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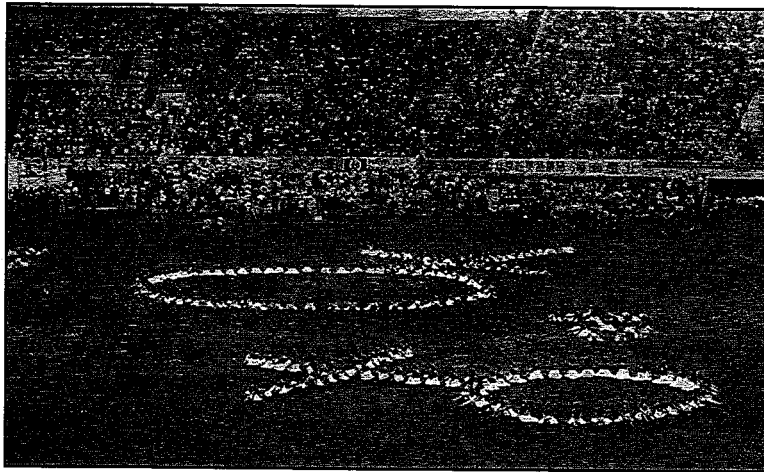
# FAITH & FREEDOM

*Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness*

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Winter 1995-96

VOL. 15, NO. 3



**Chinese performers welcome tens of thousands of women at the opening ceremonies to the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Forum and Fourth World Congress on Women.**

## *Special Report: Beijing Women's Conference*

### **IRD Coalition Speaks Up for Faith, Freedom, and Family**

*by Diane Knippers and Alan Wisdom*

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The Global Christian:  
**Church Leaders Honor United Nations**

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**Religious Left Defends Welfare State**

Mark Tooley

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From the IRD President:  
**Sex and the Churches' Social Witness**

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*(plus resources, church news, and letters)*

# FAITH & FREEDOM

published quarterly by  
the **Institute on Religion  
and Democracy**

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The IRD is a non-profit organization committed to reforming the Church's social and political witness and to building and strengthening democracy and religious liberty, at home and abroad. The IRD committees work for reform in the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The IRD also sponsors the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society.

*We are pleased to accept contributions in any amount to support this work.*

**Diane L. Knippers**  
President and Editor

**Alan F. H. Wisdom**  
Vice President

**Mark D. Tooley**  
Research Associate

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John Stumbo

## Organizations in our Beijing Coalition:

- ◆ Institute on Religion and Democracy
- ◆ Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship
- ◆ National Association of Evangelicals (U.S.A.)
- ◆ EuroCare (Brussels) and CARE (London)
- ◆ RENEW (United Methodist)
- ◆ Presbyterians Pro-Life
- ◆ Biblical Witness Fellowship (United Church of Christ)
- ◆ Disciple Renewal (Disciples of Christ)
- ◆ Episcopalians United
- ◆ Women for Faith and Family (Roman Catholic)
- ◆ National Organization of Episcopalians for Life
- ◆ Enough is Enough

### Photo Credits:

cover and pages 5-12 by Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society; page 3 by William Grigg; page 4 by Mark Tooley; page 15 by the White House.

► **Thank you, thank you for the report on the conference of "Cry for Renewal" in your publication, *Faith and Freedom*, Summer 1995. We had, prior to this time, no information on "Cry for Renewal."**

*Anita Hale  
Coos Bay, OR*

► **God bless and keep you. Thank you for your Christian effort against all the forces of evil in our day.**

*Faith Marshek  
Clintonville, WI*

► **I have been trying to find time to get off a note to you in appreciation of some recent trends or directions I have perceived in communications' from Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom....**

These seemed to me to be coming through in several of the Briefing/Action communiqués in relation to the General Assembly and in your thoughtful article in the Summer issue of *Faith and Freedom*. For instance, I seemed to detect a distaste for our Church's Washington Office taking a position [against] the Contract With America... without some definitive direction from General Assembly.

That office should not engage in active lobbying and public advocacy.

