
FAITH & FREEDOM

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interview

Defining Feminism

with Christina Hoff Sommers

Christina Hoff Sommers is professor of philosophy at Clark University and author of *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women* (Simon & Schuster, 1994). Sommers was interviewed by Susan Cyre.

What is the distinction between equity feminism and gender feminism?

Equity feminism is simply the belief in the moral and legal equality of the sexes. An equity feminist wants for women what she wants for everyone -- fair treatment, no discrimination.

Gender feminism on the other hand is an all-encompassing ideology that says American women are trapped in a patriarchal oppressive society. An equity feminist thinks things have gotten much better for women; gender feminists often think it is getting worse. They see the marks of patriarchy everywhere and expect it to get worse. But there is no basis for this in American reality. Things have never been better for women -- they are now 55% of college enrollment, the pay gap is closing. It's not perfect but the glass is getting fuller all the time.

Gender feminists claim that Western civilization and the Judeo-Christian tradition are fatally flawed by patriarchal assumptions which have oppressed women. Must their solution then include the destruction of this civilization and tradition?

Feminism is the product of western civilization. So when they attack the Western canon, Western philosophy and Judeo-Christian ethics, they are basically attacking the tradition that created them. They seem to be historically naive. Many college professors pass along to students an attitude of contempt for the Western canon which has in turn led to a romanticization of paganism and witchcraft which some regard as the lost feminist religion.

Do gender feminist tactics undermine the democratic principle of free speech? When I criticized the Re-Imagining Conference for its ridicule of Christian teachings, a Presbyterian staffer labeled my criticism "spiritual rape."

That has a chilling effect. To use such morally

loaded terms is so inappropriate. It trivializes real rape. For them to claim that because someone criticizes their conference, they are now the moral equivalents of real rape victims, is grotesque. To call honest criticism "spiritual rape" is also manipulative. Instead of dealing with the criticism in an honest way, the staffer attacks the critic.

The gender feminists are creating nihilists who believe in nothing except their own anger. They teach young women what I call advocacy statistics. They tell them that 1 in 4 girls will be victims of rape or attempted rape, that women earn 59 cents on the dollar, that there is a massive loss of confidence and self-esteem in adolescent girls, that 150,000 girls die every year of anorexia. They tell young girls violence against women increases 40 percent on Super Bowl Sunday, that battery is the major cause of birth defects. This is the sacred catechism of women's studies. None of it is true.

Young girls who believe this propaganda become enraged and decide they are not going to take it any more. What you have here is a dangerous combination: high moral fervor and misinformation. They believe the phony statistics and respond with indignation, rage, and resentment. They are prepared to do anything to right wrongs that they perceive exist. The problem is, the wrongs don't exist. That is not to say there aren't problems, but they are exaggerated out of all proportion. I feel the gender feminists have opportunistically moved in on social crises and turned them to their own advantage.

You mention that gender feminists reject "objective truth" as unattainable. Are they also hostile toward anyone who claims that such truth exists? Why?

Some of them believe that the whole notion of objectivity and rules of evidence are male constructions, that women are nuanced and know there are many truths. If they are going to play games with truth, they are getting into the realm of 1984. Orwell says when you claim that all truth is a construct and all truths are equally plausible, you can undermine democracy in very aggressive ways.

"Rosa Lee's Story: Poverty and Survival in Washington," by Leon Dash, *Washington Post*, September 18-25, 1994.

Leon Dash, in a series of eight articles, chronicles the life of Rosa Lee Cunningham, a 53-year-old grandmother who lives with several of her children and grandchildren in a cramped Washington, D.C., apartment. In his study of this family, Dash examines the interrelationship of racism, poverty, illiteracy, drug use and crime.

He writes, "Poverty is a phenomenon that has devastated Americans of all races, in rural and urban communities, but it has disproportionately affected black Americans living in the nation's inner cities.... How is it that many children and grandchildren from migrant families had prospered against considerable odds while some, like Rosa Lee, had become mired in lives marked by persistent poverty, drug abuse, petty and violent crime?"

The series, available from the *Post* (202-334-7535) at no charge, would provide a compelling and instructive basis for a small group discussion on urban problems and church mission.

"Are People the Problem?," by Tim Stafford, *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994.

For some time there have been dire predictions regarding the result of world overpopulation: massive hunger, an exhaustion of finite resources, widespread poverty, and ecological imbalance. Tim Stafford, in a well-researched CT Institute Essay on population, raises issues,

relates case studies, and proposes a biblical view of population growth.

According to Stafford, a scripture-based worldview can help one to avoid the extremes of the population arguments, that man will surely remedy his situation through improved technology or that we are on the brink of a self-made disaster that could signal the end of the world. Stafford proposes a worldview based on a belief in the providence of God. Scripture, he says, charges individuals to take responsibility for family planning and that humankind fill (not overfill) the earth as well as be good



IN PRINT

stewards of the garden.

Stafford does fall short in his analysis of coercive population control measures. He seems unaware of the serious problems in India, for example, a country where women may be forced to undergo sterilization in abusive and unhygienic circumstances and menopausal women are sometimes sterilized for small financial gain.

Stafford's work stands in stark contrast to a September 16 *United Methodist Reporter* special report on "Population, Environment, Consumption and You." This article embraces the most apocalyptic predictions of zero growth proponents and seems to endorse a New Age "cosmic consciousness" that attributes a "divine voice" to every living species, and perhaps to nonliving ones as well. The in-

dustrialized world is blamed for consuming more, without receiving credit for producing more. Readers are urged to resist economic development, but how the world's poor can better their lot without such development is not explained.

"The Gnostic Temptation in the Catholic Church," by Bernard D. Green, *New Oxford Review*, September 1994.

From science to psychology, Americans expect their expanding knowledge to save them. So says Bernard D. Green, echoing Harold Bloom (*The American Religion*) in his claim that Gnosticism is intrinsic to American culture. Gnosticism rejects the limitations of gender, time, and place and finds divinity in the knowledge of the unlimited inner self. It is knowledge of that self that leads to salvation.

