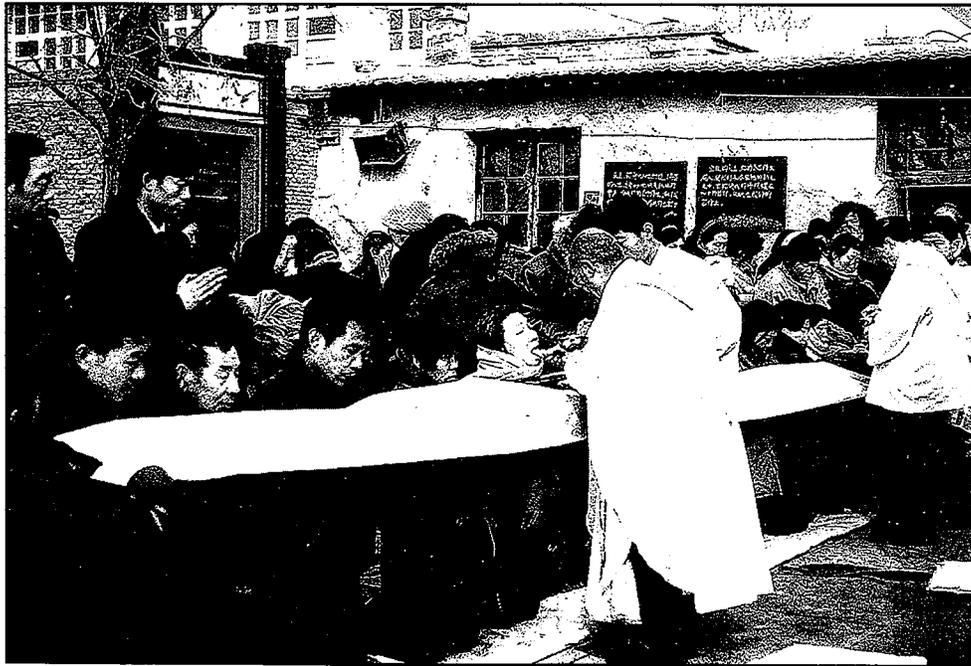

FAITH & FREEDOM

learning to live out in public the freedom to believe

SPRING 1994

VOL. 14, NO. 1



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INTERVIEW

Lobbyists with a Mission: Church Power in Washington

with Roy Howard Beck

Journalist Roy Beck has written *Prophets and Politics: A Handbook on the Washington Offices of U.S. Churches*. It will be available from the Institute on Religion and Democracy in early April. Here Beck discusses some of the issues regarding the church presence in the nation's capital.

What are these offices doing in Washington?

Among other reasons, the goal is keeping watch over the other religious groups. None of them would want another group to be seen as the one to represent the religious viewpoint. The Baptists have always been here to keep track of Catholic power, the National Association of Evangelicals to keep check on the mainline Protestant power. The Missouri Synod Lutheran Church wants to make sure that all Lutheran thought isn't represented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They feel that if they weren't here, the picture of things in the media and in the policy world would be skewed.

Do they follow mandates from their churches?

Almost all of the offices are very clear on the lines of accountability that govern them. They know how much rope they've got. Nevertheless, it is natural for people in a satellite office to ask, "How much of my own stamp can I put on this?" If a Washington office wants to work past the edge of the church's mandate, that work can be funneled into a network of groups where the denominational office does not have direct responsibility. Then the office can say it wasn't controlling it and that it wasn't done in the church's name. I'm not trying to say that they're devious; they just know how the system works.

Are these offices taken seriously?

In my experience covering Congress for daily newspapers, I found that some congressional offices don't take the church offices seriously at all, or they use church support as window dressing for their own agendas. But other congressional offices do take them seriously, especially on specific issues -- if the church office has personnel working on issues and showing up at hearings over the years and is able to provide unique information. Most of these

churches have worldwide networks in relief and development and congregations all across the country involved in all kinds of ministries. So they can say, "This is the information we're getting from the field." Where churches have the most power is on institutional issues -- child care, preschool education, hospitals, colleges, etc. Churches often are one of the main providers of these services. Congress has to listen.

Do the churches get serious media coverage?

When a church comes up with a well-reasoned theological statement addressing some issue in the news, most journalists say, "So what?" I do believe a lot of political reporting would be much better if reporters consulted more with the religious community. But for many reporters, the last thing they think to do is to talk about what the religious value-analysis might be on a particular issue.

How should reporters cover religion?

A reporter always should get a cross-section of office responses -- not just a Presbyterian view and then stop at that. There should always be a Catholic view, a mainline Protestant view, an evangelical view, a Southern Baptist view, something from the peace churches, a Jewish and even an Islamic point of view. Reporters will find that there are some values that are universal. The reader also may find that the issue is complex enough to have competing "goods" or values involved. A lot of what democracy is about is saying, "We've got this good, and we've got that good, and these two goods are clashing. How are we going to resolve this?"

Do the churches hurt themselves?

Some of the church offices contribute to their own marginality. Their credibility slips when they are too out of step with their members. Moreover, their issue coverage gets compartmentalized. One staff person may deal with the environment, for example, posing best-of-all-worlds policy answers. Another over there does the same with labor, or civil rights or children's issues. Added together, these policies can lack coherence or practicality.

"How to Teach Right & Wrong: A blueprint for moral education in a pluralistic age," by Christina Hoff Sommers. *Christianity Today*. December 13, 1993.

Sommers, both as a parent with children in the public school system and as a college professor of philosophy, found that schools have retreated from teaching right and wrong and instead drifted into a moral relativism that left her college students with false impressions that "everything is up for grabs."

Sommers' vision for moral education allows for debate on the specifics of various issues, but also holds educators accountable for the edification of students through a clear teaching that "some ethical truths are not subject to serious debate." She suggests a teaching of what philosopher Henry Sidgwick called "moral common sense."

The steps to moral education, for Sommers, are simple: 1) Schools should have behavior codes that stress necessary virtues. 2) Teachers should not be ostracized for insisting on adherence to these virtues. 3) "Children should be told stories that reinforce goodness."

"The Coming Anarchy," by Robert D. Kaplan. *The Atlantic Monthly*. February 1994.

Kaplan sees the developing world evidencing dangerous signs of demographic, environmental, and social stress. He also sees the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war.

The developed world largely has been able to insulate itself from these conditions, though even it too manifests some of these signs. Though Kaplan's integration of the

American situation into this picture is limited, his assessment of Turkey and the Kurdish problem in the Middle East is striking.

Kaplan, who has traveled extensively through Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans, also discusses important literature on the topic at hand, such as recent articles by Samuel Huntington and Fouad Ajami. "As state power fades ... peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back on their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms between them. Whereas the distant future will probably see the emergence of a

IN PRINT



racially hybrid, globalized man, the coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less, personal security more."

