

# RELIGION & DEMOCRACY



The Institute  
on Religion &  
Democracy

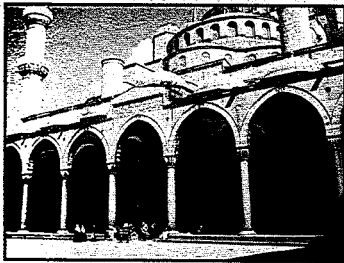
November 1993 • Vol. 13, No. 7

## INSIDE

### North American Free Trade Agreement

Some church leaders and agencies take aim at NAFTA, despite uncertainties about the treaty's effects  
Page 2

.....



### Religious Liberty Alert: Turkey

Turkey's avowedly secular state attempts to control Islam as well as Christianity. Whether it does so fairly remains open to question.  
Page 4

.....

### More on Israel-PLO Agreement

Religious leaders respond to the Israel-PLO accord  
Page 7



The Handshake:  
The PLO's Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.  
RNS/REUTER PHOTO.

## Mid East Peace

*Will it help imperiled Christians in the region?*

By Habib C. Malik

There is no question that the Middle East will never be the same following the Israel-PLO agreement signed in September on the South Lawn of the White House. Regardless of whether the main actors in this latest twist in the ongoing drama of the Arab-Israeli conflict survive their signatures, politically or even physically, a qualitative change has set in. And this change is undoubtedly for the better.

Yet there are dangers lurking ahead for the 12 to 15 million native Christians of the Middle East and Northeast Africa. Among the region's militant Islamic movements and regimes, there are diehard opponents of peace with Israel. As they begin to grasp the limitations on their abilities to derail and thwart the process, their growing frustration will be vented, as has happened so often in the past, on the many local Christian communities scattered throughout the area. Scapegoating indigenous Christians has sadly  
→ see *Peace*, page 6

## Knippers: Democracy in Danger at Home, as well as Abroad

*On October 4, Diane Knippers gave an address at a dinner marking her installation as president of the IRD. Excerpts follow.*

As the Cold War has ended, some people have asked me, "Doesn't this mean the IRD's work is done?" Every healthy organization must from time to time revisit the question of its mission. That is certainly true for the IRD. These global changes have coincided with the loss of our first president, Kent Hill, who led us with such vision, ability and grace, for the last six years. His call elsewhere was a difficult loss for the IRD. I have been among those who have asked searching questions, not the least of which is the familiar challenge: If this organization didn't exist, would we have to invent it?

*My friends, the answer is YES.*

Clearly, the defeat of totalitarianism is not enough. Democracy must be  
→ see *Knippers*, page 3

# Many Churches Look Warily at NAFTA

By Alan F.H. Wisdom

We have been hearing a lot of arguments lately about the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Almost inevitably, some church officials have tried to enter the fray. Here's a survey of their involvement so far:

The most striking fact is that only one denomination has taken a firm stand at its highest level. The General Synod of **the United Church of Christ**, meeting in July, came down squarely against NAFTA in its current form. The UCC Synod called for renegotiating the treaty to strengthen protections of workers' rights and the environment.

Far more numerous are the denominations standing on the sidelines in the NAFTA debate. From the conservative evangelical community there has been a total silence. Officials of **the Southern Baptist Convention** report that NAFTA is nowhere on their agenda. By contrast, many non-evangelical denominations have tried to steer a middle course: They have spoken on the trade agreement, but without delivering a verdict pro or con.

The **U.S. Roman Catholic bishops** have engaged the issue extensively: in consultations with their Mexican colleagues, in communications with U.S. trade negotiators, and in testimony before Congress. They have generally urged that the accord contain a comprehensive charter of workers' rights -- much like the charter adopted by the European Community. The bishops have reserved judgment about whether the current version of NAFTA adequately satisfies their concerns.

The list of other church bodies addressing NAFTA but not taking sides is long: **the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Episcopal Church, the Disciples of Christ, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Friends Committee on National Legislation**, and others. They have expressed

desires that the trade accord remedy a multitude of problems: labor abuses in Mexico, the disparity in wages between Mexico and the U.S., environmental contamination along the U.S.-Mexico border, illegal immigration into the United States, the disappearance of the family farm, the high price of prescription drugs, and racial and gender inequalities.