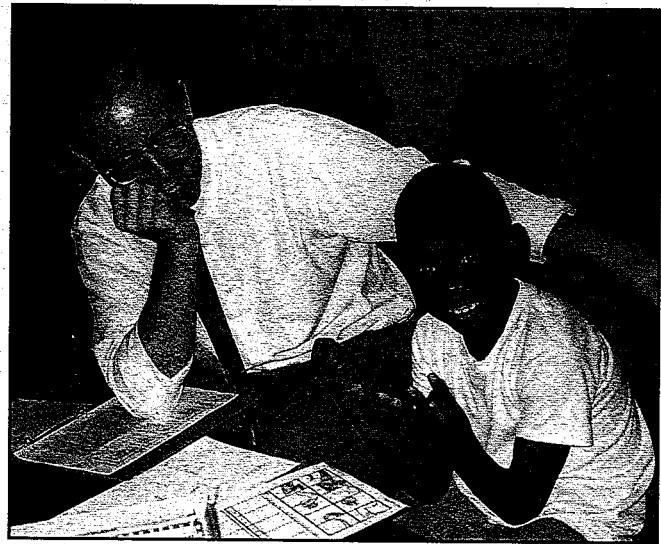
The resurrection as an historical event, a view of the sacraments that assumes the intervention of a transcendent God, and salvation offered by grace through faith, not through knowledge, are unacceptable to the modern Gnostic. What is known must be known through personal experience and must be under personal control.

Green offers a look at how Gnosticism is invading our churches (he offers the Catholic Church as his example), and urges the Church once again to "identify the dividing line and refuse to step across it."

Publishers Weekly (August 15, 1994) predicts that books on Gnosticism will dominate this year in the current climate of spiritual hunger. A list of books in this mode is given, including several on the current radical feminist enthusiasm for *Sophia*.

Poverty: A Symptom, not a Cause, of the Child Welfare Crisis

by Janice Shaw Crouse and Charmaine Crouse Yoest



The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is the 800-pound gorilla among child advocacy organizations. Its political connections include First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as a former chair, and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala as a former board member. CDF has few peers in obtaining support from foundations, corporations, and celebrities. When CDF speaks, the national media is there.

With its high profile, CDF plays an important role in shaping the debate about children's issues, including in our churches. One of this year's National Council of Churches (NCC) mission studies has been co-published with CDF. In this revised and expanded version of *Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches*, CDF/NCC squander their considerable influence with an inaccurate analysis of the causes of the child welfare crisis and flawed recommendations on children's issues. CDF/NCC identify poverty as the root of the crisis, and recommend more funding and programs. But they ignore the fact that expanding government programs will not provide the parenting children need, nor will it stem the tide of children flooding into the welfare system. These weaknesses leave little to recommend in *Welcome the Child*.

First, CDF/NCC blame the problems of the nation's children on poverty, termed "a human and moral travesty." Yet there is ample evidence that wealth does not automatically solve children's problems. Today, many children who are in so-called "poor" families are thriving and many who are in rich, but dysfunctional, families are floundering. Interestingly, CDF/NCC admit, elsewhere in the book, that "the United States is afflicted by a poverty of riches." Poverty is a serious

symptom and its complicating factors cannot be ignored, but in order to reverse the child welfare crisis we must look behind the symptoms to address clearly the root of the problem.

For James Carroll the cause is clear: "The bonds of our most solemn commitments are put to the test in our homes." Sadly the root cause of our crisis is the deterioration of relational commitments among family members. Carroll writes, "Despite our great defenses our homes have been pillaged" by abuse, adolescent suicide and parental abandonment. While CDF/NCC quote Carroll, they miss the significant implications of his remarks. The tenuous and uncertain nature of family commitments speaks more of spiritual poverty than material poverty. And, increased government spending does little to address spiritual poverty.

Hard work to restore the family involves countering our culture at numerous points -- the news media, movies, and television programming. These undermining forces are pervasive. While government has a role to play in countering the impact, bureaucratic responses are not a solution. In the short term, they are impersonal, inefficient and ineffective; in the long term, they are counterproductive and exacerbate the problems. Government spending does little to alleviate the problem and restore healthy family relationships.

Similarly, teen pregnancies and births continue at record levels. The facts clearly indicate that the focus on sex education has not delivered on its promise of reproductive responsibility. Between 1973 and 1990, the federal government spent \$2.1 billion on Title X -- the federal family planning program. During those years of record funding for sex education, contraception

and family planning, both unwed pregnancies and unwed births increased about 70 percent among teens, according to the National Center for Health Statistics and the Centers for Disease Control. The solution does not seem to be more programs or more money. Nor does it lie in education or in the elimination of poverty -- while admirable, these goals are not sufficient. Children are having children in unprecedented numbers. The resultant tragedy is twofold: not only is society paying an exorbitant financial price, we are also sacrificing these children's contributions to our nation's future.

Second, *Welcome the Child* is weakened by logical inconsistencies and poor handling of data.

- CDF/NCC write movingly about values-based programs working to discourage teen pregnancy, but they were strangely silent when the meager funding for Title XX, a successful abstinence-based federal program, was eliminated.
- They acknowledge the dire consequences of teen pregnancy and they quote a study citing a major cause -- "**Girls who grow up craving love** [emphasis ours], who have little sense of self-worth and no dreams for the future are likely to feel they have nothing to offer but their bodies and not much to lose if they get pregnant." What does this book recommend to fill the girls' craving for love? Sex education courses, AIDS education, and discussions about gender and family roles, body image, and values. Sounds like cold comfort to girls hungry for personal involvement and unconditional love.
- The view of poverty as the root of teen pregnancy ignores that teen pregnancy is one of the most significant roots of poverty. Teen-age mothers typically spend 12 years in poverty -- the years of their children's childhoods. One-third of absentee fathers fail to provide support payments and over half of children living in households headed by single mothers live in poverty -- five times the rate for children living with both parents.

Another dimension of logical inconsistency is the handling of data. In *Welcome the Child*, CDF/NCC do a disservice with inattention to details. There are no references or footnotes for the sources of the many

statistically-based claims. For example, CDF says that 7,945 children are reported abused or neglected each day and that 2,860 children are born into poverty each day. No source is given. At one point CDF asks, "What are the true values of a wealthy, democratic nation that lets infants and toddlers be the poorest group of citizens?" No statistics are given to support this statement nor do they acknowledge the context of the assertion. Child welfare problems *are* severe -- CDF/NCC should treat the data responsibly. CDF/NCC ably play the pathos card, engendering an emotional reaction to the specter of children in poverty. The absence of responsible analysis of the moral and spiritual roots of the problem lessens the potential impact of *Welcome the Child*.

