

Renewal Leaders Assess Cultural Trends

IRD consultation produces spirited talk about church, world

On October 27-29, 40 denominational renewal leaders and speakers from six mainline denominations met in a retreat setting to study the question "How are we to be the body of Christ in the world today?" The occasion was a Renewal Leaders Strategy Consultation, sponsored by the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD).

The consultation focused on the public witness of the church, and particularly the theological, ideological, and social trends which drive that public witness. Dr. William Abraham, of Perkins School of Theology, laid out the theological stakes of mainline renewal, while Michael Novak, from the American Enterprise Institute and a member of the IRD board, addressed what is at stake culturally. Among the other speakers were Richard Kew, co-author of *New Millennium*, *New Church* and David Aikman of *Time* magazine. Conferees took part in animated discussions of eco-theology, the pop culture, and the role of families in society. In addition,



IRD President Diane Knippers

IRD Senior Research Associate Alan Wisdom addressed missions efforts in the church, IRD Director of Program Development Fredrick Jones discussed mass media issues, and former IRD staff member Lawrence Adams analyzed the trends in environmental theology.

Following the consultation, IRD President Diane Knippers said, "We were heartened at the unity of mind and spirit, and at the healthy self-examination which took place among the participants. The IRD is

strategically placed to be both a catalyst and a resource for an ecumenical reform movement. We believe such reform is an crucial element to the task of sustaining the democratic experiment."

Conferees called on the IRD to hold a second larger conference in the near future. They also discussed cooperating on several joint projects, including publishing ventures, an inter-denominational convocation, and a monitoring of public denominational and ecumenical activity. The goal would be to reform and renew the social witness of the Church.

Reform groups in the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Disciples of Christ, and the United Church of Christ sent representatives to the conference. Conferees met inter-denominationally in strategy groups to talk through what they had heard and to discuss plans for future action.



Panelists discuss possibilities for church renewal

Renewal Consultation Highlights

- *William Abraham on church renewal*
-- page 2
- *Richard Kew on reading the signs of the times*
-- page 3
- *Roy Howard Beck on church activism in Washington*
-- page 4

Abraham: The Renewal of the Church

Dr. William Abraham is Professor at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Excerpts of his address follow.

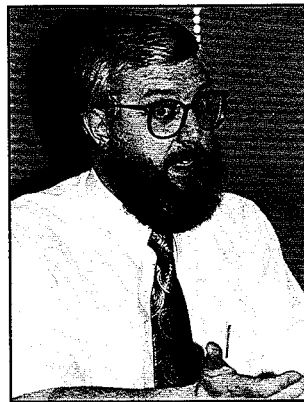
... **I**n the West, Christians as a whole are currently undergoing a profound process of soul-searching. Old coalitions are breaking down; new coalitions are forming. Christians have been driven both by the decline in their numbers and by changes in the culture to examine in new ways the state of the church and the faith. In doing so they have been forced to invent a new vocabulary of renewal to capture the dynamics of the debate.

... It is clear from the variety of proposals now offered that Christians are divided both with respect to the diagnosis of our ills and with respect to the prescriptions for our cure. These divisions run very deep indeed. They cut to the very heart of Christian identity in the contemporary world. They engage us in debates concerning our continuity with the Church of the ages and about our relations to the cultural, intellectual, and political trends which have constituted the driving forces of the modern era. Claims and counter-claims in this arena are contested from top to bottom.

... It is clear that judgments in this domain are inescapably theological in character. What is at stake is nothing less than the remaking of the church, so no account of diagnosis or prescription can be given without deploying concepts which are theological in nature. We will be driven to think in terms which relate to such matters as the content of the gospel, the nature of our existence as creatures and sinners, the character of salvation, the marks of the church, and the like. This is not to say that sociological, philosophical,

and other categories may not be needed; nor is it to say that our prescriptions may not be practical in the extreme. We are simply facing the fact that ecclesial renewal, as interpreted by serious Christians, is ultimately constituted by the work of God in the healing and saving of our fractured existence.

... American Christians are inventive beyond compare when it comes to movements, denominations, and schisms in the body of Christ. It



Shall we revise the rich canonical life of the church, say, in the scriptures and creeds, in order to make it credible with its cultural despisers?