"Christian Conviction and Democratic Etiquette," by George Weigel. *First Things*. March 1994.

Weigel, President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a board member of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, discusses the challenge of translating religious convictions into terms useful in public debate. Civility is about the superiority of persuasion to coercion, Weigel said. While law is coercive, we form laws on the basis of persuasion. This mode of lawmaking rests on truths about human nature, freedom, and justice.

"Thus in observing, even as we refine, the rules of democratic etiquette, Christians are helping to give contemporary expression to certain moral understandings that have lain at the heart of the central political tradition of the West since that tradition first formed.... And, not so inconsequently, we are thereby taking a stand against the totalitarian temptation that lurks at the heart of every modern state, including every modern democratic state."

"The Exile Returns," by David Remnick. *The New Yorker*. February 14, 1994.

Washington Post reporter Remnick traveled to Vermont to talk with Alexander Solzhenitsyn as he prepares for his return to Russia after 20 years. As an unparalleled literary figure, Solzhenitsyn's writings so threatened Soviet leaders that he was exiled. In virtual seclusion, he devoted his time to writing a history of the Bolshevik revolution.

As an Orthodox Christian, Solzhenitsyn has criticized not only communism, but the abuses of freedom in the West (most notably in his famous 1978 Harvard graduation speech). He has defended Russian democracy and refused to support the nationalist, populist right, but says he has no interest in political office. "My role can only be moral," he told Remnick. "The situation is changing so quickly that it is difficult to say how much my moral efforts will resonate and be successful. The fact that my books have not been read [in Russia] -- this also interferes a lot. You can't get them. People say, 'Who's Solzhenitsyn? Oh, yes, he's the guy they kicked out, he did something long ago.' But there are no books. This makes it very difficult."



REFORMING
THE CHURCH

RE-Imagining Conference Causes Church Stir

By Kathryn Teapole Proctor

Feminists, inspired by radical theology, planned the RE-Imagining conference as a celebration of the midpoint of the World Council of Churches' appointed decade in solidarity with women. The gathering's goal was for the 2,200 attendees last November in Minneapolis to "redefine ourselves and our God." The event was funded by several mainline denominations and produced some outraged responses from the pews as word has spread.

Syncretism, ceremonies with milk and honey, lesbian demonstrations: Conference reimagining took the form of accepting the radical as mainstream and tossing orthodox theology by the wayside. Conferees were encouraged to reject sexist names for the God of scripture, and to reimagine Jesus "as a tree, as a river, as wind, and as rain."

The actual conference is less significant than how church officials respond. So far there has been no repentance or apology. Instead, officials have spent more time and money defending their own actions rather than the teachings of the church.

The conference was supported by an initial grant of \$65,000 from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Other funds and/or scholarships came from Church Women United, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, at least two Roman Catholic orders, and the American Baptist Churches.

Parker Williamson, editor of *The Presbyterian Layman*, sent an alert to more than 5,000 readers in December charging the conference with heresy and paganism. General Assembly Council (GAC) Executive Director James D. Brown responded, "This was not a Presbyterian event, and some of the activities and language were not what would have been used in a more traditional Presbyterian setting." He said of one speaker's rejection of the atonement: "I

personally would repudiate any theological construct that would eliminate this central doctrine." Yet he made no apology for Presbyterian complicity.

The full GAC seemed unable to make up its mind about the Minneapolis conference. Faced with an outpouring of more than 8,000 letters (by mid-February *The Layman* said it had forwarded 11,000 letters to the church) as well as threats to withhold approximately \$1 million in mission giving, the council was under strong pressure to act decisively at its February meeting. Though it did condemn the controversy surrounding the conference, the GAC refused to pass any judgment, pro or con, on the worship and teachings at RE-Imagining. A move to do a special performance review of the top staffer responsible for PCUSA support of the conference was defeated by a margin of 32-31.

The response in the United Methodist Church was equally severe. *Good News* magazine editor James Heidinger called the conference "theologically aberrant" and demanded that the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries "apologize to the church for supporting such an event." He also called for changes in the division's national leadership.

An article written by Faye Short, director of RENEW, a network for evangelical women in the United Methodist Church, noted that staff and directors of the Women's Division were encouraged to attend the conference all-expenses-paid (45 did attend) as this quadrennium's theological workshop. The division's Mission & Membership Committee Report states, "The RE-imagining workshop has drawn an excellent list of women theologians."

Despite evidence to the contrary, the Women's Division claimed it did not have full knowledge in advance of the conference contents and that it was not the Division's quadrennial theological workshop. The division has distributed 600 videos claiming that God is big enough to embrace RE-Imagining's ecumenical participation.

Other Methodists are responding: The women in one southeast district are reportedly cutting their undesignated pledge to the Women's Division to \$1. Others cut off funds altogether.



Clinton Calls for Moral Renewal to End Violence

President Clinton drew praise recently from a group of nearly 50 religious leaders for his call to American churches to play a central role in ending the cycle of violence in the nation's cities. According to Religious News Service, the leaders said in a letter to the president that they were encouraged by Clinton's call to moral renewal: "We want to convey to you our own commitment to continue to mobilize our respective religious communities to combat the violence you spoke of in your address."

The letter, sent to Clinton in December and made public in January was signed by leaders including James Andrews of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Joan Brown Campbell and Gordon Sommers of the National Council of Churches, Herbert Chilstrom of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Paul Sherry of the United Church of Christ, and Melvin Talbert of the United Methodist Church.

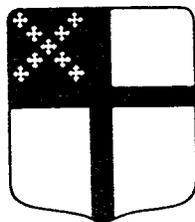
Clinton, in December in a press conference at the White House, expressed concern over the "enormous tide of crime and violence" in America and said that a "spiritual change" is the most important ingredient in the fight against violence. He added, "We'll have to draw on the strength of our religious communities."

Religious leaders told Clinton that churches would focus on "continuing to proclaim, teach and call our people to practice the ethical values and virtues which provide the basis for real community and a moral life.... Religious faith offers vital moral resources for replacing fear and violence with hope and

reconciliation in our homes, communities and nation."

Episcopalians Consider Church Restructure

The Episcopal Church, faced with a projected \$5 million shortfall for 1995, has taken steps to restructure its national program. Episcopal News Service reports that the projected cutbacks will include up to



40 jobs lost at the national headquarters and a reorganization of the church's program into a single Service, Education and Witness Unit with

six clusters: congregational ministries, prophetic justice, children/youth/young adults, Anglican and global relations, ecumenical relations and program support services. It would also include the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief and the United Thank Offering.