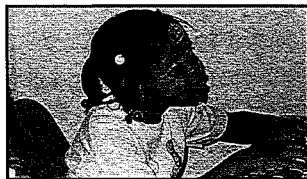
Third, CDF/NCC argue that increased funding is the solution to child poverty. But current trends are placing burdens on our welfare system, threatening the capacity to respond. "In June 1992," says the study, "an estimated 442,000 children were living apart from their families in the care of the child welfare system -- a 68 percent increase from a decade earlier." Funding simply cannot keep pace with the demands.

CDF/NCC argue that we need the "political will" to provide the resources necessary for alleviating child poverty. We would contend that having the "will" to provide for children is not the problem. The "public" can and should alleviate acute problems, but our primary focus should be on reversing the trends that force these children into our child welfare system in unprecedented numbers. No amount of money or programs will substitute for parental care or nurturing.

In conclusion, CDF/NCC confidently assert that the child welfare problems "can be fixed." However, we recognize that our bureaucratic approaches did not work in the past, are not working now, and there is little evidence that they might work in the future.

Preventing problems is much wiser than trying to find solutions after-the-fact -- especially when the problems are thorny ones. And some solutions are, at best, only stop-gap measures or are only sometimes workable. We must remain focused on the root cause of children's most pressing problems -- family disintegration. No amount of care from church or government can make up for the results of the lack of parental care in the life of that child. To truly "welcome the child," all our efforts -- government, church, school, community and CDF/NCC -- should be poured into supporting parents, training them for their responsibilities, and strengthening them in the tasks so essential to truly welcoming a child into hearts, home, and community.

-- Also available from the IRD, a review of the 1994 Spiritual Growth Study for United Methodist Women, *Family: Drawing the Circle Wide*. Please write us for a copy.



The Neighborhood Learning Center, run by the Washington Christian Fellowship, offers after-school computer training for children. IRD Administrative Director, Kendrick Mernitz Smith chairs its board.



reforming
the church

From the Culture Wars' Front

by Diane L. Knippers

It comes as no surprise that our society's culture wars have produced a virulent conflict between the religious right and left. Like any battlefield, it's not a pretty sight.

The infusion of religion into politics is not new. Religious values were central to the establishment of the United States and have informed all of this nation's major debates. Until the late seventies, the then "mainline" Protestant churches were the predominant religious influence. (These churches continue to sponsor the largest and best-funded church lobbies in Washington, D.C., according to Roy Beck's *Prophets and Politics: A Handbook on the Washington Offices of the U.S. Churches*, just published by the IRD.)

But the old mainline's political position has been challenged over the last 20 years -- by the Roman Catholic Church, the largest church in the U.S., and by the "religious right," a network of organizations, media, and personalities which combines conservative religious and political values. One key difference between the religious right and left is that the left is significantly funded by denominations. The right is largely funded by individuals and independent congregations.

Today the largest and most influential of the conservative religious groups is the Christian Coalition. This media-savvy, high-tech political movement is organized to influence elections and public policies across the country. The president of the Christian Coalition is the high-profile Pat Robertson. But increasing attention is being paid to its young executive director, Ralph Reed. Reed's new book *Politically Incorrect* (Word, 1994) defends the movement's goals as mainstream. But he also critiques some religious conservatives, particularly for a history of complicity with segregation.

As the country entered the 1994 election cycle, religious conservatives moved into high gear, particularly attacking President Clinton and the Democrats. Democrats counter-charged, and the religious left entered the fray in a new way.

On July 14, a group of religious leaders presented a statement, called "A Shared Vision: Religious Liberty in the 21st Century," to the Vice President at a White House ceremony. The statement purports to follow a middle course in warning

against two threats to religious freedom. One is indeed very disturbing: the series of Supreme Court decisions giving the government more power to restrict religious expression. The other supposed threat is a straw man: an alleged movement to declare the United States a Christian nation and impose a state religion! "A Shared Vision" is excessively concerned about keeping references to God out of public life. Such references may not always be effective in public argument, but they are legitimate in a free society. Ironically, one suspects "A Shared Vision," taken seriously, would have muzzled a Martin Luther King, Jr.

A new Interfaith Alliance represents a continuing religious left response to the right. Organized last July, the alliance asserts that "radical right-wing extremists have declared a holy war in America, promoting an agenda based on hate and intolerance." Alliance head, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presbytery executive Herbert Valentine, charged, "Religious extremism is being used as a weapon to attack politicians, to censor classroom textbooks, to cut back school breakfast programs, to promote discriminations and to mislead voters."

The alliance's strategy is to act as a clearing house for ways to respond to the right, and "work to restore civility and common sense to the public debate." Launched with a \$25,000 grant from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, it has received wide media attention. Among church leaders on the alliance's board are Joan Brown Campbell of the National Council of Churches, Roman Catholic bishops Thomas J. Gumbleton and Francis P. Murphey, United Methodist ethicist John M. Swomley, and William P. Thompson, former stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The alliance, disturbed by the November elections, issued a press release warning that "the alliance of the radical right with the newly ascendant Republican Party raises concerns that divisiveness and intolerance will now reign on Capitol Hill."

So there is one thing that the Interfaith Alliance and the Christian Coalition agree on: both overestimate the power of the Coalition, perhaps because both sides have a fund-raising interest in the exaggeration.

WCC Hires Re-Imagining Backer

Mary Ann Lundy, who resigned her position as Associate Director for Churchwide Planning at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the wake of last November's Re-Imagining Conference, is set to take on a new post -- Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. According to Ecumenical News International, a spokesman for the WCC defended Lundy's nomination, saying that it had been made "entirely on merit" and that Lundy had an "important contribution to make to the work of the WCC."

Lundy was the PCUSA's national representative on the planning committee for the now-infamous Re-Imagining conference, which was held in connection with the WCC's Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women. She was also co-chair of the U.S. committee on the decade. Although the WCC was not a sponsor of the conference, WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser has publicly defended the conference as "one of the most ecumenical meetings held in this country in a long while." He also said the "provocative formulations" of some speakers were "nothing outrageous."

UM Peacemaking

There's a style of Christian "peacemaking" that has become popular of late. Its most famous practitioner is former president Jimmy Carter. It was Carter who, in cutting a deal for the Haitian generals to leave power, declared that they were not dictators at all but misunderstood patriots. To prove his good will, the former U.S.

president invited General Raoul Cedras to teach Sunday school in Plains, Georgia.

