, let's recognize first of all that even many Native Americans today are not radically opposed to American culture. Many of them have willingly assimilated to some degree. These problematic church documents tend

to select out the most radical liberationist portion of Native American voices. So the dynamic that they're engaged in is one of trying to take this contemporary voice and project that back over the last 500 years. Indian groups for the most part right now are weak, disorganized, feel in some ways oppressed, and have a vast number of problems. We have to recognize that European behavior is, to a large extent, but not wholly, responsible for some of these problems. At the same time, it is difficult to compare Native American life now with what the colonizers found. It's easy to go to an Indian reservation now, see various Indian rituals going on, and observe their belief system. All of this appears benign, fairly innocuous. There's no reason we shouldn't be able to tolerate, if not respect, what's going on right now. But if you really begin reading seriously what any individual Indian group was like in 1492, you're likely to find that there are lots of things that we simply wouldn't allow to occur anymore.

One question that is almost entirely lacking in what I have read in most of the Christian pronouncements is the question, "Does Christianity make a difference to culture?" Christians are not supposed to say simply, "Well, you're doing fine the way you are. And, by the way, have you heard about this guy Jesus Christ?" -- as if knowing Christ wouldn't affect someone's understanding of whether they indeed were doing fine. In archaic societies, where there's an image of the cosmos that is based on the cycles of the seasons and the stars moving in the heavens, there's a common belief that sacrifice, including human sacrifice, is a necessary element to keep the balance of nature going. In point of fact, lots of these archaic cultures have what I would regard as a sinister and perhaps sometimes even diabolical vision of the balance of nature. It's not cruelty, by the way. They don't mistreat the captives. In fact they treat them rather well before they sacrifice them. But it is necessary to shed human blood in order to keep the cosmos in balance. If Spanish Catholicism had taught as dogma that God required us to sacrifice other human beings so that the universe and the Spanish monarchy would stay in good order, we'd have some problem with that. We'd think that was a perverse form of religion. For some reason, there doesn't seem to be a similar set of criteria applied to most of the indigenous cultures.

The Europeans should have done some things differently. But I don't know myself, if I walked into Mexico City with the Conquistadors, how I would have reacted. You have to imagine an enormous temple, a pyramid with two altars at the top -- one to a fertility goddess and one to the god of war. The Spaniards come in and see this huge temple with serpents' heads at the bottom. They observe rites in which human beings are taken up, their chests opened up, their hearts dug out and offered to the gods, then their bodies kicked down the stairs. And the priests

who performed these sacrifices were not allowed to wash the gore off, were not allowed to cut their hair or fingernails. I think that's a pretty horrifying image, and the modern person seeing that today would not take that lightly and say, "Well, we have to respect native cultures." When you understand that that sacrifice was connected with the deepest theological conceptualization of what the world is like, you realize that it's very unlikely that it could have been unseated easily. Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes said



*An old replica
of the Santa
Maria,
Christopher
Columbus'
flagship*

RNS Photo

something that I have never heard from any Christian organization. Basically, he said we can only imagine the astonishment that the Indians, such as the Aztecs, must have felt when they were asked to worship a God who had sacrificed himself for human beings, rather than worship gods who asked human beings to sacrifice themselves to the gods. That's an enormous change in perspective, one to which the notion of "respecting other cultures" doesn't do justice.

What does this say about the churches that are able either to ignore some of the historical evidence or the modes of moral reasoning that would illustrate the dilemmas that were experienced five centuries ago?

ROYAL: The reason I think the churches embrace activism on behalf of oppressed indigenous people is because they feel themselves to be in crisis right now. One of motifs that runs through many of these documents is a deep appreciation for Indian spirituality. But I think what comes through in a lot of the church documents is that the churches feel very empty spiritually. They're looking for places where vibrant spirituality exists. So there's a projection: If we don't have it, they must have it.