**The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**, at its Churchwide Assembly in August, took a fresh approach. It adopted a set of



A young anti-NAFTA protestor at a Michigan rally. RNS/REUTERS.

principles to consider in discussion regarding NAFTA, without dictating a yes or no vote on the treaty. The four principles were: 1) Justice requires respect for human dignity. 2) Justice requires interdependent solidarity. 3) Justice requires that economic activity provide sufficiency for all. 4) Justice requires long-term sustainability.

Some leftist religious activists are not happy with this even-handed approach. Pharis Harvey, a longtime United Methodist activist on labor issues, told an audience of churchpeople in Washington, DC: "You've got to get your churches off the fence." According to a Religious News Service report, Harvey insisted that "we have to let them [members of Congress] know that the churches have a conscience on this [NAFTA]."

Harvey assumes that if the churches did have a conscience, they would surely speak against NAFTA. That

assumption is shared by a whole network of religious activists who have worked to enlist their churches in the anti-NAFTA coalition. Undeterred by the absence of declarations from church governing bodies, they have exploited their sway inside national church agencies.

Take **the National Council of Churches (NCC)**. The NCC General Board has not adopted any statement of policy on the trade agreement. Nevertheless, the NCC staff has hardly been neutral on the issue. General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell has condemned NAFTA for making "poverty a competitive advantage."

A Sunday bulletin insert produced by the NCC mounts an all-out attack on free trade. "What might this [NAFTA] mean to you?" it asks. "Potentially relinquishing the economic future of your community, state, and nation." A cartoon character parrots the old Marxist analysis: "Nations must cut wages to stay competitive in the world market.... Canada cuts wages to compete with Japan, who cuts wages to compete with Korea, and so on and so forth.... until workers everywhere earn next to nothing and can't afford to buy the products produced.... This is known as free trade!!" Sophisticated NAFTA critics can do better.

Another less-than-balanced resource comes from **Interfaith Impact**, a lobbying group largely sponsored by the oldline Protestant denominations. Its Autumn 1993 newsletter never precisely instructs readers to oppose NAFTA; however, the message is clear. The front page highlights a photo of a demonstrator bearing a placard: "Free Trade Costs Workers and the Environment." A lead article predicts that "NAFTA could create a future with less safe food, increased air pollution, and more health problems caused by toxins at the U.S.-Mexico border."

The rest of the **Interfaith Impact** newsletter continues in the same vein.

ing on warnings about the dangers of the trade agreement. None of the articles offers even a single reason for favoring NAFTA. All of the suggestions for further reading and action point in an anti-NAFTA direction.

In the United Methodist Church, the Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division have taken the initiative in opposing the trade agreement. Church and Society executive Thom White Wolf Fasset announced on September 20: "Our review of the final text of NAFTA and its recently-signed side agreements shows that this agreement does not enforce labor and human rights or environmental standards."

Only one religious group, as far as we know, has even leaned toward an endorsement of the trade agreement. That is Pat Robertson's **Christian Coalition** (which is not a church, but a self-defined advocacy organization).

During this past summer, Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed indicated support for NAFTA. "NAFTA means 150,000 jobs," he said then, "and jobs are at the heart of the pro-family agenda we promote." But in September the coalition backed away from giving its blessing to the accord -- apparently under pressure from conservative opponents of the pact.

Reed and the Christian Coalition received a blast of criticism for their dalliance with a pro-NAFTA stand. Columnist David Broder wrote: "Frankly, I don't know what the 'Christian position' on NAFTA should be, or the 'Jewish,' 'Muslim,' or 'Hindu' position, for that matter. But I think it's pretty obvious the Christian Coalition doesn't know either."

The same point could be made about many of the unauthorized anti-NAFTA pronouncements from the religious left. The arguments deployed are not transparent statements of basic Christian teaching. Instead, like Reed's claim about jobs, they are estimates of the probable effects of a complicated document on a complicated situation

→ see NAFTA, page 8

**Knippers**, from page 1 built and sustained.

And there are today new and continuing threats to democracy --



Diane L. Knippers

threats which are sometimes more subtle and pernicious than the obvious danger of Marxism-Leninism. Some of these threats to democracy lurk very close to home. Democracy is built and sustained, now just by political and economic factors, as important as these are, but also by deep-rooted cultural traits. Surely we who are people of faith must understand this. As we noted in our conference last fall, democracy is more than just a constitution. It is sustained by non-political institutions, virtues, and habits.