Jimmy Carter did not invent this style of peacemaking-by-pretending-the-bad-guys-are-really-okay-and-our-differences-with-them-are-all-our-fault. He learned it, we suspect, in church. Truthfully, the ecclesiastical masters of the art still frequently exceed Carter.

Consider the Rev. Dr. John Swomley, retired United Methodist (UM) professor of ethics. In the September issue of the official UM social action magazine, Swomley gave a most astounding report on a trip to North Korea.

Based on independent accounts from Korea scholars, journalists, and defectors from North Korea, we have a fairly clear picture of North Korea: The world's last Stalinist bastion, where everyone is required to wear a picture of "the Great Leader" Kim Il Sung (now succeeded by "the Dear Leader," his son Kim Jong Il). A place where radios are manufactured so as to receive only one station. A regime that imprisons perhaps 100,000 of its citizens, and executes thousands, who are classified as "politically unreliable." (Any evidence of Christian faith is an automatic reason for being so classified.) A country whose economy has sunk so low that official propaganda exhorts, "True patriots eat only two meals daily." A nation with a million-man army poised in an attack mode along the border with its southern neighbor. A government that has refused to honor its treaty commitments to open nuclear sites for inspections.

Dr. Swomley, however, painted a quite different picture of North Korea. Based on a brief visit as a guest of the North Korean government, he described a land of

impressive high-rise buildings, high-tech hospitals, and free education for all. He reported that he had seen no evidence of the million-man army along the border. In fact, Swomley implied, it was the 30,000 U.S. troops in South Korea that gave the North reason to fear.

Regarding human rights, the Methodist ethicist thought the charges against Kim exaggerated:

He seemed friendly to religion, regularly visited farms, factories, schools, and was frequently in touch with ordinary people. I was told there is no death penalty in North Korea and no liquidation of opponents, but there are "re-education labor camps," which I was unable to see.

Swomley conveyed, with apparent approval, the official North Korean explanations: that Kim was not a dictator, but "more like a patriarchal father who makes final decisions on policy matters"; that he was not a Marxist or Leninist but a "humanist"; and that he was "respected, admired, and even venerated" by all the people.

Swomley did remark that there was "much to criticize in North Korea." But he gave no details. He rejected the kind of negative reports cited above, condemning them as part of a "process of demonizing North Korea" in preparation for war against it.

It should not be thought that Swomley is an isolated champion of peacemaking. He is, in fact, well connected within the world of oldline Protestantism. Not only was his report published in the official UM journal *Christian Social Action*, but he also sits on its editorial board as well as the board of the Interfaith Alliance (p. 4), and is the editor of *The Human Quest*.

FROM BALTIMORE TO NEW ORLEANS: IRD Tracks the NCC's Human Rights Policy Statement

by Faith H. McDonnell

Last year, IRD staff attending a National Council of Churches General Board meeting heard the first reading of a proposed new policy statement on "Human Rights: The Fulfillment of Life in the Social Order." This new statement is intended to expand on the NCC's 1963 statement on human rights. Seriously concerned about the new statement, the IRD has made it a priority issue throughout 1994. "The stakes are high," says IRD President Diane Knippers. "This document will significantly determine the direction of our churches' social teaching and advocacy into the next century. Will the ecumenical movement have a strong, clear voice for human rights? Or will it disintegrate further, undermining the very notion of universal and inalienable rights?"



The Background of the New Statement

According to Elmira Nazombe, Director of the NCC's Office of World Community, the NCC decided in 1987 to review all its policy statements for possible updating or revising. The 1963 human rights statement was evaluated by the Human Rights Committee, whose members are staffers who work on human rights, chosen by denominations of the NCC.

"The committee determined to affirm the 1963 statement and expand the statement to reflect new global realities," said Ms. Nazombe. They began drafting a new human rights statement in 1990, consulting with those in the religious community with experience in the work of the United Nations and international human rights law. After presenting a first draft at the NCC General Board meeting in Baltimore in November 1993, the process was opened up for comments from member communions, overseas partners of the NCC, and others.



IRD Analysis

IRD had several concerns with the text of the draft statement presented in Baltimore. Unlike the 1963 statement, the new document failed adequately to root human rights in their divine origin. The Scriptures are presented as one source, among many, offering insight into human rights. The document failed to give significant attention to freedom of religion. The draft statement applied the phrase "human rights" so indis-

criminally to virtually every desired social good, that the force of the term was dissipated. Finally, it took no position on the much-debated question of whether human rights are universal -- the denial of which is the most serious challenge to human rights work today.

For the past year, IRD has been aggressively working to influence the rewriting of the new NCC human rights statement.

- We distributed free human rights information packets for local church study groups and others. The packets include Alan Wisdom's analysis of the 1963 and 1993 statements, related articles, and study questions.
- We brought to the Episcopal General Convention a resolution asserting "The conviction that civil rights and political freedom are the universal bedrock of any meaningful scheme of human rights," and requesting that Episcopal leaders communicate this to the NCC.
- We ran a leadership letter campaign, in which we sent the NCC statements to over one hundred individuals with expertise in the field of human rights, requesting them to send comments and criticisms to the NCC.



IRD Solicits Comments from a Host of Leaders

Our leadership letter campaign brought in instructive replies from a variety of respected leaders. Here are excerpts from their advice to the NCC:

--James O'Dea, Director, Amnesty International, Washington, DC office

"The principle of the universality of human rights could indeed be strengthened in the draft. There are real attempts by some governments to claim that issues of

cultural particularity, religion, group rights and national sovereignty should be given a status that would supercede the universal application of human rights."

--The Rev. Steven L. Snyder, President, Christian Solidarity International--Washington, DC

"It is very likely that such a broad definition as the NCC is proposing in its interpretation of 'human rights' could likely be interpreted by even the most oppressive political regimes as serving their interests as well. More caution and care may be necessary in establishing more defined and specific examples of human rights. It is possible that even the most violent offenders of human rights may refer to the NCC statement for justification of their own ruthless and evil actions."

--The Honorable Frank R. Wolf, Member of Congress--Washington, DC

"...as a Presbyterian church member, I have a personal interest in the message being expressed from the NCCC. As a legislator, I have come to appreciate the influence churches can and must exert in public life.... In many cases, I have found churches to be a strong ally in a common struggle for human rights and religious freedom. In other cases, though, I have found the churches to be shamefully silent. I would hope that the new NCCC policy statement would strengthen rather than weaken the council's stance as an advocate of human rights and religious freedom."