The proposal calls for phasing out Volunteers for Mission and instead placing responsibility for mission programs on local dioceses and congregations. According to Mission Partnerships Executive Patrick Mauney, "We are not getting out of the business but launching out in a new direction, trying in a new way to work in partnership with others."

Figures indicate that only 33 of the denomination's 118 dioceses fulfilled their financial obligations to the national church for the 1994 budget. Diane Porter, senior executive for the restructure program, noted that designers of the new program experienced much pain at the cutbacks but were also "very serious about designing something

entirely new."

Ironically, the transfer of responsibility to the diocesan and local level is what conservative reformers called for last summer at the "Shaping Our Future" symposium.

Broadcasters Hear Cautions on Partisan Politics

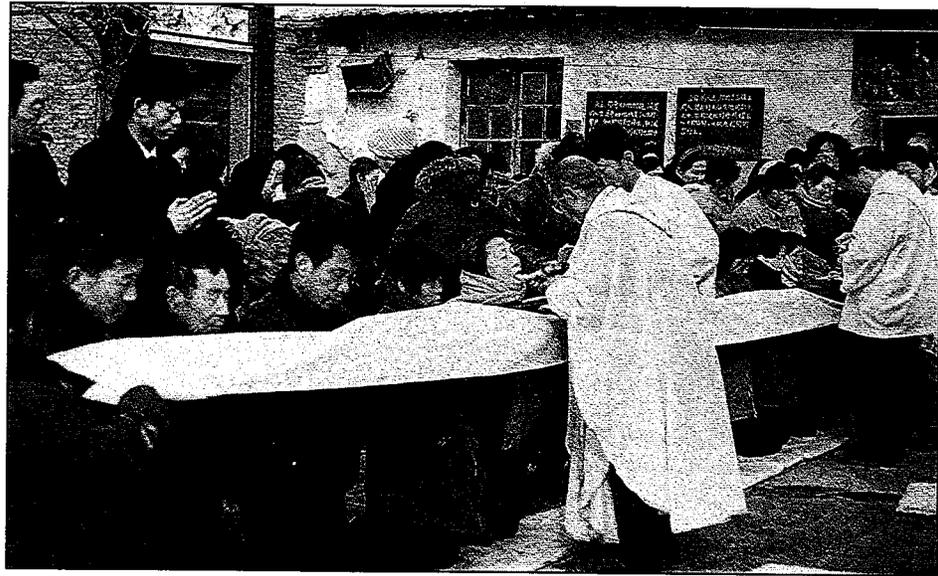
Television and radio broadcasters at this year's February meeting of the National Religious Broadcasters were warned by several speakers not to confuse partisan politics with taking biblical stands on the issues.

According to Gustav Niebuhr of the *Washington Post*, prominent voices are warning against close party connections. "Once you start leaning to the political, you're out of the primary arena of your calling," said Anthony T. Evans, national broadcaster and pastor of the Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas.

Charles W. Colson, chairman of Prison Fellowship, supported challenging a politician who acts "contrary to God's will." But he also stated that "the gospel and ideology do not mix.... You can never make the gospel hostage to the fortunes of any political party."

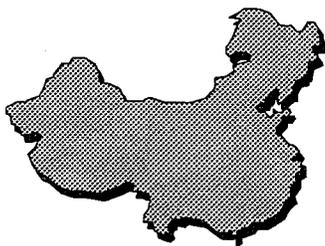
Evangelist Luis Palau said he sees a "re-thinking among the broadcasters about how to influence the nation's life." Palau contrasted partisan involvement with taking stands on individual policy issues, which he said turn on decisions about ethics and values.

The religious broadcasters invited President Clinton to attend the convention last year, but did not do so this year. They said that they could not "give a platform to a leader who so aggressively supports ... policies and positions which are blatantly contrary to scriptural views."



Left: Communion in a donkey stall at an underground Chinese Catholic church. Next page: A Chinese man prays.

TOMORROW, You Could Be in Prison



The humble origins of an underground Chinese faith

By Stan De Boe

It is easy to find elegant church buildings in China's major cities, some of which were built before the communist revolution and survived the devastating Cultural Revolution of the 1970s. The religious leaders responsible for them wear fine suits, enjoy high social status, meet freely with foreign visitors, and publicly proclaim that indeed China has freedom of religion.

The government approves and monitors these churches. One branch, the Catholic Patriotic Association

(CPA), has four million members, with 60,000 said to be joining each year. CPA President Joshua Zong Huaide called this a "golden period for church development."

The CPA is not united with the Vatican. The Chinese government appoints its bishops. These Catholics have a reputation for patriotism and good work. CPA leaders support the coercive population control program the government. It is important, Zong said, for the Chinese people to love their country and support socialism.

Yet the CPA and its official Protestant counterparts make up only one segment of the Chinese Christian community. This became dramatically apparent on my recent trip there. Off in a "village" of three million people, I was told privately that Mass was being celebrated by the underground Catholic Church, and that I should go.

A long, wandering cab ride took me to the outskirts of the village, where the car stopped and I was told to get out and walk the last few blocks. Nothing ahead looked like a church, though the street was filled with bicycles. After turning one last corner I had to stop in disbelief. There, in a stockyard at the very end of this desolate area, were hundreds of people, young and old, men and women, kneeling on the frozen ground as a priest was saying a Eucharistic prayer. They had gathered in secret to pray, to worship.

It dawned on me that this church building was in fact a donkey stall, something like the humble habitation where Christ made his first earthly appearance. The altar was set up under a canopy. Speakers hung from trees to project the voices of the choir.

I was reminded of the many pictures I had seen of the underground Ukrainian Catholics during the Soviet era, gathered in remote places in the dark of night to celebrate their liturgy. Here, I could see the depth of faith of these Chinese believers. After communion everyone sang at the top of their lungs a song proclaiming their loyalty to Pope John Paul II. This act is the very thing that could get them arrested or result in discrimination against them. Yet they proudly and boldly sang. This was the fourth or

fifth such Mass conducted in the stockyards that day.

Persecution and the party line

I traveled to China in early January as part of a congressional delegation to discuss human rights, religious freedom, and the future of U.S.-Chinese relations. We met with officials from the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Justice, and the Supreme People's Procurature, as well as the CPA. We consistently asked if there were Christians in prison because of their faith. They told us no, and that if Christians were in prison it was because they did not support socialism.

Unlike some churches in Eastern Europe under communism, the underground churches I encountered in China did not appear to be havens for political dissidents. These Christians, constantly at risk of being sent to prison or worse, pray for their state leaders and do not openly quarrel with socialism -- though the Vatican does.

They pray for their freedom to worship. Rarely do they focus on the problems and sufferings of the past and present. Instead, they choose to see the past as preparation for the future. Not only is the Chinese church on the brink of a great awakening, I was told, but the church in China is being prepared for a mission beyond China. Missionaries are being trained to take the Christian message to all parts of the world, once they are allowed.