-- William Abraham

might be thought then that I am merely complaining about the standard kind of divisiveness which is all too familiar. As is well known, the Christian tradition has been fractured at two crucial moments in its history; in 1054 with the division between East and West; and then, in the early sixteenth century with the divisions, within the West, between Roman Catholicism and the various branches of magisterial Protestantism. As we come the end of the second millennium, these divisions are minor compared to the really

deep division which has rocked the Protestant tradition in the modern period, namely, the division between those who want to jettison the classical faith of the church and those who do not. The really crucial watershed is how we shall come to terms with this division. The dilemma which has again surfaced for us in Protestantism is this: Shall we revise the rich canonical life of the church, say, in the scriptures and creeds, in order to make it credible with its cultural despisers? Or shall we find ways to convert the cultural despisers to a living, personal faith which is rooted in the deep intellectual continuity with the faith once delivered to the saints? Inability to reach consensus on this issue is one of the fundamental sources of our current troubles.

Seen from this perspective, one of the root problems, if not the root problem, is the theological confusion which has been fueled by massive efforts to make the Christian faith credible in the face of constantly changing philosophical and cultural norms. This lies behind the alienation from the central agencies, the worries about the current leadership, the anxiety about the seminaries, the moral and theological fuzziness of church teaching, the encroachment of radical agendas into the fabric of the church, the fear of institutional division, the lack of spiritual seriousness and depth. The crucial issue underlying this catalogue is one of theological vision. The church is lacking in corporate theological and spiritual focus. It is internally divided about its own identity in the modern world. It is torn between holding to and expressing the classical faith of the church, on the one side, and constantly revising, accommodating, and adjusting that faith to the changing demands and norms of modern culture, on the other.

Perhaps another way to make my central point is to say that we are now having to grapple with the internal secularization of the church itself.

ere God and the classical means of
ce, such as the teaching of scripture
and the great creeds of the church,
were systematically eliminated from
the public order, they are now being
challenged within the church itself.

Copies of Abraham's complete address
are available to IRD members upon
request.

Kew: Reading the Signs of the Times

Richard Kew is the Executive Director of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. He also is co-author with Bishop Roger White of New Millennium, New Church (Cowley Publications). Excerpts from his address at the consultation follow.

I think that one of the struggles before us is to be able to look at things in positive rather than negative terms -- to see the glass half full, rather than half empty. I find it strange as an Englishman to say that to a group of Americans because I have always had this picture and image in my head of Americans as "can do" people, and I'm beginning to wonder about that now. Perhaps we're a little bit more "can do" than you are.

One of the great truisms today is that the world is going through a time of enormous and unprecedented change. And what amazes me is that while this change is going on around us, it doesn't seem to have had much impact on the way that we exercise our ministries. I happen to believe that the time which we are passing through has many parallels to the Renaissance and the Reformation. In fact, I am

beginning to work up a book on this. We see that period from about 1470-1530 of the high Renaissance as a complete overhaul of what was going on in the world. And something like that is happening now. And as a result, it is pregnant with possibilities for

mission and ministry in the life of the church.

One of my favorite pieces of periodical reading is the International Bulletin of Missionary Research. About 18 months ago, a retired Presbyterian missionary living in Tennessee wrote that "the colliding waves of change, when one era is coming to an end and a new one is about to begin, can be seen as the hidden activity of God." That is what is happening -- the hidden activity of God -- in this sharp transformation which is going on in the world around us. Business has to be done differently. The way we manage nations has to be undertaken differently. Many people are



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-- Richard Kew

questioning whether the nation-state has a role in the future, and if it does, [whether] it will be a radically different role than the one it has now. And it seems that the religious press is not unlike the secular press, because both of them seem to be incapable of foreseeing what might be happening. They only reflect upon what has happened.

I think it is very important for us,

in the life of the churches, to at least be a jump ahead of what is going on, so that we can be proactive in our response to what is happening in the world rather than reactive. We always seem to be running to catch up, rather than being ahead of the pack and being ready to meet things as they arrive at us. And as we move forward on the flood of history, then the Holy Spirit is at work.