I think it would be better to go back to our own tradition for help, although the very people who write these documents think the tradition is exhausted. In that tradition we can see how the biblical view of history, of man, of the world broke with the cyclical visions of most Native Americans. Nature is not exactly cyclical. People such as those who write background papers and resolutions in the

churches regarding Columbus keep telling us that nature is in balance, and that Indians were in balance with nature. But nature is not in balance. Nature has linear changes that make entire regions uninhabitable. It's violent, and most Indian groups understand that, so they don't idealize nature. Modern people, however, tend to idealize nature because modern man, to a great extent, tamed nature.

Some of this is done because of modern discontents that many of us share. Most modern people feel that our societies have become too atomized, that we're all too individualized. They feel divorced from God, from nature, and other human beings. In response, however, some moderns imperialistically redefine the Native American experience. For example, these moderns believe Native Americans have available face-to-face community. They have concrete spirituality. They have an environmental sense because they're close to nature. I think every one of those beliefs is a debatable proposition in the sense modern commentators give to them.

How much of all of this is really about Columbus?

ROYAL: Often the people who go back and talk about Columbus really want to raise a different banner, a critique of modern America. I debated a couple of people at a National Council of Social Studies meeting last year and a woman got up and said to me from the floor, "How can you, in an ethics center, say the things that you're saying? Don't you realize that just a few months ago David Duke got 40 percent of the vote in Louisiana?" My response was: I thought we were talking about Columbus here. After that, she tied together Columbus, Cortez, David Duke, George Bush, Ronald Reagan -- all as one thing -- as if a deep evil monolith has existed in European society forever. You get the same feeling by reading the materials produced by the churches. There is a kind of a simple-minded desire to tell a morality tale, told from a modern American point of view which imposes a distorted reading on Columbus, on native American people, and on the interaction between them. Everything that is wrong now existed in October 1492, and we're all just living out that evil legacy.

Isn't the concern of many in the churches that people will miss entirely the legacy of sin?

ROYAL: As far as I know there has been virtually no uncritical adulation of Columbus in the preparations for the anniversary. But while we are avoiding the sin of believing the past was perfect, we might also worry that using and distorting other cultures for political purposes is an imposition, a lie -- potentially, also a sin.

Will this blow over once the anniversary is over?

ROYAL: I don't think it will entirely go away. One of the dynamics that is very prominent in 1992 is that the old liberationists are going to have to find a different conceptual basis now that Marxism has collapsed. The Columbus

Anniversary has been a kind of a godsend. This is a golden opportunity for "progressives;" here are some truly marginalized, oppressed peoples who must be dealt with in a more just way in 1992. I think many parts of society will do that anyway, just as long as no one is putting a gun to

their heads with radical demands and forcing them to confess that their entire history was evil.

What basic things can people hold onto when they are reading to help them put it in perspective?

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IRD Staff Examine NCC Study Guide on Columbus

Ready for a two-hour learning journey? That's what the National Council of Churches (NCC) has prepared in study guide form (called *Columbus Explored: Retracing Our Roots*) for those who want to discover how their own histories are intertwined as they are with the legacy forged by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Some IRD staff members explored the leader's guide for the journey. Interspersed with the description of the guide below are summaries of comments from the staff who participated.

Shameful Histories

The first part of the session involves helping participants either to think about that which they associate with Columbus or to recall how their families came to the United States. People are asked to create timelines for everyone's arrival. The point, however, is to set up the participants to see that their own histories in the Americas are short in comparison with indigenous peoples. The unequivocal point is made: opportunities for "boat people" came at the expense of "America's first peoples."

IRD Staff: They're telling me my roots aren't really here; my history is illegitimate. I'm being asked to subordinate my own experiences to what is presumed to be a broader ideological perspective which says that America has been a place of genocide and oppression.

For the leaders, this problem of the relationship between the "boat people" and the indigenous people was set up in the introduction of the guide. Many, including church groups, will be challenging celebrations of Columbus' voyage because of the "devastation wrought by the colonization process on indigenous people." This devastation, the result of an "exploitive world view," continues to operate today. To emphasize the point that nothing has changed since 1492, Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* is quoted: "There is, in fact, no new world order; we are still being governed by an old one whose economic, political, philosophical, environmental, and especially spiritual roots can be traced back to the conquest and colonization of the Americas."