--Dr. Paul Marshall, Senior Member in Political Theory, Institute for Christian Studies--Toronto

"The major problem with the document is that it is not clear what it is about. Rights and human rights are nowhere defined, or even discussed with any specificity.... Comments on political, civil, social, and economic rights are combined with rights to ecology, peace, communities, and identity in promiscuous abandon. The authors appear never to have met a right they didn't like.... Behind this is a further glossing over of a more basic distinction between rights as limits and rights as goals.... The notion of rights as limits...means that there are certain things (such as torture, detention without trial, killing of innocents) that no government can ever do, even in pursuit of a good cause. The limit applies in all circumstances, hence its claim to be universal."

--John E. Langlois, Chairman, World Evangelical Fellowship, Religious Liberty Commission--Guernsey

"It is generally recognized by all Christians that we must stand together in our defence of the fundamental freedoms to which all human beings are entitled by

reason of their creation, irrespective of race, colour, creed, religious beliefs or political persuasion.... I would encourage your Council to maintain its clear stance of 1963 and not venture into fields of situational variations when fundamental freedoms can be discarded or 'temporarily' suspended.... I have great concern for the appalling denial of human rights suffered by millions of Muslim women, whose lot is to be degradingly subservient to their male overlords...."

--Dr. Gaspar Biro, UN Special Rapporteur --Budapest

"Thanks to the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, DC, I had the opportunity to study the NCC draft policy statement in the field of human rights.... According to my own experience as UN Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Sudan [the universal and indivisible character of human rights] should be strengthened and developed unequivocally at all national and international fora dealing with the noble question of human rights. Not only because this aspect is questioned today by some State and non-State actors, but because the mere concept of human rights is intimately linked by the principle of universality: weakening or debating the latter is emptying the idea itself."



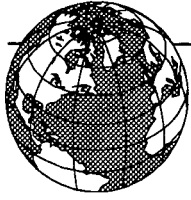
New Orleans, New Opportunities to Affect the Human Rights Statement

Just before the November 1994 General Board meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, IRD mailed an abridged version of Alan Wisdom's analysis and copies of several letters received in the leadership letter campaign to all 275-plus board members.

Involvement in every stage in the process of creating the NCC's new policy statement on human rights included advocacy at the 1994 General Board meeting in New Orleans. The IRD brought Dr. Paul Marshall from Toronto, Canada, to conduct a forum on the proposed statement. Thanks to the openness of NCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell, the forum was well publicized and attended by general board members and some visitors.

Following IRD's forum, and after considerable debate, the General Board voted to do what the IRD had recommended -- to return most of the draft policy statement to committee for further revision.

IRD is eager to once again take up the gauntlet for the fight for human rights; we are making plans to expand our educational and advocacy campaign in 1995.



the global
Christian

Claiming the Promise: African Churches Speak

by Walter H. Kansteiner, III

Claiming the Promise, an official mission study published by the National Council of Churches (NCC), is a bewildering collection of essays about the role of the church in Africa. The book relies heavily upon lectures and papers presented at various All Africa Conference of Churches symposiums, and touches on issues ranging from co-existence with Islam to the feminist movement to international debt rescheduling.

Many of the essays resort to the usual interpretation of history -- colonialism caused the vast majority of Africa's problems. But there are refreshingly honest historical assessments as well, including this forthright comment from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "We know just how appalling the human rights record has become in Africa. There has been less freedom in independent Africa than during the much-maligned colonial period."

Africa has come under examination particularly following the United Nations' failure in Somalia and the horrors of Rwanda. If Robert Kaplan's *Atlantic Monthly* article (Feb. 1994), which predicts Africa is heading for Dante's Inferno, represents one extreme, much of *Claiming the Promise* represents the blue-sky theorists on the other end of the spectrum. Reality, no doubt, lies somewhere in the murky middle.

Claiming the Promise doesn't duck all the tough questions. A pastor from Rwanda, D. Andre Karamaga, opens up the key social and political dilemmas that face most African countries -- and have a striking similarity to some of our own problems. Karamaga identifies the family as the central component of African society, and the institution of marriage as the framework that must be bolstered in order to protect the family. "The church should pay special attention to marriage, still the most appropriate institution for the development of children, and wage a relentless struggle against the negative influences coming from countries where the marriage contract facilitates only a temporary coexistence." A refreshing comment from an NCC publication!

The selected writings on African indigenous religions and cultures are fascinating in

anthropological and sociological terms. The explanations of "life cycles," the roles of family members -- both living and dead -- and the use of the dowry give us a taste of African cultural traditions and rites. The belief that life begins at conception and is eternal has obvious parallels with Christianity. The notion of a person consisting of flesh, mind-soul, and spirit is interesting, particularly the belief that the mind-soul can (and must) mature, even after death, in order for the spirit to achieve eternal life. But how these beliefs are reconciled with Christian beliefs is not really pursued, and such an omission is rather worrisome.

The chapter on "Islam and Christianity in Africa" is not nearly as enlightened or objective as the chapters on indigenous religions. Written by Dr. Johannes Haafkens of the Netherlands, the section relies on a few statistics explaining how important Islam is in Africa, and a few platitudes on how the two great faiths must get along. Religious toleration is, of course, the theoretical answer for the green/black divide that cuts through much of Africa. But how that theory plays out on the African political scene is the tough reality that Christians and Muslims face every day. Enforcing Shari'a law, the Muslim religious code, upon a non-Muslim society is hardly the embodiment of religious tolerance. Unfortunately, Dr. Haafkens merely advocates more Islamic studies and understanding as the solution to the conflict.

Claiming the Promise: African Churches Speak is eclectic at best. Some authors recycle the rhetoric of the 1960's anti-colonialist/nationalist perspective. These authors often fail to confront the real challenges that face Africa today: corruption, authoritarian rule, closed economic systems dominated by urban elites, tribalism, and religious war. But others (see Karamaga, Mutambirwa, and Tutu) do indeed face these realities, and call on the churches to cease blaming others and look to the Gospel for some answers. The book is a mixed bag, but there is hope that some in the church in Africa today are looking for the face of Christ, and showing it to their brothers and sisters.

***Gods of this Age or...God of the Ages?*, by Carl F.H.**

Henry, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.