Meeting with me carried great risk, but these underground Christians wanted their story told. Many of these Chinese Christian leaders had already spent years in prison, one for nearly 40 years. Most had been beaten repeatedly, some were forced to stand for days in closet-sized rooms in water as



high as their waists, while others were bound by their wrists and suspended from the ceiling. All spoke of inadequate medical attention and food while they were detained. Many had been sentenced to "re-education through labor" programs -- prison camps for hard labor -- regardless of their age or physical condition.

In 1991, one of the underground parishes decided to test the government by building a church. They worked day and night, making most of the materials they needed. In two months their structure was complete. The government sent in police to tear it down, but the people surrounded the building. Apparently not wanting to shed blood, the police backed down and did not tear down the church or arrest anyone. The government is not always reticent. Yet this one act of defiance served to strengthen the resolve of the underground church.

That strength is quietly linked across traditions, as shown in the evident respect of underground Protes-

tants and Catholics for each other. A Catholic bishop spoke with great respect and affection for the Protestant minister with whom he once shared a prison cell. One Protestant leader spoke of the dedication of Catholics he knows. But when he was asked about any contact or cooperation between the two communities, he said there was little or none. We later learned that this was not due to problems between them, but because of the potential dangers. If they were working together, the government, ever-fearful of Christian conspiracy against it, would have another reason to persecute the church.

Underground Catholics with whom I met said that the government continues to harass them. Many of those known to the government, especially the priests, cannot obtain residency or work permits. Thus they are entirely dependent on the support of the community. They are subject to detention without charges for short periods of time -- too short for international religious freedom advocates to publicize their plight.

In danger, but not afraid

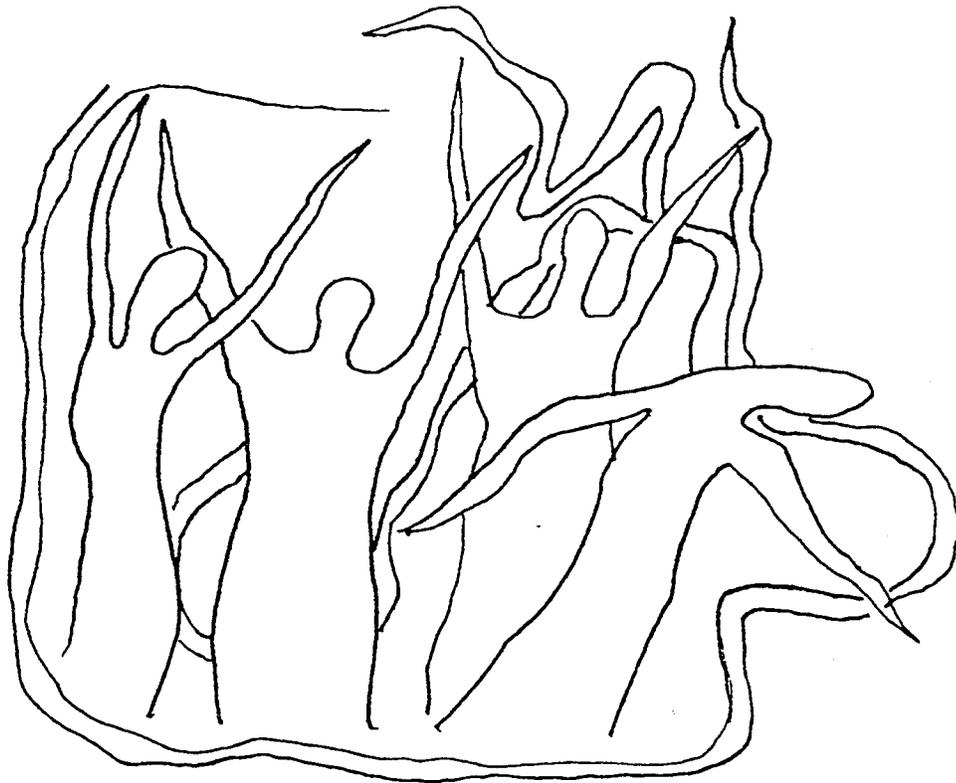
Just days after our return to the United States, a Catholic bishop who celebrated Mass for our delegation was detained without charge for nine days at an undisclosed location. After his release he was questioned at length about the meeting with us.

On January 31, two days after the release of the bishop, Premier Li Peng issued two executive orders severely restricting religious activity. Order 144 bans the work of foreign missionaries and Order 145 restricts the activity of Chinese Christians and could result in the arrest and detention of thousands who choose to practice their faith outside of government control.

In a midnight raid in Central China during mid-February, ten Christians, three from the United States, were arrested for "illegal religious activities" -- involvement with the underground church. The foreigners were expelled, while the nationals and the expatriates could face up to three years in administrative detention.

The United States government, under President Clinton and his predecessors, has said that it is looking for improvements in human rights in China. During some periods Christians are persecuted less, during others more. But the legal and ideological structure by which people are always at risk remains strong -- and perhaps has become even more threatening.

There is no indication that the Chinese government has any intention of easing up on the underground Christians. Nor are church members being broken by the waves of persecution. After seeing a simple but magnificent church recently constructed by hand on the personal property of an underground Catholic bishop, I asked about the government's response to the way they had ignored regulations on building. The bishop bravely said, "Now is the time for the underground church to come above ground. What can they do to us? Tear down our church? Put us in jail?"



Looking for God in the Mirror

RE-Imagining conference shows the spirit of radical feminism

By Katherine Kersten

RE-Imagining, a conference "by women for women and men," marked the midpoint of the World Council of Churches' "Decade in Solidarity with Women." Held from November 4-7 at the Minneapolis Convention Center, the conference drew 2,200 participants from 49 states and 27 countries. It was sponsored by local and state ecumenical councils, and underwritten by a \$65,000 grant from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Among the mainline organizations providing additional funding were the National Ministries of the American Baptist Church, the Division of Congregational Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Board for Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ, the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church, and several orders of Roman Catholic nuns.

The purpose of "RE-Imagining" was nothing if not ambitious. The conference, its organizers proclaimed, signaled the dawn of a "second reformation." "This second reformation ... is much more basic and important to the

health of humankind" than the first, declared Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, one of the many feminist theologians who took part.

In the preface to the conference program, Mary Ann Lundy and Bishop Forrest Stith — Presbyterian and United Methodist co-chairs of the U.S. Committee for the Ecumenical Decade — justified the need for radical theological surgery. Our churches, they insisted, must free themselves from the grip of sexism, racism, and classism. Women require a new theology grounded in their uniquely female, everyday experiences of the divine. Rather than pursuing the Truth, then, RE-Imagining's focus was on encouraging each woman to imagine "her own truth." The new reformation's aim, in the words of liturgy director Sue Seid-Martin, is to "creat[e] that wonderful space where we are truly free to be ourselves."