Irving Kristol put the case dramatically when he said, "Now that the 'Cold War' is over, the real cold war has begun." He points to the ruthless corrupting influence of "an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other." And he further observes that "we are far less prepared for this cold war, far more vulnerable to our enemy, than was the case with our victorious war against a global communist threat."

Let me make an important parenthetical comment. There is within our country a recurrent isolationist instinct. Both within the churches and in the society at large, I hear the assertion that we Americans should solve our own problems first before we try to solve anybody else's. IRD's interest in addressing significant issues in our own society should not be mistaken for a desire to turn inward and abandon our

obligations and commitments abroad. I emphatically reject isolationism -- and I believe that expressions of it, when related to the mission of the church, contravene biblical teaching.

.....

There is no mainline. And by that I mean that there is no broad religious consensus within our society which can either shape the character of democratic citizens or provide the moral legitimation for the democratic social order. There are strong and positive elements within the evangelical and Catholic and even parts of the oldline worlds. But they are fragmented and their voices are drowned out by the cacophony of other voices within and without the church. Can anyone look at our society and doubt it? The IRD must be a part of nothing less than a renewed effort to forge a moral and religious consensus which will undergird this democracy -- and other democracies.

I do not pretend to think that the IRD will encompass more than a part of this effort. But our part is essential. It is the part of the activist -- organizing, persuading, challenging, equipping -- always seeking to address issues about which the battle is most critical. We activists are on the front lines at church conventions. We provide solid alternative resources for local church leaders. We organize press conferences, letter-writing campaigns, and demonstrations. We are in the trenches with men and women who depend on us for research, analysis, advice, and encouragement.

Even if I did not believe that so much was at stake in preserving the democratic experiment, I would be committed to the reform and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ. I would be so committed because the Church is the body of Christ. Whenever the Church is in decline, disarray, and disobedience, it betrays our Lord.

*Copies of the Knippers speech are available from the IRD.*

# Paradoxes of a Muslim Secular State

## Turkey remains an anomaly in the Middle East

By Barbara Baker

When the Republic of Turkey celebrates its 70th anniversary this October, one of its most notable claims to distinction will be its role as the world's only successful democratic model of a predominantly Muslim country, the government of which is avowedly secular. It legally contains all religions within a fairly confined sacred box. But while the Turkish courts regularly defend the rights Christians, other authorities subtly and not-so-subtly have tried to reduce the space in which Christians may function.

Despite these problems (and other historic problems regarding human rights), Turkey remains unabashed in its reputation as a maverick in the Muslim Middle East -- even though orthodox Islam calls for no separation of religion from state. Compared to Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region, a westward-looking Turkey offers emerging countries in central Asia an alternative picture of the role of religion in society.

"Turkey is a living model for the compatibility of Islam and democracy," Turkish President Suleyman Demirel declared last year. "Freedom of belief and conscience for every citizen is the cornerstone of Turkish secularism."

It was the sweeping reforms initiated by modern Turkey's first president, Kemal Ataturk, which secularized the centuries-old Islamic judicial and educational systems of the Ottoman Empire. He banned everything from polygamy and women's veils to the militant Muslim orders.

Turkey's pervasive secularism has in recent years come under fire. Even the late President Turgut Ozal agreed with conservative Muslims that the government had adopted an anti-religious stance that needed to be corrected.

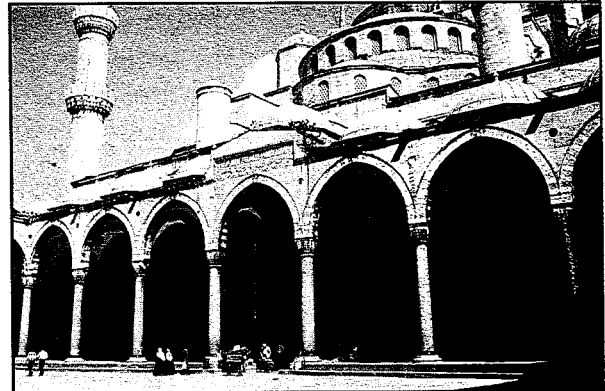
But at the same time (and it a pattern difficult for Westerners to understand), the Turkish government exerts firm control over the entire Islamic establishment, which is subordinated to the Department of Religious Affairs. This government agency supervises the appointment, funding, and activities of all Muslim religious leaders, as well as the construction of mosques and operation of religious schools.