Henry, in a book which draws together recent lectures, articles, and essays, suggests that the rejection of the God of the Ages makes Western society more vulnerable to those forces which threaten to destroy us. He points to a slow and subtle shift from biblical truth to secular humanism.

In the book he addresses "The Struggle for the Soul of a Nation" with an emphasis on resurgent paganism, world-view clashes in education, a call to maintain evangelical integrity, and current theological trends. He concludes with a reminder of "our glorious calling: to pass the gospel of Jesus Christ to our generation, and to all generations following."

Henry is a lecturer-at-large for Prison Fellowship and visiting professor of theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The founding editor of *Christianity Today*, he also serves on the IRD board.

***Vietnam: Free Market, Captive Conscience*, Puebla Institute (1319 18th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036), 1994, \$10.00**

The Puebla Institute defends freedom of religion for all faiths and, like the IRD, promotes democracy as the political system which best protects this precious freedom.

Nearly 90 percent of Vietnamese people identify themselves as religious. They are predominantly Buddhist, with a smaller number of Roman Catholics and an even smaller number of Evangelicals and other Protestants. Despite reform in other areas, Vietnam continues to

deny basic religious and political rights to its citizens.

In this 133-page volume, Puebla documents cases as well as means of religious repression. It is not an easy task, as no independent human rights groups are allowed to operate openly in Vietnam. However, Puebla has gathered from a wide range of sources evidence of the scope of religious repression, from a prohibition on printing of religious literature, to the confiscation and control of places of worship, to the imprisonment and torture of believers of all faiths. Included are lists of current and recently released prisoners.



RESOURCES

***Emerging Trends*, published ten times a year by the Princeton Religion Research Center (P.O. Box 389, 47 Hulfish Street, Princeton, NJ 08542), \$38.00/year.**

This six page newsletter explores the trends in American religious life, using the resources of Gallup International, to inform and "to enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth." Recent issues have included a study of the use and usefulness of small groups and a survey of regional religious beliefs (e.g. Eastern Christians are far less likely than those in other regions in the country to identify themselves as "born-again" or evangelical -- 28 percent to 42 percent.)

PPRC also offers other

data-based resources such as *Religion in America*, which contains statistical details on a wide range of behavioral and attitudinal measurements on religion, and *The Unchurched American -- Ten Years Later*, which offers data on how to reach the unchurched and how to maintain present membership.

From the IRD

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

Why do church denominations have offices in Washington and what do they do? Beck, a veteran 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. The handbook includes listings of priority issues handled by each office as it seeks to influence the political process, as well as background on how each church sets its agenda for its public witness.

***The Financial File -- United Methodist Women's Division Funding Analysis*, from the IRD, updated May 1994, \$5.00.**

Compiled by the Evangelical Coalition for United Methodist Women and the IRD, with the help of Nancy Smith (see *From the Pews*, p.14), this is a case-by-case analysis of the most troubling recipients of funds from United Methodist Women. It also make suggestions for alternative giving.

(IRD members receive a 10% discount on all IRD publications.)

Protestants Killed by Mob in Chiapas

Three Protestants were killed in a mob attack September 29 in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas. Miguel Mendez Santiz, Veronica Diaz Jimenez, and Miguel Lopez Perez were surrounded in their homes and shot to death by a band of 300 fellow Chamula Indians, under the direction of tribal leaders.

The three were part of a group of 600 mostly Presbyterian Chamulas who had been driven out of their mountain township a year earlier. Indian leaders had accused the Protestants of being insubordinate and anti-social for their refusal to participate in civic ceremonies involving a mixture of Roman Catholic and pagan worship. Over the last 30 years, some 30,000 Chamula Protestants have been expelled from their homes in similar fashion.

Most of the previous exiles have settled around the city of San Cristobal de las Casas. But the latest group, under Mendez Santiz's leadership, attempted a peaceful return to their homes this August. The remaining 600 are demanding the protection of the state government and the prosecution of Chamula officials.

Churches Address Haiti Intervention

Many church leaders commented on Haiti as the situation moved toward military intervention in September. Some favored it; others opposed it. Some backed the international embargo against Haiti as a step to be taken before an invasion; others endorsed it as an alternative to an invasion; still others thought the embargo unjust. Some church

leaders championed exiled Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide; others distrusted him. Here's a roundup of what they said:

The historic peace churches rejected any use of military force. "We fear that a decision in favor of U.S. military intervention may be imminent," the General Board of the **Church of the Brethren** warned in June. "We are alarmed at voices in the U.S. government calling for this action," the Brethren board said. "Also, we are reminded that U.S. military intervention in Haiti during the years 1915 through 1934 did not lead to social justice there and we affirm our conviction that it will not bring true democracy and lasting peace to Haiti now." The church also expressed concern about the effects of the embargo levied against Haiti: "The common people are suffering while the Haitian military and elite prosper under the U.N.-imposed sanctions."

A coalition of the pacifist left also delivered an anti-war message, but combined it with vocal support for President Aristide. Groups including **Witness for Peace** and **Pax Christi** held peace vigils outside the White House. At the same time a delegation of their leaders demanded that President Clinton "demonstrate unquestionable support for President Aristide by sending an unambiguous and unequivocal message to General Cedras and his cohorts to get out now." Among other measures, the delegation recommended tightening the embargo. But these pacifist leaders also reported that their friends on the Haitian left felt that a U.S. invasion would be too much -- neither necessary nor desired. "We believe that if the Clinton administration stops sending mixed signals," the delegation said, an invasion "can be avoided and

democracy restored."

The **Roman Catholic** hierarchy was equally opposed to U.S. intervention, but more hesitant to back Aristide. A September joint statement by the presidents of the U.S., Latin American, and Canadian bishops' conferences indicated, "We are not persuaded that the use of foreign military force to restore democracy in Haiti is, at present, morally justified or likely to establish genuine democracy for the

"We are alarmed at voices in the U.S. government calling for [military intervention]."

Haitian people." The bishops also criticized economic sanctions as ineffective and "a source of ever greater suffering for the poor and increased profiteering for others." They denounced the "illegality of the coup regime," but failed to name Aristide as the legitimate ruler. U.S. conference president William H. Keeler of Baltimore appealed to "all the Haitian factions [to] face up to their duty to respect democracy, to protect human rights, and to achieve political settlement through dialogue and compromise rather than confrontation." Allies of the Vatican in Latin America have criticized Aristide as emotionally unstable, corrupt, and inclined to stir up class hatred and turn the mobs against his political enemies.