While Reformation #2 seemed short on ideas and debate, it appeared to thrive on exotic self-expression. The Meadowlark Singers, representing various South Dakota

Indian tribes, kicked things off. As the conference program explained, "The drum is feminine and the drumbeat is the heartbeat of the earth." Arranged in Native American "talking circles," participants engaged in "scribble writing" with crayons and pastels, blessed "rainsticks," danced "holy manna," and joined in Hawaiian chants and rousing Zulu songs. "Multi-format option groups" gave participants the opportunity to learn belly dancing, to call out the divine "from a woman's body," and to listen as speakers like educator and retreat leader Sr. Roseann Giguere shared her wisdom on "the theology of darkness, the goddess, creation spirituality, mid-life transitions, and dreamwork."

By now, these trappings of secular feminist consciousness raising and New Age therapies are familiar to those who monitor mainline and WCC-related church events. What was not so familiar — even to RE-Imagining participants — was the star of the show: the goddess Sophia, designated as "the Spirit of Wisdom, the Spirit of RE-Imagining." "Sophia is the suppressed part of the biblical tradition, and clearly the female face of psyche," explained Seid-Martin, a former instructor of ritual studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Though participants never seemed clear how — if at all — to associate Sophia with the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they appeared to flock happily to her altar. The whole assembly prayed to her, blessed every speaker in her name ("Bless Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within"), and invoked her repeatedly as Creator and Mother. In the ritual of "Making Holy Time," attendees were urged to "dream wildly" about "who we intend to be ... through the power and guidance of the spirit of wisdom whom we name Sophia."

"Naming" Sophia was the focus of "RE-Imagining God," the first plenary session of the conference. To sound the "water drum," participants gathered in their "talking circles" to ask, "Who is your God? What does your God sound like, taste like, look like? Name God — tell each other at the table! Reimagine your God in name and image!!"

Despite all this, Sophia's identity should have proved a mystery to no one. Participants only had to look in the mirror to find her. The conference program put it succinctly: Sophia is "the place in you where the entire universe resides." As deity of the second reformation, Sophia seemed the answer to the prayers of a multi-cultural, therapeutic world. She does not judge nor does she recognize any sin but the corporate transgressions of racism, sexism, and classism. Sophia has just one commandment, and participants learned it: "Freely bless your own experience."

While the four days of RE-Imagining left no doubt that Sophia resides in one's own navel, it became increasingly clear that she is most fully manifest in bodily functions and sexual encounters. At Sunday's communal "blessing of milk and honey," for example, 2,000 women clinked glasses over rice milk while repeating the following prayer: "Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image.... With the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life.... Sophia, creator God, let your milk and honey flow.... 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.... We celebrate the sweat that pours from us during our labors. We celebrate the tongue which licks a wound or wets our lips. We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water."

It will be interesting to hear "RE-Imagining" organizers explain to Christians who pray the Creed every Sunday why their hard-earned dollars financed a conference at which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit didn't even put in an appearance. How will they defend Christine Marie Smith's indictment of Jesus as guilty of "violence against women," or Chung Hyun Kyung's assertion that God speaks equally "through Buddha, through shamans," and through Christ? How will they justify Delores Williams' off-hand dismissal of Christ's atonement: "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all. I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.... We just need to listen to the god within."

One wonders whether these women ever seriously considered what it would be like to attain their elusive promised land — a world without rules, limits, or Truth, "that wonderful space where we are truly free to be ourselves." Humankind's natural proclivity to greed, lust, injustice, and cruelty suggest that such a space would closely resemble the Christian concept of Hell.

At first blush, it appears paradoxical that people who contemptuously reject Christianity's most fundamental tenets should persist in calling themselves Christians, and locating events such as "RE-Imagining" within Christian history. In fact, their behavior is easy to understand. Those who claim to be "reimagining Christianity" get headlines about a new reformation. They get endowed chairs in seminaries, money, power, legitimacy, and a captive audience that must be the envy of the self-declared followers of Wicca. Sophia serves these "reformers" as an invaluable blank slate. Their adherents' ignorance of Sophia — far from being an obstacle — is essential to their project of fashioning a new religion while retaining tenuous and self-interested links to the Christian faith.





THE GLOBAL
CHRISTIAN

Daily News and Personal Conscience Management

By Fredrick P. Jones

Every day I breeze through four newspapers. I zero in on two, maybe three articles that I really take the time to read. I barely process the rest, and what does catch my eye gets filed quickly under some standard labels: posturing by interest groups or public officials, unduly scary or falsely promising scientific research, poll-processed opinions that supposedly represent real people, and all-around "human interest" portraits. Still, I tend to teeter between two states: numbness resulting from the overwhelming supply of information, and my conscience tugging at me to grab hold of real lives buried between the lines.

Years ago, John Donne could write, "Any man's death diminishes me." But it usually takes large numbers of dead strangers to stir me at all. The problem, I sense, is that I allow the news to manage my conscience for me. I must not be alone. How else could NATO finally reach an agreement in early February to thwart the siege of Sarajevo? Because 68 people were killed at one time in a market. But thousands have died in the past year under the same circumstances -- only in a trickle, mostly one or two at a time. Our sensibilities must be such that 68 means more than one + one + one -- each one virtually assured given the gross improbability of progress in negotiation toward peace.

My point is not policy advocacy. It is about conscience management. It is easy to move from numbness or complete shut-down to moments of over-reaction. All the news media have to do is press the superficial outrage button inside of us. Over-stimulus unto no possible response is bad. Stimulus unto over-response -- "We've got to do something!" -- may be worse. There is a position between abdicating responsibility and throwing one's self, full emotional throttle, at a problem. But to become familiar with it requires careful thinking over time. It requires insight into how the world works as God made it and holds it together. Rather than have our consciences led around moment-by-moment by headline news inventions and then put out regularly for recycling, we need to impose a rhythm on our intake and digestion of information.

We often practice this rhythm in Christian

community. It is called liturgy. In Lent we recognize our need for true humility and follow Christ on the path of suffering and redemption. All through the year, the liturgy gives unique form to the personal and collective cultivation of our souls.

Believe it or not, we can also impose order on our connection to the vast, beautiful, and broken world. There is very little news you need to know -- when the news says you need to know it. Break the cycle. Forget collecting factoids for use in casual conversation. Instead, create your own agenda for making sense of things, one in tune with your real responsibility as one person, however small, in the world.