### Ottoman Mindset Pigeonholes Minorities

This state control of religion represents a carryover of the Ottoman mindset, under which the empire not only required conformity among its Muslim subjects, but also classified its ethno-religious minorities in separate religious communities which were answerable to the government.

Today, modern Turkey's minority populations are miniscule. Only 100,000 ethnic Christians, mostly of Armenian, Syriac, and Greek descent, and 25,000 Jews live

among the nation's 57 million Muslim Turks. But all chafe under bureaucratic discriminations imposed by a nominal Muslim establishment, even though their religious rights are spelled out in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923.



Blue Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey. Chris Woehr/NNI.

Church and government clash frequently over restrictive legal and fiscal policies which have hampered and in some cases dissolved a number of Armenian and Greek institutions. For example, when the state withholds approval for upkeep of their historic buildings, this valuable real estate falls into disuse and can then revert to government ownership. The Ministry of Education has also stalled for years on naming Greek principals for the church's primary and secondary schools, which by default are then administered by Turkish vice principals. Requests from both Greek and Armenian churches for permission to reopen their theological seminaries, closed by government order in 1971, continue to be ignored by the state.

The Armenian community of Istanbul still fumes over the government's attempt three years ago to impose new rules which would have in effect dictated the election of their new leader. Only when the church refused to proceed with the elections did the state withdraw its demands.

The Syriac Orthodox, meanwhile, have dwindled to a mere 2,400 in the beleaguered southeast provinces, where the conflict between Kurdish separatists and Turkish military forces has claimed more than 6,500 lives since 1984. Most of the 12,000 Syriacs who have migrated to Istanbul in western Turkey over the past decade were fleeing either the armed conflict, terrorism by Muslim extremists, or the region's general economic collapse.

Although barely 3,500 ethnic Greeks remain in Turkey, the Eastern Orthodox Church Ecumenical Patriarchate based in Istanbul retains its symbolic title as "first see" of worldwide Orthodoxy. Both Turkish nationalists and Muslim fundamentalists perceive this as a political threat, given the centuries of conflict between the Christian Greeks and Muslim Turks.

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The same bias colors the man-on-the-street's view of Armenian church leaders, who are assumed to be suspect in their loyalties where relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan's contested Karabakh region are concerned.

#### **Moving Legal Precedents into the Marketplace**

Until Article 163 of the Turkish Penal Code was revoked in April 1991, the Turkish judicial system had routinely prosecuted Muslim religious orders, Christians, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other religious groups for allegedly "subverting the nation's secular principles to their own religious ends."

Although ostensibly to prevent moves toward an Islamic theocracy, the law in effect had enabled the police to intimidate and restrict Christian activities among Turkey's religious minorities and discourage any missionary activity.

In spite of the revocation of Article 163, two such arrests as recently as July involved four American students and a separate group of 14 Spanish tourists who were taken into custody in Istanbul. When detained, both groups were using legal Christian literature and conducting themselves within the Turkish laws concerning public gatherings. Nevertheless, the Americans were threatened with deportation during their overnight detention, and the Spaniards were held 48 hours at a police station and taken before a prosecutor before their release.

Despite common misconceptions held by police and the general public, Christian or any other non-Muslim propaganda is not prohibited under Turkish law. In fact, the constitution guarantees this right, and also makes it a criminal offense to prevent the conduct of worship or to insult religious officials.

In addition, Christian evangelicals taken to court in recent decades have never been convicted of breaking the laws of Turkey, although usually their work and residence permits have been revoked and police often attempt an unofficial "deportation."

In two landmark cases in 1991 and 1992, Christian expatriates won lawsuits against the Turkish Interior Ministry for being deported without trial and then denied residence visas. Both decisions declared that foreign residents of Turkey could not be deported or denied residence for activities related to "legal Christian propaganda."

This January, Turkish postal authorities were also forced by court rulings to cancel secret, extralegal orders under which they had been told to intercept and confiscate Christian literature sent through the Turkish mails.

The Interior Ministry also revoked last year's closure of a small expatriate Christian church by security police in Adana, where the authorities had declared that worship services in rented facilities violated Turkish law. Responding positively to a petition filed by the church, the January 1993 Interior Ministry decision was said by security authorities to constitute a "national policy."