Most leaders within the oldline Protestant churches, by contrast, seemed sympathetic toward Aristide. But they, too, tended to exhibit at least a wariness about U.S. military action. A June letter to the President and members of Congress from top leaders of the **United Church of Christ** encouraged stronger economic pressure on Haiti. The letter, signed by UCC President Paul Sherry and others, called for "the full application of a

total commercial embargo against Haiti, while continuing humanitarian assistance."

Thom White Wolf Fassett, General Secretary of the **United Methodist Board of Church and Society**, tried to align his denomination in an anti-intervention, almost pacifist stance. "Protestants, at least in the United Methodist Church, should be clear," Fassett told Religious News Service in September. "We do not support an invasion. We cannot countenance measures that end in violence."

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning said in July that he detested the thought of the United States invading another Caribbean nation. Nevertheless, he conceded that military force might be necessary -- but only acceptable if multilateral: "If the only means to end this nightmare for the people of Haiti is through military intervention, then let it be led by multilateral forces."

One church official was unequivocal in his support of military action. Ralston Deffenbaugh, Executive Director of **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service** told Religious News Service in July: "A multilateral military intervention is fully justified to overthrow the

"Military intervention is fully justified to overthrow the band of thugs ruling Haiti."

band of thugs ruling Haiti." In September he said, "The human rights situation continues to be very bad, very grave. Sanctions have clearly not worked, and the Clinton administration has followed all the Ps and Qs of international law."

National Council of Churches General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell spoke more ambiguously.

"If the use of force is the only recourse to bring about an end to this rule of death," she said in July, "we must keep in mind that what is fundamental is not merely the removal of three [generals], but rather to change a system which has repressed Haiti for more than 40 years." Later -- after President Clinton had given his "final warning" to the Haitian generals, but before U.S. troops landed -- Campbell gave a passionate personal endorsement of the president's policy. "President Clinton's continued sensitivity to the undeserved suffering of the Haitian people at the hands of brutal oppressive leadership is in the finest tradition of a compassionate America," Campbell said. "We in the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA reiterate our continuing respect for the President's leadership." She praised Clinton's "restraint in the use of power," and expressed hope that the Haitian military would finally yield to U.S. pressures. Yet in the end, Campbell implied, force might be unavoidable. "The NCCCUSA believes it is immoral to ignore the plight of those who suffer and to fail to act to relieve such suffering," she declared.

The **American Jewish Congress** also offered support for U.S. intervention in Haiti. "The U.S. national interests in stopping human rights abuses, stemming the tide of dangerous migration from Haiti and promoting democracy are real and profound," said A/JC President David Kahn.

Many denominations had no official comments to make on these contentious questions. Among those keeping public silence were the **Southern Baptist Convention**, the **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**, the **Assemblies of God**, and the **Lutheran Church-**

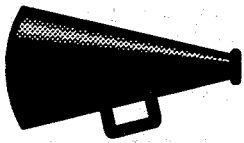
Missouri Synod. Many were active in prayer and in relief efforts, but not in making prescriptions for U.S. policy.

Assassination of Church Leader in South Africa

We learned recently of the death of a courageous South African Christian leader. The Rev. Johan Heyns, shot to death by an unidentified sniper on November 5, had been moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church from 1986 to 1990. Under Heyns' leadership, the church took a decisive turn, acknowledging the injustice of apartheid and repenting of its previous theological justification of that system of racial separation. This about-face by one of the leading institutions of Afrikaner culture had a tremendous effect in preparing the way for democratic majority rule in South Africa.

The motives of Heyns's killer were not known, but many speculated that he may have been a pro-apartheid extremist taking vengeance upon the church leader. South African President Nelson Mandela remembered Heyns as a "soldier of peace." We in the IRD, who hosted the Dutch Reformed leader at a luncheon in June, 1987, join our South African friends in mourning this man of conviction.

It is also ironic that Heyns died just as the Dutch Reformed Church was taking its next step toward racial reconciliation. In an October synod meeting, the white church voted to pursue unification with its separate daughter churches for black, colored, and Indian persons. The new moderator, the Rev. Freek Swanepoel, hailed the merger as "a prophetic word to the world that people are one in Christ and that they can work together."



from the pews

UM Women's Division: Band-aids or Deep Healing?

by Nancy Smith

Over 11,000 participants came together for the April 1994 United Methodist Women's Assembly in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a United Methodist, I've become more and more concerned about the direction of my church's women's leadership. So I went to the Assembly, with a group of like-minded women, to monitor seminars and speeches, to distribute alternative material, and to host a hospitality room. Because this assembly came shortly after the November 1993 Re-Imagining conference, I wanted to see if it would reflect the theological and liturgical excesses of Re-Imagining. In the major plenary session it did not, and for this, I give thanks to God. There was, however, a defense of radical feminist ideology and liturgy within at least two of the workshops.

The assembly focused on social issues: seeking justice with a passion; being in solidarity with the oppressed; and, through the empowerment of women, children and youth, breaking down the current power structure and redistributing wealth. I agreed that God is angry about those who abuse authority or power over others. It is never wrong to be angry about what angers God. Ephesians 5:11 tells us "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." In mission we must minister to the wounds of the people in various ways.

I went to the Assembly to examine the UM Women's Division's theological motivation for mission and to look closely at how that is projected in projects and ministry. I wanted to see if we are fulfilling the Great Commission given to us by Jesus Christ, which is to spread the gospel to all peoples. If we fail in this endeavor, the fruits of our work

will be in vain. If we are not teaching basic Christian doctrine to those we serve, we are only applying band-aids to the wounds. If we are only focusing on individual rights and anger, we are not providing access to the Healer God through Jesus Christ and a means for hearts to be changed and souls to be saved for eternity.

Sadly, the UM Women's Assembly spoke only to the wounds and to the problems creating the wounds. I heard all types of statistics concerning social injustices, and rightly so. There were at least

two statistics left out, I believe. One was how many souls were won for Jesus and the other, how many lives were lost through abortion. For example, one of the leaders of the Women's Division said in affirming a missionary couple's perspective on their calling: "We are to love them; we

are not called to save them." But is it love if we don't point the way to salvation?