For example, take a month or two and keep on the lookout for migrating peoples: Azeris fleeing homes in dispute with Armenia, Sudanese Christians fleeing assault by a ruthless Islamic regime, desperate urban dwellers escaping underclass blight, Haitians making boats to sail to the United States. Who are they? Where are they going? Why can't they stay where they are? Does this movement represent anything about changes in relations among nations? Don't try to answer all of this at once. Simply let one question give way to a better, more insightful question. Practice using what you know and question the assumptions lying behind.

When you tire, start off in another direction. Start with something basic, and let it grow. Talk about it with others. Keep track of how your thoughts develop, and what impulses to action are generated. Seek out thoughtful writers that can help shape your worldview. All along the way, don't let the news (immediately dated as it is) and the clamor to act (as fueled even by "doing" organizations with the best intentions) get in the way.

For fun, you also can take all of the fundraising letters you receive, especially the ones from Christian organizations, and edit them. Put notes or questions in the margins, and send the letter back (with or without a check, depending on the nature of your notes). Think past the tease, and challenge them to think beyond the conditions that have grabbed their (however selective) attention. They may be right. But don't assume it. This goes for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, too.

Archbishop of Canterbury Visits Southern Sudan

Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey visited Christians in war-torn southern Sudan in December and vowed upon return to raise the profile of their plight.

According to Episcopal News Service, Carey reported that persecuted Christians are "begging for peace, for the right to live in their own land without fear, and practice their own faith alongside their Muslim brothers and sisters." Carey noted, "It was humbling to realize that my mere presence was taken as a sign that the Christian world remembers them...."

Although Carey visited hospitals, villages, and refugee camps in the south, a trip to the capital of Khartoum in the north was canceled by Carey at the last minute after the Islamic government tried to impose restrictions on the itinerary.

"We must work harder for a political solution," Carey said. "We cannot allow so much human misery to continue." Anglican bishops in Sudan are eager to have the country's appalling human rights record put on the agenda of the United Nations. The UN is preparing a report listing atrocities in Sudan, including the abduction and forced conversion of thousands of refugee children from the south, most of them Christian.

WCC Approves Lifting South Africa Sanctions

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches voted in January to approve the lifting of all

sanctions against South Africa while reaffirming generally economic sanctions as a means of securing social and economic change. The committee first chose sanctions in 1980 as a strategy to isolate the white minority government. Most countries have already lifted these sanctions.

Last August the committee reaffirmed economic sanctions, saying that changes in the country could not be considered irreversible until elections were held. South Africa's first free and open elections are scheduled for April.



Billy Graham with Kim Il Sung

Graham Carries Messages from God, Clinton to North Korea

In January, evangelist Billy Graham made his second trip in two years to North Korea to preach and meet with the communist regime.

Graham preached at the newly-opened Protestant Chilgol church near Pyongyang, which is only the third officially sanctioned church in a country that once was home to a vibrant Christian faith. According to Krich Bridges of the Baptist Press, some North Korea watchers believe that churches hold services only when foreign dignitaries visit. The visit received extensive coverage through state-controlled media.

Graham also spoke to 400 stu-

dents and faculty at the Kim Il Sung University, and to 1,000 people in a meeting on "why Christians are to be a moral and spiritual influence on society" at Pyongyang's Great People's Study House.

Bridges reported that Graham said those whose lives are changed within by Christ make good citizens and help change society for the better. But many Christians as well as communists dispute whether Christians, who look to a source of authority beyond the state, make the kind of citizens of that totalitarian regimes desire.

Graham's trip coincided with a conflict between North Korea and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which inspects nuclear production for non-proliferation treaty signatories. The government of Kim Il Sung has resisted full inspections of its facilities, though two weeks after Graham shuttled messages between Kim and President Clinton an agreement was reached to allow some inspections. It is widely assumed that North Korea is developing nuclear weaponry in violation of the treaty.

"One of my reasons for going at this time was to express my concern for peace in the region and to make whatever small contribution I could to better relations between our two countries," said Graham. He said he went to North Korea not as a diplomat but as a Christian and a citizen, and that he did "not pretend to know the exact formula for solving the present tensions."

Graham also said that the North Korean people he met appeared happy, optimistic, and energetic. Though details about life in this tightly controlled country are difficult to verify, it is known that religion is highly suppressed and that many people outside of Pyongyang face acute poverty, even starvation.



RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

Religion and Rebellion Mix Dangerously in Chiapas

By Alan F. H. Wisdom

Mexico defines itself as a secular state. Until 1991 the Mexican constitution was the most anti-clerical in Latin America. But the crucial role of religious faith is becoming increasingly manifest in Mexico's public life, as evidenced by the January uprising in the southern state of Chiapas. Church people have been prominent as victims of and prophets against injustice, as well as potential peacemakers. A central figure is the Roman Catholic bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas, Samuel Ruiz Garcia.

When the Mexican government needed a mediator to talk with the rebel Zapatista Army of National Liberation, it turned to Bishop Ruiz, a sharp critic of the social situation in Chiapas. "The powerful have propped themselves up with the use of force and have become deaf to the Gospel," he declared in a pastoral letter last August. "The poor demanding their rights through legal means are repressed, ... the jails are full of innocent people, and hunger and malnutrition are a permanent condition for many of the indigenous." It was frustration with such conditions that impelled many Chiapas Indians to join the leftist-led rebels.

Bishop Ruiz sponsors a center that documents the pattern of human rights violations. In carrying on this work, Ruiz has often quarreled with the local bosses of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party. Retaliations against the church have included the jailing of priests, the killing of catechists, and threats against the life of the bishop.

Ruiz has defended not only his own Catholic flock, but also the Protestant minority. In the last two decades more than 20,000 evangelicals have been driven from their homes. Dozens of churches have been burned or forcibly closed. Several pastors and lay leaders have been martyred. No one has been prosecuted for these acts.

Bishop Ruiz has condemned the attacks on Protestants, and his diocese has offered aid to the victims. The persecution is driven not so much by the Catholic teaching as social attitudes among the Indians. Their communities revolve around church-related obligations such as the festivals of patron saints and religious fraternities. Those who reject

these Catholic traditions and adopt an evangelical faith are viewed as anti-social. Their persecution is therefore emblematic of the suffering of all who are marginalized and ostracized in Chiapas.

Bishop Ruiz may have predicted the troubles to come, but he was not everyone's top candidate to mediate them. His statements carry an ideological



Bishop Ruiz

tone that casts him as ex-extremist, not moderate. In his pastoral letter last August he denounced whole classes of persons. "The powerful, the well-placed and the bar owners are sucking our blood," Ruiz said in a section entitled "The Word of Our People." According to Ruiz, "our people" are also opposed to privatization and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Capitalism is rejected as "a way of life and production that oppresses us" while benefiting "the strongest and the most powerful."