... Let me just suggest to you one or two things that you might do if you want to track trends. You can, by just looking and observing and reading some of the right things, begin to have a feel where the flood is taking us. We have to be observant. We have to look beyond our own immediate little concerns. I sit down with parish priests in the Episcopal Church and I hear clergy pour their troubles out on how they feel that the church is gone to the dogs, about how they hate it, and yet they don't see where else they are going to go. I begin to try [to] encourage them. One of the reasons why they are discouraged is that they are looking at the garbage in their own back yard, rather than looking at the whole picture. It is by observation, and then being able to extrapolate from that on a wider scale, that we begin to see what God is doing in the church and how we can cooperate with God as his servants to enable that to continue to happen. As that happens, we start riding the wave, rather than fighting it. I sense that in the renewal wing of the churches, we have been fighting the wave for too long, rather than riding it. I would just encourage you and your organizations to see the good things which are happening. Ours is a God who raised Jesus from the dead. See the good things which are happening, and then, in prayer and in ministry, and with vision, take unto ourselves that resurrection power, that the earth may be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

Beck: Churches Vie for Public Position

Journalist Roy Howard Beck has written a handbook on Washington church offices, which will be published by the IRD in February 1994.

The idea of denominational religion having a lobbying office in Washington, D.C. did not spring from notions of inalienable rights at the founding of the country. It was not until 1917 that the concept took any kind of institutional form. That's when the Methodist Church established its Board of Temperance. When the Southern Baptist Convention established its office in 1989, that marked the 15th denomination or group of denominations to open shop.

The more interesting part of this history to me is that the churches primarily came to Washington intent on countering each other's presence. The Methodists were there, in part, because of something that had happened demographically in the country beginning in the 1840s but which gained momentum in 1880s: the great waves of immigration. What those waves brought were a different kind of people than those who had settled the country. Though the



Guess who's coming to dinner?

Roy Beck presented the scenario of a White House dinner for representatives of the Christian community. If there were 40 seats to be divided up on a proportional basis, how many of each church would come? Beck showed that not only would many oldline Protestant churches have to share chairs, but many of their Washington staff would have to find dinner elsewhere.

country was then pluralistic within the Protestant point of view, the great waves brought masses of Catholics.

This had an influence on the temperance movement. As soon as there were three or four people

gathered on the edge of the frontier, there would be a saloon. And a couple of people later there would be a Methodist Church, and then a Baptist Church. These churches fought the effects of the saloon. The immigrants came from alcohol-respecting cultures quite different from the predominantly alcohol-resisting Protestant cultures. I think there was a concern among the Methodists at that time that society was no longer quite as much in their control or as much reflecting of them as before. They felt they needed to have a special presence in Washington, which they created to push temperance.

A few years later, the Catholics established the second office and of course their situation was one of feeling very much a minority in a Protestant society. The Catholics were very subtle in their lobbying and political influence in the early years because they were representing primarily foreign-born and children of foreign-born people. Then, as they began to gain some power and President Franklin Roosevelt was → see Beck, page 6

Foreign Mission Disconnected from Local Congregations

Alan Wisdom, IRD's Senior Research Associate, addressed the consultation on "Global Mission and Action." Wisdom discussed problems that have made many denominational mission agencies inflexible and disconnected from the work of local congregations. According to Wisdom, one almost unailing measure of the church's health is the extent to



Alan Wisdom

which it proclaims the gospel in word and deed to those beyond its membership. "We've seen this in our own denominations, that the decline in mission was not only a sign, but in fact was a harbinger of the decline of our denominations as a whole."

Wisdom also said that the church has a problem of political irresponsibility. This is especially true where mission agencies have identified a single movement of "liberation" worthy of support. "The problem is that when we link ourselves with that movement," Wisdom said, "the church gets burned." On the other hand, he added, some churches do not think at all about their political influence through foreign mission. "This is particularly true ... where there is religious oppression, in the Islamic world or in countries such as China or North Korea, where there is a real failure to think of how to deal with structures of oppression and how we can constructively aid Christians there to overcome those, without marrying the church to a particular political movement."

Michael Novak: The Cultural War

Michael Novak, who holds the Frederick Jones Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute and is a member of the IRD board of directors, addressed the consultation on "The Cultural Scares." Novak said that politically the United States is quite healthy, at least relative to most other countries in the world. But in what he called a "culture war," Americans face the greatest crisis in our history. "Our culture," Novak said, "at almost every point, in almost every institution, has betrayed its originating principles." What makes this present crisis so deep is that for the first time in American history "what is at stake are our own souls."

American churches "are not towers of strength in the present world," he said while highlighting the weaknesses of various social institutions. "One has heard the defense for practically everything from church people," Novak added. "There hasn't been a moral standard within Christianity or Judaism that hasn't been insulted by church people, speaking for the church."