#### **The Right to Convert**

Clearly, the most sensitive debate on religious freedom in Turkey remains whether a Turkish Muslim can freely convert to another religion. Today many Turks are nominal, non-practicing Muslims, but their roots are only a generation away from the Ottoman Empire's death penalty meted out to apostates.

Although legally there is no restriction now against "missionary" activity as such, civil authorities have for decades severely harassed Turks known to have converted to Christianity, along with any foreigners suspected of "religious proselytizing."

However, a wave of police arrests in 1988 which resulted in four formal trials against Turkish and expatriate Christians in the end brought blanket acquittals and positive legal rulings, all of which reinforced the civil religious rights of Turks who choose to convert to another religion.

While family and social recriminations continue against some converts, others have without incident changed their religion on their identity cards, and even put their names on the line to register their Turkish Christian fellowships as legal meetings for worship.

On the legal side, few expect that these "acts of openness" will have anything but positive repercussions. But admittedly, the rising climate of anti-secularism fueled by Muslim extremists in the country this year is worrisome.

In the wake of January's shock assassination in the capital of a prominent investigative journalist who was an outspoken secularist, the nation was rocked again in early July by an outburst of fanatical religious violence that left 37 dead in the eastern town of Sivas.

While Christians have not yet been targeted in this spiraling violence, church leaders and Turkish converts admit that the polarization between secularists and Muslim fundamentalists will eventually catch them in the crossfire.

Last month, a Turk who had publicly declared his conversion to Christianity began to consider this possibility. Some months ago, he had registered his name as the "responsible person" for printed flyers to be distributed by his local fellowship, encouraging people to write in and request a New Testament.

When the convert showed up at his workplace, he learned that in his absence, an irate father had appeared, brandishing a pistol and shouting threats intent of taking vengeance in the name of Islam. He was furious that his daughter had been mailed a New Testament, which she had requested secretly.

With such a violent response to the exercise of simple freedom of belief and conscience, it remains to be seen if Turkey is indeed the "living model of the compatibility of Islam and democracy," as President Demirel claimed.

*Barbara Baker is the Middle East Correspondent for News Network International.*

### *Peace, from page 1*

been an endemic feature of Middle Eastern history since the rise of Islam 14 centuries ago.

Disturbing signs of this anti-Christian hostility have been in evidence for some time. An ugly war is being waged by the radical Islamic regime in Sudan against that country's native Christians (as well as animists) living in the south, with many atrocities, including crucifixions, being reported. The eight million or so Christian Copts of Egypt are living in a state of constant fear as Islamic fundamentalists openly challenge the government of Hosni Mubarak, burn Coptic churches, and engage in other forms of persecution. And in Lebanon, where the Middle East's last remaining free Christian community struggles after 18 years of war to preserve what is left of its hard-won freedoms, a steady and relentless process of Islamicization is under way -- fueled by Saudi Arabian money and taking full advantage of the country's current occupation by more than 40,000 Syrian soldiers. So far, impending peace in the Middle East contains no assurances for the region's beleaguered Christians.

Whatever breakthroughs occur in the steadily unfolding peace process following the Gaza-Jericho milestone will be driven primarily by economic considerations coupled with a pervasive feeling of war-weariness on all sides. Expectations of a sudden surge in creative intercultural exchange regarding ideals and values among former enemies, or a wholesale embrace of democratic institutions across the Arab world, need to be toned down considerably. Since the liberation of Eastern Europe and the end of Cold War competition in the Middle East (as demonstrated by the successful prosecution of the Persian Gulf War), some Western journalists and academics have speculated wistfully about the imminent democratization of Arab societies and governments. The euphoria is premature and largely misplaced. Unlike the West, the Middle East has not undergone two centuries of sustained secularization because, unlike Christianity, Islam is a religion that does not as easily segregate the temporal and spiritual realms. It regards the thorough, unqualified intermingling of politics and religion as something normal and desirable. Thus, personal and communal identities in the Middle East are defined principally on the basis of religious affiliation, which then trumps other national, ethnic, or linguistic indicators. Middle Eastern Christians will therefore continue to be viewed by the Muslim majority as "people of the book," or *dhimmi* -- tolerated but never treated as equals, and requiring every now and then to be put in their place, through brutal methods if necessary.