These sorts of statements might put Bishop Ruiz a lot closer to the Marxist Zapatistas than to the neoliberal Mexican government. In fact, the Chiapas state government at first accused his diocese of having fomented the guerrilla uprising. Ruiz's fellow Mexican Catholic bishops hastened to his defense. The permanent council of the Mexican bishops' conference declared on January 12: "We cannot accept any such suspicions concerning priests or religious or about the bishop himself. We maintain that he has always condemned the violence as he has also denounced the misery that, in this case, is the result of the abuse of power and unjust structures that must be corrected."

Now the allegations have been withdrawn, the army has been called off, and Bishop Ruiz has been invited to mediate. Perhaps, ironically, the radical bishop is in a position to foster a moderate solution.

The goal is not revolution but reform: a series of measures that might set the authoritarian, oligarchic society of Chiapas -- and the rest of Mexico, for that matter -- more firmly on the road to a fuller democracy.

***Prophets and Politics: A Handbook on the Washington Offices of U.S. Churches*, by Roy Howard Beck, the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Available April 1994, \$8.95.**

Why do church denominations have offices in Washington and what do they do? Roy Beck, a veteran Washington journalist who has covered the religious community, answers those questions and more in the format of an easy-to-use reference tool for clergy and laypersons, church leaders, and reporters (see interview with Beck on page 2). The handbook includes listings of priority issues handled by each office as they seek to influence the political process, as well as background on how each church sets its agenda for its public witness.

***RE-Imagining Conference Information Packet*, the Institute on Religion and Democracy, January 1994. Free.**

Prepared with the help of the Evangelical Coalition of United Methodist Women, this packet offers excerpts from the official conference handbook and daily newsletter, a copy of the RE-Imagining brochure, excerpts from tapes and reporter's notes, press coverage, and responses from churches and critics. The packet is useful for educating local church members and leaders on the dangers of radical feminism. Further it provides vital information on the expenditures of church dollars on this influential movement. It is guaranteed to open up interest in and raise critical questions about the commitments of the mainline churches that have supported the development of radical forms of feminism.

***The Price of Prophecy, Orthodox Churches on Peace, Freedom and Security*, by Alexander F. C. Webster, Ethics and Public Policy Center/University Press of America, 1-800-462-6420, \$24.50.**

The Orthodox Church is in a prime position to play the role of moral leader in Eastern Europe's struggle with its new-found freedoms. In Alexander Webster's analysis of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Orthodox Church, and

RESOURCES



the Orthodox Church in the United States, he tells the story of both political collaboration and moral courage, ideological compromise and spiritual conviction, faithless betrayal of the Church and selfless fidelity to its moral tradition.

***Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1992-1993*, Freedom House, 120 Wall Street, New York, NY, 10005, 800-289-8800, \$24.95 (paper) plus postage.**

The Freedom House survey of political rights and civil liberties ranks each country in the world according to the degree of political rights and civil liberties its citizens enjoy. It offers an overview of each country, identifies its political and economic systems, and provides social and ethnic information as

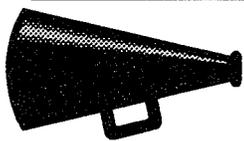
well. The survey includes maps and charts that facilitate comparisons between countries. Also available from Freedom House is the "Map of Freedom," which charts the world's countries as free, partly free, and not free.

***Mars Hill Tapes*, Ken Myers, editor, Mars Hill Audio, P.O. Box 100, Powhatan, VA 23139-0100, 804-598-7557, \$36.00 per year (six 20-minute audio cassette tapes).**

Mars Hill tapes, produced by journalist Ken Myers, cover significant events, trends, and people in the arts and humanities, public policy, science, and popular culture. They feature interviews, commentary, and reviews of films, music, and books. According to Myers, the tapes are designed for "evangelical non-scholars who appreciate the life of the mind and the role of ideas in shaping culture." Past tapes have included mystery novelist P.D. James on evil characters in fiction, William Kilpatrick on his book *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong: Moral Illiteracy and the Case for Character Education*, and Russell Hittinger on the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

***Critique*, a publication sent free to donors of Ransom Fellowship, Denis D. Haack, editor, 1150 West Center Street, Rochester, MN 55902.**

Critique aims at "helping Christians develop skill in discernment" through essays, reviews of books, articles, films, music, and more. It calls attention to resources in an effort to stimulate Christians to "think biblically about all of life."



FROM THE
PEWS

Making My Voice Heard to Challenge Our Leaders

By Robert F. Burger

I write letters. Some 400 in the last year-and-a-half. I learned from my mother the value of having direct, personal connection with public officials. I also once heard from a Northwest congressman that one personal communication from a citizen was considered by his office to be the likely opinion of 99 others. So I keep writing, whether to Congress or the administration. I get responses more than 25 percent of the time. I even respond to these responses to keep the discussion going.

Much of my recent writing has been on the Bosnian crisis. As a child I loved geography and history, and always saw the Balkans -- the fault line of some of this century's greatest struggles -- as a deeply interesting part of the world.

Again, the fault line has produced devastation. About it our political leaders, and even our church leaders, have remained largely silent. I know. The deanery in the diocese in which I serve as a Episcopal priest took to our diocesan convention last year a resolution calling for the U.S. government to display "bold and active" leadership on Bosnia. It was overlooked and not even brought to the floor.

The chief governing factor to date in the U.S. government's response to the Bosnian situation has been a deep fear of getting into another "Vietnam quagmire." To the end of avoiding such a scenario, any number of excuses have been trotted out as to why we should forego any serious U.S. military involvement in Bosnia. At the same time, we have maneuvered ingeniously to persuade ourselves and others that we are, yes indeed, terribly concerned over the tragedy there and that we are "reviewing our options." The result is a farce, a diplomatic charade before the whole world.

As I write this, NATO has taken the most decisive action thus far through its promise to dislodge the Serbians from their siege of Sarajevo. At press time, it appears to have worked. But the larger issues continue to be sidestepped by both the administration and Congress because: 1) no vital American interest is seen to be at stake, and 2) the mood of the American people is ascertained to be against getting involved in any foreign conflicts. Added to this is the hope that the conflicts in the former

Yugoslavia will just sort of burn themselves out eventually.

But, 1) if the United States, as the one remaining superpower in the world, does indeed have a major responsibility in the face of what continues to go on in Bosnia, and 2) if that conflict has a real potential to spread to other parts of the Balkans and seriously destabilize a good portion of that whole area -- and 3) if a lack of Western response to this particular challenge simply emboldens other and future predatory adventures in the "New World Order," should we not honestly get involved in it, and cease being a supine onlooker?