IRD Staff: They've missed the complexity in the historical development of the Americas and the interaction of many different factors. The Indians have not always been victims; they've had their own impact on the development of economies and societies. Yet this exercise produces a sense of guilt which seems meant to urge us on

to something more radical, though nothing seems radical enough to cleanse us, to cleanse the nation.

Participants then are given a handout designed to tell the story of the "vanishing" indigenous peoples, the slave trade, wealth taken from the Americas by imperial powers, etc. The purpose, according to one line of questioning, is to help participants understand why Native Americans and others don't want to celebrate on October 12. Participants are asked whether they agree that Columbus Day is not something to celebrate, though the leaders are clearly told not to "convince anyone" and to encourage "differing angles" in the conversation. The facts presented on the handout for discussion, however, are shorn of virtually any meaningful context and are assumed to be self-evidently powerful in the case for the European exploitation of the Americas. Any "disagreement" regarding the historical picture provided by the NCC, much less whether any celebration should take place, clearly must be drawn from other sources.

IRD Staff: We are dependent on the NCC for the facts, but those given were carefully selected to lead us to a certain viewpoint. We are free to disagree, but are left with only our disagreement, rather than strong conclusions drawn from hard facts that might have been provided in a more balanced account of our nation's history.

Acting on Guilt

Taking action based on what has been learned follows in the session. Another handout recommends a variety of approaches: demanding that Native Americans be given a prominent role in any observances, finding alternative observances, raising issues important to Native Americans in the upcoming election. Organizing a service of "repentance and renewal" also is suggested, along with a resource list that includes worship aids. Contact with Native American groups is encouraged so that participants may join efforts to defend rights.

IRD Staff: Much of what we see in the suggested "Action Steps" is somewhat mainstream: Native American involvement in Columbus event planning, protection of religious freedom, maintenance of cultural integrity. Yet we are given for follow-up a resource list of organizations and journals with a rather radical slant. We are open to learning, but this one-sidedness is discouraging.

Briefs

PDRF Leads Amending of General Assembly Korea Policy

Commissioners to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) meeting in June affirmed a greater awareness of the need for religious freedom and human rights in their amended resolution on Korean unification. At the urging of IRD-affiliated Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF), and due to the efforts of a variety of individual commissioners, the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee supported amendments to add religious rights issues to the Korean agenda.

The original resolution on Korea submitted by the official church agencies focused on the peaceful reunification of North and South Korea. This focus was further stressed in a powerful autobiographical presentation by the Rev. Dr. Syngman Rhee, a Presbyterian and current President of the National Council of Churches. Rhee pointed to the North Korean constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and suggested that media accounts of human rights violations stemmed from the "continuing anti-communist syndrome that does not hold water." When pressed by commissioners to apply the same standards to Kim Il Sung's government as had been applied to other regimes, he finally conceded that a mention of human rights in the resolution was consistent with the church's goal of peace and reunification. Amendments included language directing Presbyterian agencies to "inquire about the state of human rights and express a desire for their expansion as they communicated with both Korean governments and Korean Christians."

According to PDRF Director Alan Wisdom, "We [PDRF] were impressed with the independent, assertive character of commissioners on the Peacemaking and International Relations Committee. But there are deep habits of thought and practice among Presbyterian staff that will not be changed by one committee." PDRF will continue to monitor human rights concerns in North Korea.

WEF Creates Religious Liberty Commission

The World Council of Churches isn't the only international body of Christians. World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) traces its roots to a meeting of 800 evangelicals in London in 1846, which resulted in a loosely linked Evangelical Alliance that died out during World War I. It was revived formally as WEF in 1951 according to one of its founders, the Rev. Dr. John Stott, for the defense and confirmation of the gospel, and fellowship in and the furtherance of the gospel. As of its sixth General Assembly, held in June in Manila, The Philippines, WEF now contains 68 national and regional evangelical fellowships. It has been estimated that the WEF community, based in Singapore, contains some 100 million people around the world.