Nor is the concept of minority rights, so essential in the Western formulation and application of democratic principles, easily digestible in an Islamic context. If democracy signifies anything in such a context, its meaning does not penetrate much beyond the external trappings of the ballot



*Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat shake hands at the White House on September 13, with President Bill Clinton presiding. RNS/REUTERS.*

box, representative assemblies, and majority rule. Hence, "Islamic democracy" becomes synonymous with numerical determinism (majority rule), and native non-Muslim communities continue to suffer discrimination as a result.

No one is suggesting that Middle East peace is not good for the region's Christians. Therein, however, lies the dilemma: For native Christians to shed their ingrained phobias and benefit from the fruits of peace, this peace will have to transcend the mere cessation of hostilities, mutual security arrangements among states, the elimination of barriers to free trade, and the upholding of regional stability. Real peace will have to address the thorny issues of human dignity, basic freedoms, minority rights, open societies, pluralist coexistence, distinctive religious and cultural identities, and healthy interactive diversity. But it is precisely this higher-level meaning of peace that the rulers and societies of the Middle East do not yet appear ready to accept.

In the absence of such a readiness, therefore, and in the interests of whatever peace can be secured, concrete guarantees need to be worked into ensuing peace agreements, and bold steps will have to be contemplated by the international community to curb potential offenders. In specific terms, this could mean tough sanctions against the regime in Sudan, further support for the Mubarak regime in Egypt to protect its non-Muslim citizens and clamp down on extremists, additional steps to contain the extension of Iran's revolution beyond that country's borders, and a determined decoupling of Lebanon and Syria so that the former can resume its unique and fragile experiment in multi-communal and multi-confessional nation-building.

Peace between Israel and her neighbors depends as much on developments in Tehran and Khartoum as on the formal peace treaties. Even a minimal peace ensuring immediate security needs and a modicum of stability has to be enforced. It must be defended against spoilers no matter

## Religious Groups Laud Peace Accord -- with Reservations

By Kathryn Teapole Proctor

For religious groups across the nation, the September 13 signing of the Israeli-Palestinian accord was reason for cautious optimism. Leaders from the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths, as well as from the National Council and the World Council of Churches (NCC and WCC) hailed the accord as a breakthrough in the peace process, but urged caution in light of the obstacles ahead.

"Today's declaration should be a source of hope for Israelis living in fear of their neighbors and for Palestinians living under an oppressive occupation," said Washington-based **Churches for Middle East Peace**, a joint program of Protestant and Catholic agencies.

The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the NCC, said the accord represents "a new era" in which "both Israelis and Palestinians in unambiguous terms have for the first time, recognized each other's political and human rights."

**Pope John Paul II** stated, "We thank the Lord for having inspired courageous leaders to overcome fear, mistrust, and serious objective problems, so as to begin -- at last -- a concrete and constructive process for peace between peoples." He also prayed that the negotiators would be "protected and strengthened" in their work.

Others noted the difficult path ahead before peace is truly achieved. "We realize that the agreement of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization is only the first step in what will undoubtedly be a long and arduous journey," said **Disciples of Christ** President Richard Hamm and **United Church of**

**Christ** president Paul Sherry, in a joint statement. "But that first step, a recognition of each other's rights and each other's reality, is such an important one. Once taken, we pray, it will not be reversed, and a world of new possibilities will now be open to both peoples and to their neighbors."

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, president of the **Central Conference of American Rabbis**, the rabbinical association of Reform Judaism, acknowledged that, "The swiftness of the negotiations ... requires a reorientation of long-held thought patterns on all sides. The very possibility of peace challenges us to question and rethink our assumptions." Zimmerman realistically added that the Israeli-Palestinian struggle "is not the core of Middle East strife" and predicted the region will "continue to be the source of tensions between fundamentalism and democracy." This important point was missed by most Christian communicators.

Perhaps the most starry-eyed response among them was from the Rev. Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop of the **Episcopal Church**. He stated that the accord is "a resounding affirmation of the highest values that the three great religions of the region share in common. It is as it should be. The values of love, hope, peace and justice now have a chance to triumph over hatred, suspicion, racism and violence. Arabs and Jews, and Muslims and Christians from the Middle East who take this bold step today, serve as an inspiration to the whole human race."

See page 8 for information on how to assess your church's perspective on issues related to life in the Middle East.

how seemingly remote or weak they may appear.