Does the leadership of the Women's Division express the values of the grassroots of United Methodist Women or has it come off center? Have we become so overwhelmed by the need to respond to the injustices of this world and by the quest for individual rights that we have forgotten where our "stronghold" lies and what His Word says? If so, how can we bring renewal?

"The world cries out with a common voice: 'Is there hope...where can hope be?' To our wounded world, God still replies with the Cross of Calvary." (B.J. Hoff)

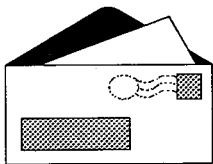
Nancy Smith is Senior Financial Analyst with the University of Cincinnati Medical Center and a United Methodist laywoman. She helped compile the financial data for the recently updated UM Women's Financial File, a report on UMW spending, which is available from the IRD.



Nancy Smith and IRD President Diane Knippers hand out brochures for the IRD's new Ecumenical Coalition on Women in Society at the UMW Assembly.

• Thank you for bringing me the views of Stephen Carter [Summer 1994]. He has helped me to understand real problems that I have confronted as a Christian and an American, most recently in the Peace Corps. In an organization that teaches cultural sensitivity, I found antagonism for my belief that God exists and guides each of us through our lives and work. In an organization that supposes itself to work for the benefit of the needy, I found disregard for the Christian

LETTERS



social views which motivate me to help others.

• Carter is right: Christians must bear witness in the world.

*Karl W. Forge
Atchison, KS*

• Enclosed is a letter to United Methodist Bishop Maryann Swenson prompted by your efforts [at publicizing Re-Imagining and the response of the UM bishops.] Keep the heat on these weak characters we pay to be our bishops. To Bishop Swenson:

"... Some mainstream denominations are noticing a significant withholding of funds. Have you considered that such action is the only effective weapon in the arsenal of the local congregation?... I am seeking ways to insure that my giving benefits only my local church....

"Joseph Sobran, writing in 1987, said 'It can be exalting to belong to a church that is five hundred years behind the times and sublimely indifferent to fashion; it is

mortifying to belong to a church that is five minutes behind the times, huffing and puffing to catch up.' I am tired of being mortified.

A 'task force' on Sophia/wisdom? Craven moral and spiritual capitulation, to make a charitable call."

*Ken Waddell
Salida, CO*

• I have been disappointed in your organization and its reaction to the Re-Imagining Conference. I notice that you are taking on Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, among others. I don't understand why you and your group are so much smarter than all the members of these denominations

I think you are wasting your time on human rights world-wide. I admit there are many very bad situations that need to be corrected, but I doubt that your organization can do much about it.

There is a situation at home that cries for justice, toward which your organization could make a significant contribution.... Let me give you just one example. The S & L crisis is expected to cost up to \$500 billion dollars before it is completed.... You could help people to put Christian principles into their thinking about politicians and try to straighten out the mess we are in.

*Truman Hunter
Oxford, OH*

• Diane Knippers's September member's letter was encouraging. I particularly was interested in your saying, "I believe, by God's grace, that our new [women's] coalition could break the grip that extremist feminist ideology has on seminary campuses and in the leadership of women's organizations." I think our country needs that even more than some of the other nations.

*Lillian H. Wray
Orange, TX*

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*We are pleased to accept
contributions to support this work.*

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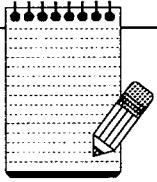
Walter H. Kansteiner, III
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Janice Shaw Crouse and Charmaine Crouse Yoest

Janice Shaw Crouse, Ph.D., is a speechwriter and author who frequently writes on family and health care reform. Charmaine Crouse Yoest is a Bradley Fellow at the University of Virginia, Woodrow Wilson Department of Government.

PHOTOS & ART

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IRD
diary

Covenanting for Freedom and Democracy

by Helen Rhea Stumbo

Helen Rhea Stumbo, who in October was elected to chair the IRD board, brings readers this issue's IRD Diary. Stumbo is a life-long United Methodist who has served in all levels of church life and leadership and has supported the IRD from its earliest days. She is president of Camellia & Main, Inc., Fort Valley, Georgia. Also joining the IRD board are John Boone and David Stanley. Boone, an insurance underwriter, helped found Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom and has served as its president. Stanley, president of an Iowa investment company and chairman of a law firm, has long been active in the United Methodist Church. We welcome them on board.

Twice a year the IRD's directors gather in the nation's capital for a time of reporting, evaluating and planning. We assume a corporate responsibility for the direction of the programs of this organization which gives expression to our common concerns for religious liberty and human rights in our world, as well as for religious freedom and the democratic prospect here in our own nation.

While some may mistakenly assume that concern for religious freedom ended with the downfall of Soviet communism, we are convinced that threats to freedom of conscience in many other parts of the world necessitate our continued work. In particular, the IRD board remains deeply concerned about the new human rights policy statement being considered by the National Council of Churches. Many human rights experts have joined the IRD in asking the NCC to stand up for the concept of universal human rights.

A new IRD focus for the upcoming year, "Keeping the Covenant for Our Children's Children," is a reminder that democracy is a fragile, never-finished experiment. IRD's newly-named

Vice President, Alan Wisdom, has done a perceptive analysis of both political trends and trends within the churches which undermine the habits that sustain democracy. Wisdom told the IRD board, "While our churches are not primarily in the business of sustaining democracy, they can -- if they give a full-orbed witness to Christ in their society -- make many valuable contributions to the democratic prospect. They can shape the civic habits that we transmit to our children."

The concept of "covenant" is a fitting one. Those who have gone before us have given us something very precious; we in turn must hand it down to succeeding generations. This implies responsibility and faithfulness between parties. What a tragedy it would be if in our justifiable concern to build religious freedom and democracy in other parts of the world, we ignore the signs of societal deterioration in our own nation.

Our nation's public life is an important arena of witness for the Gospel. Even a cursory reading of our history testifies to the importance of religious bodies in shaping the values which undergird the democratic experiment. If our children's children are to enjoy the blessings and benefits of freedom and democracy, we must consciously inculcate in them an understanding of and reverence for both the rights and the responsibilities (with their concurrent expectation of specific behaviors) that are the very nature of democracy.

In this holiday season, surely our common prayer is that the Spirit of the Prince of Peace will strengthen and embolden all who seek peace and work for freedom -- and that we will never forget the countless Christian brothers and sisters who must still worship God only in the secret of their own hearts as well as those who suffer for their faith.



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