Then secondly, I would enthusiastically commend the spirit in which [Alan Wisdom] wrote his piece "Confessions of a Cautious Critic."

There has been too much shrillness on both sides of these issues as they have been debated in the life of our church. The kind of approach you outlined in the article is also much needed in our dealing with these tough questions. Keep up the good work.

*William Shirley  
Pittsburgh, PA*

► **Finally, someone with spine who will speak the truth clearly and to the point with no dancing. What we are dealing with is those who have abandoned the faith and follow de-**

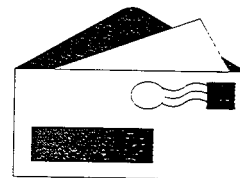
ceiving spirits...(1 Tim. 4:1).

Thanks for your faithful and forthright witness. Let's get the lay people involved in a letter campaign. Give names and addresses. Let them hear from the grass roots!

*Rod Buchanan  
Mount Vernon, OH*

► **The excitement level of IRD has jumped up several notches! You**

## LETTERS



are doing a great job.... I'm happy to hear of the membership growth which is so vital. Apparently you are raising the visibility of IRD.... Keep up the good work.

*Bill Steers  
Kalamazoo, MI*

## Editor's Note

With moving our offices, the Beijing trip (see pages 5-12), and other activities, 1995 was a particularly challenging year for the IRD. This issue of *Faith and Freedom* is the third and last issue of the year. In place of the fourth issue, which we were not able to publish, we are offering a complete Beijing packet to any interested IRD partner or subscriber. The packet includes news clippings, copies of Diane Knippers's congressional testimony and other speeches, plus a complete set of the *Beijing Bulletin*, which we faxed to some 1,000 media outlets daily during the United Nations women's conference.

### IRD Partners/Subscribers:

Please drop us a note or give us a call (202/986-1440) if you want our Beijing packet.



THE GLOBAL CHRISTIAN

# Church Leaders Honor United Nations

For most Americans, the United Nations' 50th birthday was a ho-hum affair. But for oldline church leaders, the anniversary was a time for celebration, for blaming the UN's failures on the United States, and for portraying the UN as an agent for establishing God's Kingdom.

This year's Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly saluted the UN for "preparing the foundation for a global community." Presbyterian committee chair William Thompson said, "We [the U.S.] are responsible for many of the failures for which the UN is now criticized." He professed embarrassment over America's "niggardliness" in its own financial support to the UN.

Church officials blamed the U.S. and other Western powers for "thwarting" democracy at the UN by manipulating poorer countries. "If one of the five powers [on the UN Security Council] doesn't like a country, it will wipe you off the map," explained Esmeralda Brown of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. She cited U.S.-led efforts against Cuba and Iraq as examples.

## 'Hymn of a New Age'

Despite insidious U.S. influence, the UN is credited with enormous accomplishments by oldline churches. A National Council of Churches mission study called *Community of Nations* claimed the UN had ended the Cold War, advanced nuclear disarmament, and reduced global famine. The church was assigned only a supporting role in the UN's fulfillment of biblical prophecies, which traditional Christians have assumed only Christ Himself would fulfill. "Mother Earth," ancestor worship and pantheist theologians were saluted.

Pantheism and syncretism prevailed in a service at San Francisco's Episcopal Grace Cathedral to celebrate the UN's founding there in 1945. Leaders of 45 major religions marched in dazzling vestments and turbans to the "Hymn of a New Age." Cathedral Dean Alan Jones praised the "sacredness of the earth" and declared, "This

occasion is a summons to the great religious traditions of the world."

As UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali watched, waters from rivers around the world were mingled symbolically in a huge bowl before the altar. "As these sacred waters find confluence here," said Episcopal Bishop William Swing of California, "may the city

that chartered the nations of this world bring together the religions of the world." At a September convention of the UN Association of the USA, National Council of Churches General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell enthusiastically described a photo of planet earth in Vice President Gore's office as a "religious icon for our time that God intended for

God's people." She said it symbolized the desire to live "at one with nature, with the divine, and with humankind."