What ought Christians in the West be doing in order to help the peace process along and preserve a place for free Christianity in the very region where our Lord became incarnate, lived and taught, and performed his supreme loving act of universal redemption? The following points are only suggested guidelines for thought preceding action:

- Do not think of Middle Eastern Christians as only -- or primarily -- those 70,000 or so Palestinian Christians living in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Important as this group of native Christians is, it represents only a fraction of the overall regional population of Christians. The concept of the Holy Land ought to be broadened to include everywhere Jesus went -- meaning Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon.
- Remember that Christians in the region are beset by life-and-death fears that differ qualitatively from the often legitimate grievances of Muslims seeking to improve their

socio-economic or political standing and obtain a greater share of wealth and power.

- Remember that because the East did not undergo the same historical development as the West in terms of secularization, Eastern Christians often exhibit a peculiar brew of politics and religion in their attitudes and behavior that is alien to their Western counterparts. Understand before you judge and condemn.
- Personal and communal freedom are rare commodities in the Middle East. Since they constitute basic Christian values, any oases of Middle Eastern freedom and any homegrown experiments in political pluralism, sociological diversity, or economic free enterprise, no matter how ephemeral or incomplete, are worth saving or reviving, both as values in themselves and as beacons for the entire region.

*Dr. Habib C. Malik is IRD's Middle East Associate. A Roman Catholic, Malik lives in Beirut, Lebanon.*

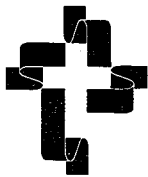
**NAFTA**, from page 3

for years to come.

Nobody can say with prophetic conviction how many and which jobs will be gained or lost, whether the Mexican government will become more or less attentive in protecting workers' rights, whether Mexican environmental standards will be raised or U.S. standards lowered. Perhaps it would be best if churches would encourage their members to hear all sides of the NAFTA debate -- and then let the members decide for themselves.

**Correction**

In our critique of a new United Methodist Women's Division statement on ministries to women and children (*Religion & Democracy*, June 1993), we wrongly stated that the statement "does not even mention fathers." In fact, there is one brief mention: a lament that "75% of absent fathers pay no child support." We quite agree that too many absent fathers criminally neglect this duty. But, recalling the wag who noted that a father's role should go beyond being a sperm bank and an ATM machine, we continue to wish that the Women's Division had also spoken of the crucial need for fathers to be present in their children's lives.

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(202) 393-3200

**Diane L. Knippers**  
President

**Alan F. H. Wisdom**  
Senior Research Associate

**Fredrick P. Jones**  
Research Associate and Managing Editor

**Contributing IRD Staff:**  
Lonni K. Jackson, Kathryn Teapole Proctor,  
Kendrick Mernitz Smith, Suzanne S. Mulvey,  
Faith McDonnell

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## What does your church say on the Israel-PLO accord?

Churches speak in various ways. Frequently church leaders, whether elected or appointed, speak their own minds about public issues and are treated by the media as people ordained to speak the mind of the church -- whether they have that authority or not.

Each denomination, however, does have official ways of speaking through representative bodies of clergy and laity. Many such bodies will deliberate over what they ought to say publicly by entertaining written resolutions. These might originate at the local or regional level, or from denominational agencies. *What has your church said officially about the Middle East in the past? What do you think it will say in the future? Can you help shape the outcome?*

As you study what your church has said, consider these questions:

- Is the resolution well-argued and reasonable? Have a range of experts been consulted reflecting potentially different views of the issues?
- Is the issue in an area in which the church should speak?
- Is the church making broad applications of theology to provide a framework for its members and policy makers to think about public policy? Or has it gone so far as to do detailed public policy analysis in order to tell the government what to do and its members how to practice their political responsibility?
- Does the resolution give specifics as to how it should be carried out? Is it reasonable? Does it hold the church accountable?
- Does it acknowledge God and is it grounded on biblical principle, rather than on fashionable or politically correct concerns?

### *Specifically on the Middle East --*

- Does it reduce the Middle East to only the Israeli-Palestinian question? Too often the concern is only for the rights of the Palestinian -- and not for the safety of the Israeli, or the rights of the Bah'ai, or the rights of the Muslim woman or Muslim minority groups.
- Does the resolution consider human rights and the lack of democracy in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Syria?

**Consider writing your own Middle East resolution.** IRD staff would be glad to assist you in obtaining a copy of official statements from your church and to provide further ideas for drafting a resolution.