We should stop just talking about being a world leader and start acting like one. Talk is cheap. If it's not backed up by deeds, the world's bullies will sense this very quickly and act accordingly. The radical Serb leaders have done this already, as did Hitler in the 1930s, when he took unfailing advantage of the softness and indecisiveness of the Western democracies.

At best, things now are on temporary hold. It is a momentary reprieve, nothing more. To build on the present achievement and go forward to a lasting and just peace in this part of Yugoslavia carries a price tag for the United States. That price tag is: from the White House on down, a real American interest in and vision for a restored, viable, and secure Bosnia; an American willingness to get involved on the ground, should extending the present UN action to other parts of Bosnia make this indispensable.

As Secretary of State Warren Christopher has emphasized, we are at a critical juncture. Thus far, we have mainly been cheerleaders on the sideline. This must change, if the small but important success being enjoyed in Sarajevo is not to be stillborn. In short, it is fish-or-cut-bait time for the United States in the Balkans.

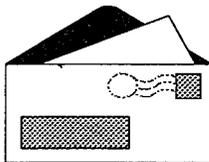
So I will keep writing my letters, whether I get a response or not.

"From the Pews" is a regular feature representing the views of individual clergy and laypersons.

Thank you for keeping us informed about the National Council of Churches (NCC). The Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the NCC, recently made the following confession: "We did not understand the depth of the suffering of Christians under communism. And we failed to really cry out against the communist oppression. I do give credit to people who called for that and did not get a response, at least from us."

According to your report, only a

LETTERS



few weeks after this candid admission, the NCC adopted, without dissent, resolutions endorsing the normalization of relations with North Korea and ending the embargo against Cuba. In neither case were human rights discussed.

Unbelievable. When will the NCC take human rights and religious freedom seriously?

Keep up the great work.

*Steve Beard
Wilmore, KY*

After reading the December issue of your publication, we wanted to thank you for the article on the "Renewal Leaders' Strategy Consultation." As participants in that meeting, we want to express our appreciation for the event, which brought together renewal leaders from many of the mainline churches. Disciple Renewal, the organization we direct, believes in the importance of an ecumenical witness based on the historic faith as presented by Scripture. The

strategy consultation gave another opportunity for such a witness.

Perhaps it will be encouraging for you to know that all of these months later, we are still thinking about the meeting and sorting through the wealth of information provided there. There were so many ideas that came out of that meeting. We must not lose the excitement and the momentum that began in Baltimore. So -- the pressure is on! What's next? We cannot encourage you strongly enough to do it again -- soon!

Our prayers are with all of you there as you continue in the work that God has called you to do.

*Kevin and Linda Ray
Lovington, IL*

"Extremist feminism... is at the highest levels of many U.S. churches.... Its exaltation of women's self-actualization....

While these key words diagnose, the entire first paragraph of your "RE-Imagining Event" article in the December issue is the disease. "Sophia" aberrations are symptoms finally surfacing after years of ... incubation.

As a United Methodist who has studied our Women's Division for the last 25 years, I am not too surprised at the fever of present female problems. ...Christians and their organizations are called prayerfully to judge themselves. One way is repeatedly to pose the questions: Are we here to promote ourselves? Women? Or the gospel of Jesus Christ?

... My question as a laywoman in the Methodist Church is whether or not our bureaucracy has become too ill to recover. Pray for miraculous healing!

*Sidney Edwards
Kileen, TX*

FAITH & FREEDOM

Published quarterly by
the Institute on Religion and Democracy
1331 H Street, NW, #900
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-393-3200

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IN THIS ISSUE

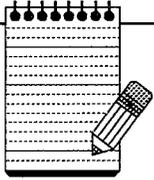
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PHOTOS AND ART

Cover, pages 6-7: Stan De Boe
Page 2: Lonni Jackson
Page 8: RE-Imaging Conference Booklet
Page 11: Baptist Press Photo
Page 12: RNS Photo/Reuters



IRD
DIARY

A RE-Imagined God: Enough to Die for?

By Diane L. Knippers

What does a conference sponsored by radical religious feminists and held in the United States have to do with a church leader martyred in Iran? Nothing? Or maybe everything.

Recently, I've read a lot about last November's RE-Imagining conference (see pages 4, 6). Much of what the conferees "re-imagined" seems simply blasphemous to me. Instead of worshipping Jesus Christ, the participants worshipped Sophia. Christ's incarnation, his divinity, and his atonement on the cross were all defiantly rejected by various speakers. One seminary professor put it plainly when she said, "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."

More than 2,000 women attended this conference, which was funded by at least five major U.S. denominations. The more I've read about it and the stonewalling and defensiveness of church leaders who refuse to denounce it -- the more I've been stunned by the lethal combination of narcissistic decadence and institutional cowardice in important segments of our churches.

During the same time period, I've followed the moving and tragic events concerning two Christian leaders in Iran -- Mehdi Dibaj and his bishop, Haik Hovsepian Mehr. Dibaj is an Assemblies of God pastor in Iran. Early in January, after nearly 10 years in prison, he was sentenced to death. His crime? Apostasy. The evidence? He converted to Christianity from Islam some 45 years ago.

Thank God, the Iranian authorities relented and released him. He remains free -- for now. Observers believe his release was largely in response to the international outcry on his behalf. This international campaign was inspired, in part, by the bold advocacy of Bishop Haik.

This is where the story gets both personal and painful for me. I met Bishop Haik a couple of years ago and I talked with him at length. Few people have impressed me as much as he did. He was a

godly teacher -- mature, wise, and courageous. But it was too dangerous to tell his story publicly then.

On January 19, shortly after Dibaj's release, we learned that Bishop Haik had disappeared. Besides working for Dibaj's release, he had appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Commission for an investigation of the plight of the Christian community in Iran. So, certain that he had been picked up by Iranian security, an international advocacy network swung into action. Our office had helped to publicize a demonstration outside the Iranian interest section in Washington on January 30. On that very day we learned that the faxes, letters, and phone calls had been to no avail. Bishop Haik's body had been found, stabbed to death. Iranian government officials claim unconvincingly they simply found him already dead.

In my grief, I recalled what Dibaj had said at his December trial. He did not know that he would be released when he faced his accusers then. Nor could he have known that Bishop Haik would be killed. "I am a Christian," he said, "a sinner who believes Jesus has died for my sins on the cross.... His resurrection and victory over death [have] made me righteous in the presence of the Holy God."

Dibaj declared himself ready "to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord and enter His kingdom sooner." Dibaj was willing to die for the sake of the One who died for him. Bishop Haik made that sacrifice. What pierced my heart was the knowledge that he died for the Gospel that some in our own American churches now dismiss and denigrate. Surely it was for those who seek life's meaning in a god re-imagined in their own image that Jesus warned, "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Bishop Haik's death reminds me that the warning -- and the promise -- are for all of us.