WEF Chairman Tokunboh Adeyemo described the movement until 1986 as one of "struggle and survival." However, a recent growth spurt and greater financial stability made the assembly's "arise" theme seem appropriate to this stage of its development. A major item of business for assembly delegates was to provide feedback to a report prepared by WEF's Long Range Planning Team, which set out to evaluate areas of growth and refinement. The report contained an analysis of world trends to which the church must in some way respond if, as the Rev. Ian Coffey,

chairman of the team, said, it is going to move beyond "pietistic meetings" and be salt and light in society.

The world trends study looked at economic, socio-political, technological, demographic, religious, and environmental trends. It recognized the worldwide forces of globalization and fragmentation, patterns of urbanization and family disintegration, ecological threats, human rights problems (especially religious persecution), a "shift in the center of gravity" of the world church, a decline in denominationalism, and the crucial role of women in the church, among many other things.

One of the report's recommendations proposed that WEF better address social and political issues from a Biblical perspective. Another suggested providing guidance for regional and national fellowships in responding to governments "on matters of public importance." Consistent with this, WEF has established a Religious Liberty Commission to research problems of persecuted believers around the world. IRD Research Associate Fredrick P. Jones was invited to Manila to advise WEF in designing its advocacy work, which will be coordinated by Mike Morris, the International Director of the Evangelical Alliance of the United Kingdom. According to Jones, "The WEF community knows the urgency and sensitivity of issues related to religious freedom. Surely as its efforts expand persecuted people everywhere will find great comfort."

Church Groups Disappointed by Rio Summit

In some church circles, the integrity of the environment has become the first order of business. Participation in the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) last May in Rio de Janeiro,

Brazil, and regrets over its outcome mark the continuation of this focus.

Religious groups were among the 13,000 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) registered at UNCED. The NGO's held a parallel Global Forum for networking and lobbying the governmental representatives who were working to finalize various environmental treaties. They issued statements, held rallies, and sought to establish a global "consciousness" which would go far beyond the limitations of treaty and government activity.

Just prior to the opening of the Earth Summit, more than 100 religious leaders joined with prominent



scientists (led by Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould and astronomer Carl Sagan) in a day long meeting in Washington to discuss common ground. Sen. Albert Gore also took part, along with Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning, James Parks Morton, Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, leaders from the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Southern Baptist Church, and some evangelical groups. They drafted and issued a "Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment," signed by 115 of those in attendance.

The Appeal begins: "We are people of faith and of science who, for centuries, often have traveled different roads. In a time of environmental crisis, we find these roads converging. As this meeting symbolizes, our two

ancient, sometimes antagonistic, traditions now reach out to one another in a common endeavor to preserve the home we share." And ends: "Understanding that the world does not belong to any one nation or generation, and sharing a spirit of utmost urgency, we dedicate ourselves ... to cherish and protect the environment of our planetary home."

The World Council of Churches led a two-day forum at UNCED called "ECO'92," the theme of which was "Searching for a New Heaven and New Earth." Participants from 72 churches in 54 countries took part, including some from major U.S. denominations and ecumenical organizations. Four goals were established: 1) spread the word ("raise ecological sensitivity") through sermons, seminars, etc.; 2) encourage religious leaders to lead grassroots efforts; 3) promote environmental legislation; 4) pressure the UN to adopt a strong Earth Charter (with equal status to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights) by the 50th anniversary of the UN in 1995.

Religious participants, along with many in the environmental activist community, expressed deep disappointment in UNCED. Many of these had seen UNCED as the "last chance to save the earth." Anything short of a complete global overhaul would disappoint. Many put the blame for meager UNCED results at the feet of President Bush and the United States delegation. The common refrain that "the U.S. is the world's leading environmental destroyer" (by indicating that it "emits the largest volume of greenhouse gases of any country") was followed by calls for radical turnabouts in U.S. positions and practice.