Campbell bemoaned the recent spirit of "selfishness" in the U.S., where a "privatizing of life" has fueled resistance to the UN's "global neighborhood." She lamented American preoccupations with "MY family, MY property, MY children, MY taxes, and MY nation." This "greed" was not only "crippling" U.S. funding for the UN, alleged Campbell, but keeping "our neighborhood small." The UN is essential in "our struggle against racism, sexism, and economic superiority."

All the oldline leaders' hoopla over the UN must confuse church members, most of whom see the UN as an occasionally useful tool for diplomacy, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. But they also recognize its flaws, such as a bloated bureaucracy and frequent bias against Western democracy.

Rather than pretending that the UN is the consummation of biblical predictions about humanity's redemption, church leaders instead should cite the UN as proof that authentic "peace" is impossible without divine leadership.

IRD

by Mark Tooley  
Research Associate



United Nations is celebrated in quasi-religious ceremony at UN Association meeting.

## A March Against Capitalism

"F--- Rockefeller! F--- Columbus! F--- Bill Clinton! F--- the CIA and the FBI!" So screamed an angry young woman from the podium of an October rally in the nation's capital against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The demonstration was endorsed by numerous Catholic and Protestant church groups.

The woman, identified only as "Rachel," excited the crowd by cursing at authority figures in fascist "Amerikka."

She screamed, "This system ain't coming down by singing 'Kum-Ba-Ya, My Lord.' We've got to stop singing and start swinging!" The threat of violence was unmistakable.

"Witness for Peace," a group friendly to Nicaragua's former Marxist government, organized the "50 Years

avor of "Indigenous People's Day." Miguel d'Escoto, Nicaragua's Marxist former foreign minister, told the cheering crowd, "Our objective is not really to change the World Bank and the IMF because they are merely the instrument of this beast, this diabolical capitalist system."

One speaker claimed, "There's no more middle class in America." She informed the crowd that "no one owns their own homes in the U.S.—the d--- bank owns it all."

Another asserted that the World Bank and IMF "have said that the poor and elderly and disabled and indigenous and lesbians and gays are disposable."

Besides the rally, anti-bank activists hosted a reception for d'Escoto at Foundry United Methodist Church (where the Clintons worship), performed "acts of civil disobedience" against the

head Joan Brown Campbell, and numerous other church leaders and secular leftist groups such as Greenpeace, USA.

## Support For Fidel Castro

Cuban dictator Fidel Castro sought support from over 100 American church leaders at an October meeting organized by the National Council of Churches in New York. The communist leader thanked the NCC and other church leaders for their humanitarian aid to Cuba and their opposition to the U.S. embargo against him.

"We see in you the expression of the best values and intentions of the American people," Castro told the church audience. "We love you very specially and always welcome you to our country."

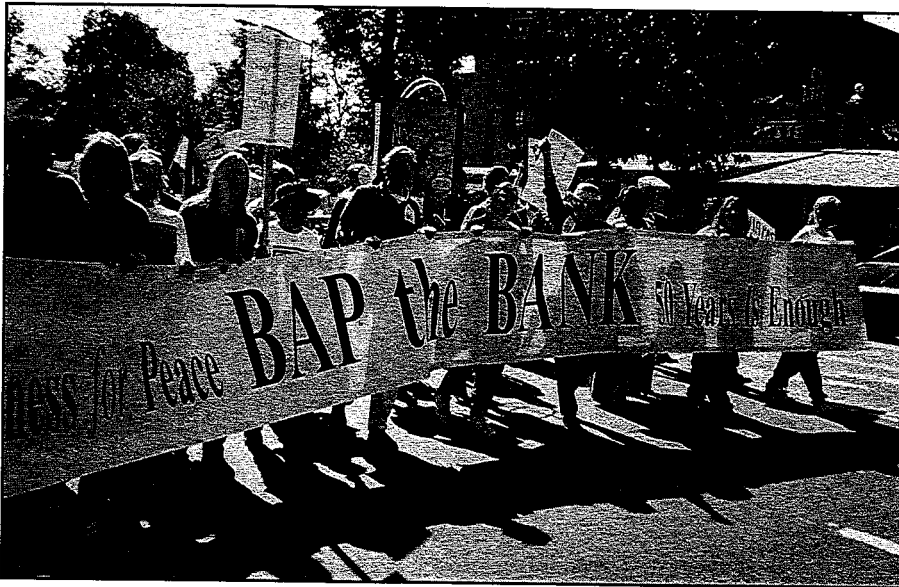
NCC chief Joan Brown Campbell responded that the NCC "has for a long time spoken against the embargo." Expressing concern about the "detention of some pastors" in Cuba, she still thanked the dictator for "his priority of caring for the poor."