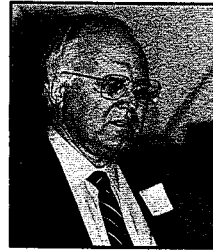
The deepest crisis is one of truth. "There are more and more people and more and more environments in which people will not accept the notion that there is true and false. They want: 'That's your opinion and that's my opinion.'" But Novak said, this kind of pluralism "means there is no truth, there are only perspectives."

Novak disputed those who say that people who believe in truth are a danger to democracy. "If there is no truth, then there really isn't any dignity," he said. Therefore, there is no basis for limited government and human rights.

Katherine Kersten: Out-of-Touch Feminism

Katherine Kersten, who serves on the boards of Lutherans for Religious and Political Freedom and the IRD, addressed the consultation on trends in contemporary feminism. She said that most feminists do not understand the fears of most women, fears which are not primarily about succeeding in the workplace. Instead, Kersten said, most women she talks with are scared for their children and their future.

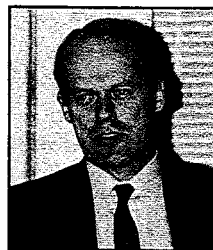
"I think the reason is that the contemporary feminist movement has strayed far from the mission of classical feminism. To many of us, today's feminist establishment



Michael Novak



Katherine Kersten



David Aikman

seems adrift, elitist, out of touch with the average woman's concerns, and intent pretty much on devoting the bulk of its energies to issues not at the center but on the periphery of most women's lives." At its most vocal and extreme, "the contemporary establishment feminism seems to encourage obsession with self. It seems to be driven by what I see as an irrational anger and resentment, and to be positively addicted to the idea of woman as victim," Kersten said.

To alienated women seeking something true for them, Kersten said: "There is an answer that is true for you, and it is also true for all women and for all men in all times and places. There is a truth that has a source outside our flawed and limited selves, and it is the Rock on which our frail, human souls can stand."

David Aikman: Assaults on Religious Freedom

David Aikman, correspondent for *Time* magazine, reported on developments related to religious freedom around the world.

In Russia, Aikman said that President Boris Yeltsin's "gruesome confrontation with parliament did at least postpone what could have been a worrying resurgence of Russian Orthodoxy in the form of authoritarian cultural nationalism." This resurgence, evident in legislation to restrict foreign mission and non-orthodox religious activity, "would have essentially reduced to insignificant proportions, or perhaps eliminated, all Christian evangelistic efforts." Aikman, who has visited with Yeltsin, said that the president's vision for Russia includes freedom for religion. "He grasps the point that you cannot have a modern society without people being able to make choices of conscience in a genuinely free way."

Aikman raised serious questions about the degree of religious freedom in the United States. Beyond the standard attempts to remove religious discourse from the marketplace of ideas, education, and the media, he said that the new political correctness employed by progressive groups is revealing a deep hostility to Christian views.

Aikman identified Sudan, with its radical Islamic government, as the site of the worst persecution faced by Christians in the world today. In the future, however, he predicted, "if fundamentalist Islam runs its course, it will break Islam as a religion in the same way that the cultural revolution, which took Maoism to its extreme, broke communist China. Nobody believes communism in China anymore. The same thing will happen to Islam."

Beck, from page 4

considering sending an ambassador to the Vatican, the Baptist Joint Committee was formed to open a Washington office to oppose the Catholics on the ambassador issue.

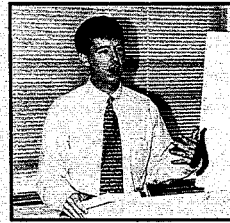
About ten years later, the National Association of Evangelicals formed an office primarily to oppose the near-monopoly of the mainline Protestants over the radio airwaves. Then the Presbyterians came. I have yet to find a Presbyterian who can tell me why they formed an office, but one was established nevertheless in the 1940s. At the same time the Friends opened an office. Though pacifist, they wanted to join with other peace churches in humanitarian efforts during the war.

The Episcopalians are the real Johnny-come-latelys. They came in 1979, which is kind of interesting since the Episcopal Church is, in a sense, the country's oldest denomination. Perhaps they felt they were still in control until 1979. With Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 and all the media publicity about evangelicals and the rise of the religious right, there are a number of reasons -- speculative in nature -- as to why the Episcopal Church finally joined the others.