The actual results of UNCED were indeed small in light of the expectations of some, not to mention the billions of dollars that went into creating and executing the conference. However, a "Rio Declaration" of environmental principles was promulgated, a biodiversity treaty and a climate change treaty were signed,

and a UN Office for Sustainable Development was created. The longest-term consequences may come from the 800-page "Agenda 21" guidelines for the global environment. These steps, while they went too far for some observers, were yet too little too late for those religious activists who proclaimed this the last chance for sweeping action.

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core of followers -- a few tens of thousands. But it capitalizes on the alienation between most Peruvians and their government.

President Fujimori's "self-administered coup" was a desperate move to break the impasse. According to public opinion polls, large numbers of Peruvians backed the coup. But church leaders were not so confident of Fujimori's strategy to save democracy by temporarily curtailing it.

In a pastoral letter on June 16, the Catholic bishops declared: "The solution to the current crisis must be sought democratically. If not, any measures will be fragile, illegitimate and inefficient." The bishops pointed to examples of democracy at the local level to prove that Peruvians have a national vocation for democracy. They called for new attitudes and practices more conducive to democracy in the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the news media, and the public.

It's hard for U.S. Christians to know what to think or do about Peru's tragedy. It defies all sorts of assumptions. Communism was supposed to be dead. Democracy was supposed to be the wave of the future. And the people are not supposed to sympathize with an authoritarian coup.

We can scarcely have hope that the Shining Path will heed anybody's pleas for mercy. Our sisters and brothers have a lot at stake in the success or failure of democracy in Peru. If it is to succeed, the community work of the churches will be crucial. If democracy fails, there will be many more martyrs for us to remember.

IRD to Give Religious Freedom Award to Gleb Yakunin

The IRD will present its 1992 Religious Freedom Award to Russian Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin on October 6 in recognition of his defense of religious rights and advocacy for religious and political reform.

Ordained in 1962, Yakunin was removed from his ministry for criticizing the suppression of the Orthodox Church and the cooperation of the clergy with the Communist Party. From 1979-1986, he was imprisoned for criticism of the Soviet government. Upon his release, Yakunin continued to publicize the plight of prisoners of conscience. He presently serves in the Russian Parliament.

For more information on events surrounding the award presentation, call IRD at 202-393-3200.



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ROYAL: There's a cultural dimension to Christianity which, contrary to the radical critics, has not by any means been simply evil. In fact, it has produced some remarkable results along with its evil legacies. Slavery existed everywhere in the world, basically, until some universal principles of Christianity began to be applied in a widespread manner. Christianity opposed caste systems, and made social hierarchies much less respectable looking around the world. There's a definite cultural influence of the Christian view of the human person, human dignity, the image of God, that has been, despite everything, a force for good in the world. These are concepts that most of the official statements simply have no room for. They don't seem to understand that being Christian means a difference. They think that all cultures are equal, in the same way that all individuals are equal. I don't see that. All individuals are children of God, but all cultures are not equally close to Christian ideals. I think we can say even within Europe that at certain times European culture was closer to Christianity and at times farther away.

Secondly, there has to be a much more serious commitment on the part of Christians of whatever political persuasion to be more respectful of the facts. Facts are important. Facts help contribute to the truth, though facts are not the truth. And we belong to a religion whose founder said that he is the way, the truth and the life. There's a dimension of truth that simply must not be papered over because we want to have good relations with and good feelings about marginalized groups.

On the positive side, it's the duty of a Christian people to hold on to their principles and try to shape their public order as well as they can. We need to remember the legacy of good, as well as evil. There are some remarkable accounts of Christians attempting to do right in the early days of the Americas; they were not always successful theoretically or practically by any means. But compared with much of the world throughout history, the record of Christianity shows alongside great failings, great glories that also should be remembered on October 12, 1492.

Robert Royal's new book, 1492 and All That: Political Manipulations of History (Ethics and Public Policy Center, \$18.95) is available in bookstores or by calling 1-800-462-6420.