In the handbook IRD is publishing [available in February 1994], we have collected for the first time information about all them. Other books on religious lobbying mix in material on parachurch lobbying. But there is a big difference between church and parachurch, because you can form a parachurch group around an issue. People are only members because they agree with you on that issue. If they don't like what you are doing, they just drop out. But a church-related lobbying office is not built around an issue but is built around a church membership. There has to be some sense of connectedness with people in the pews. That is its reason for being. A major question is about how connected those offices' voices are to the people in the pew.

No Escape from the Media

Fredrick P. Jones, IRD's Director of Program Development, said in his address on "Popular Culture and the Media" that the United States is by far the largest exporter of media products around the world. There's an up side to



Fredrick Jones

that influence: the notions of freedom embedded in those products have given inspiration to those fighting against totalitarian control. "But when these cultures become liberated from these tyrannies, our pop culture doesn't give them very much with which to rebuild society. Concern about our popular culture is not just our problem, it is the world's problem," Jones said. He outlined good and bad ways the National Council of Churches responded to this situation. Jones acknowledged that it was difficult to find good things in pop culture. Nevertheless, popular culture is the cultural currency of our time. "Not to investigate its meaning is to be as vulnerable as one who clings to a barter system when money has become the real measure of value." People may see and hear in popular culture "evil things that have been dressed up with the pretention to social acceptability," Jones said. But, if you listen carefully, "you also will hear cries of pain and anger. You will see reaches for meaning that sometimes can be understood only if you get into the youth cultures and crack the code. To know the idiom of pop culture is to open the way to reaching the youth in our culture. Avoid it, and you probably can kiss discipleship goodbye."

Green Gods Emerge

"Sustainability," a notion that gained prominence with the rising environmental consciousness in the culture and in the church, has become a new paradigm of thought, according to Lawrence E. Adams, Associate Professor of



Lawrence Adams

Political Science at North Park College in Chicago, and, until recently, of the IRD staff. In his address on "Green Theology: The New Paradigm," Adams said that many denominational publications now regularly feature the environment and earth theology, and emphasize the need for public witness on the environment. Paralleling this are emerging symbols and liturgical images reflecting new and sometimes dangerous theological thinking.

"It used to be that as a component of justice there was a lot of talk about sustainable development," a technical term which describes a way that we ought to go about doing economic development that does not extract more from the earth than can be replenished. It wasn't long until talk shifted subtly to building sustainable society. Such a society would be evaluated not by its commitment to justice but on its commitment to environmental wholeness. The latest shift has moved in the direction of what Adams called sustainable faith. "A sustainable faith is a faith such that if everyone adopted it and followed it, we would be assured of a sustainable, just, and humane future for earth and her people."

The new environmental theology criticizes classical Christian theology for placing humans in a position of uniquely bearing God's image. In reaction, this theology often exalts the earth to god-like status.

NCC Tackles Human Rights, Evangelism

In an attempt to update earlier policy statements, the National Council of Churches (NCC) General Board heard first readings of proposed policy statements on human rights and evangelism at its annual meeting in November.

Disappointingly, the human rights statement ducked taking a position on a much-debated issue in the international community: whether human rights are universal. It did argue for a "holism of the concept of human rights" that makes no distinction in priority between civil and political rights and economic and social entitlements.

The surprisingly excellent evangelism statement, which like the human rights resolution will be the subject of comments by NCC member communions during the coming year, emphasized the proclamation of the Gospel, conversion, and discipleship.

In other action, the NCC called on the United States to recognize the government of North Korea and to end the embargo against Cuba (in neither case were human rights concerns expressed). Two separate resolutions addressed the mass media, one related to the problem of violence and the other on the alleged control of Western media over cultures in developing nations.

Radical Feminism Rules at Women's Conference

Extremist feminism is a powerful movement at the highest levels of many U. S. churches. Its pagan forms of worship challenge biblical faith. Its exaltation of women's self-actualization challenges the Christian teaching of personal and social

responsibility. In so doing, radical feminists appear bent on destroying the foundations of the Church, while also threatening to undermine the religiously-based social covenant that makes the ordered liberty of democracy possible.

In order to evaluate the directions of the feminist movement in the churches, the IRD joined with other reform groups in sending a team of reporters to "RE-Imagining," an ecumenical gathering of some 2,000 women in Minneapolis, November 4-7. Katherine Kersten, an IRD board member in attendance, said she was particularly shocked by a portion of the Sunday worship liturgy, "Blessing over Milk and Honey." The following is an excerpt from this devotion to "Sophia" (which means "wisdom" in Greek), a feminist form of God:

*Our maker Sophia, we are women
in your image:*

*With the hot blood of our wombs
we give form to new life.*

*With courage of our convictions we
pour out our life blood for
justice....*

*Our sweet Sophia, we are women
in your image:*

*With nectar between our thighs we
invite a lover, we birth a child*

*With our warm body fluids we
remind the world of its pleasures
and sensations....*

*Sophia, Creator God, let your milk
and honey flow....*

At the end of this responsive reading, the worshipers were directed in a revised communion ritual to "drink of the milk and honey together at their table."

Conference funders included national agencies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the American Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (including an initial start-up grant of \$65,000 from the Bicentennial Fund), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

The Women's Division of the UMC Church, in fact, did more than send a check. The board of directors and staff were authorized to attend the conference as their quadrennial theological workshop. The division (and women in the pews) picked up the tab.

Sudanese Christians still under Fire

While Somalia continues to garner media attention, Sudan and its dispossessed millions receive hardly a word. Reports continue to emerge of whole villages under siege and facing starvation as the Islamic government uses the denial of food to force Christians and other non-Muslims to accept Islam. It has been estimated that 1 million have died in southern Sudan, many reportedly by crucifixion.

According to IRD President Diane Knippers, "Surely the media could find a story in the 100,000 or more children who have become orphans, wandering almost aimlessly in search of food or shelter. They live off leaves, roots, grass, and an occasional rat -- if they live at all. Reportedly, some of the children are caught by government forces and either gunned down or sold into slavery in Libya, and some are hunted down and eaten by packs of hyenas."

Hassan Turabi, head of the fundamentalist Islamic movement that holds sway in Sudan, lamented to the *Chicago Tribune* recently that the West sees Islam as a threat. "How could the Sudan, a little, backward country, be such a threat to the U.S.?" Turabi thinks it is wrong for Islam to be targeted as a pariah in the way that Soviet-inspired communism was. Yet when he calls for a worldwide Islamic revolution, he answers his own question about how Sudanese government could be a threat beyond its borders -- not to mention a menace to its own citizens.

Materials Available

The IRD has the following items available at no charge to our members:

- an information packet on the RE-Imagining Conference (pg. 7).
- Diane Knippers' speech at the dinner marking her installation as IRD President.
- Dr. William Abraham's address given at the IRD Renewal Leaders Strategy Consultation (pg. 2).
- Kathy Kersten's remarks at the Consultation (pg. 5).
- Our three-page report to the media on the November NCC General Board meeting (pg. 7).

Are you an IRD member?

If you are not a member of the IRD, we urge you to join now. Your \$25 membership fee entitles you to our newsletter, a 10 percent discount on all IRD publications, and any of the above materials you desire.

If you are already a member, won't you please consider making an extra contribution to our work at this time?

Photographs in this issue were taken by Lonni Jackson and Parker Williamson.



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New Members of the IRD Board of Directors

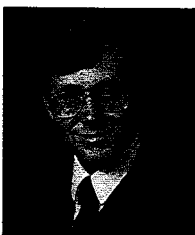
The IRD is proud to announce the election of four new members to its Board of Directors:



Mary Ellen Bork is a free lance writer and lecturer interested in issues affecting Catholic life. She holds a B.A. in Philosophy from Manhattanville College, an M.A. in English Literature from Siena College, and an M.A. in Theology from Catholic University. She also serves on the board of directors for the Catholic Campaign for America, as well as the John Carroll Society, Women Affirming Life, and the Notre Dame Institute.



Dean C. Curry is Chairman of History and Political Science, and Professor of Political Science, at Messiah College. His specialties include international politics and American foreign policy; he also has written broadly on matters related to religion and public life. He holds a B.A. from Houghton College, an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate School.



Kent R. Hill is President of Eastern Nazarene College and the former president of the IRD. He holds a B.A. from Northwest Nazarene College and a Ph.D. from the University of Washington in Russian Studies. Hill is the author of *The Soviet Union on the Brink*, as well as numerous articles on religion in communist societies and Christian apologetics.



Allan M. Parrent is Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Vice President, and the Clinton S. Quin Professor of Christian Ethics at the Protestant Episcopal-Theological Seminary in Virginia. He holds a B.A. from Georgetown College, an M.A. and M.Div. from Vanderbilt University, and a Ph.D. from Duke University. Parrent also serves on the board of the Episcopal Committee on Religion and Freedom.