United Methodist Bishop Joel Martinez of Nebraska lamented that the U.S. still behaved "toward Cuba as if there is a cold war." A Baptist minister praised Castro as a "compassionate man who genuinely cares for the poor." A minister from "Pastors for Peace" attacked U.S. policies as "cruel and shameful."

Castro defended his regime by saying that, "Like Jesus, we have worked with our own hands to divide equally and fairly the few loaves and fishes we have among our people." He denied that there was religious persecution in Cuba. And he hailed U.S. church leaders who support Cuba.

"Like the early Christians, they have been willing to stand up for their beliefs, even against those who would crucify them," Castro told the appreciative church leaders.

IRD



Church leaders endorsed this radical street demonstration against the World Bank.

is Enough" demonstration against international banking. But much of the rhetoric was aimed at the United States and capitalism.

"The U.S. uses these organizations to wage war against the poor," declared Witness director Paul Sciré, who repudiated Columbus Day in fa-

World Bank, staged a candlelight vigil, and held a "Call to Jubilee" church service.

Endorsers of the demonstration included 20 Catholic bishops, 17 United Methodist bishops, Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, National Council of Churches

# IRD Coalition Speaks Up for Faith, Freedom and Family

In John's vision of the New Jerusalem, beside the river flowing from the throne of God there grows "the tree of life," and the leaves of this tree "are for the healing of the nations." By odd coincidence, there was a "healing tent" centrally located at the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Forum of the United Nations Conference on Women this September. As women from every nation came to Beijing in search of their New Jerusalem of worldwide peace and justice, they had access to a place offering spiritual healing.

It was striking that a conference organized by a secular bureaucracy like the UN, and inspired by a movement as aggressively secular as contemporary feminism, should feature a site so obviously religious. The "healing tent" was filled with all the tokens of spirituality: the aroma of joss sticks burning, the soothing melodies of "earth sounds."

But the spirituality being offered was not at all Christian. The religion of the healing tent, and many other places at the UN conference, was closer to some form of neo-paganism. Worship was directed toward the feminine self, toward Mother Earth, toward various goddesses ancient and modern—but rarely toward "the Lamb that was slain" for the sins of the world.

Yet for a brief half-hour on Sunday, September 3, the healing tent did more closely approximate John's vision of the New Jerusalem. Under the leadership of the IRD-convened Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society (ECWS), a service of Christian worship was held on this pagan site in a communist land.

More than 50 voices from every continent sang out



**The ECWS team, from left: Winnie Bartel, Donna Maxfield, Jane McDermott, Terry Schlossberg, Diane Knippers, Mariam Bell, Nancy Smith, and Marilyn Heigl. Not pictured: Janice Crouse, who edited the daily *Beijing Bulletin* back in Washington.**

hymns to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Holy, Holy, Holy," "Amazing Grace," "How Great Thou Art." A homily was preached on Jesus' promise that "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." Episcopal priest Jane McDermott declared the inextinguishable freedom that women (and men) find in Christ.

Many in attendance found it significant that the Gospel was being proclaimed at such a central location in the NGO Forum. A woman from Kenya said, "I'm so grateful for this service. I thought I was the only Christian here." An Australian television crew filmed the entire service. A reporter from U.S. National Public Radio drifted in, attracted by the sound of singing. She stayed after the service and did a long interview with IRD President Diane Knippers, which was broadcast nationwide.

Perhaps the worship service best encapsulated our ECWS

mission in Beijing. We were attempting to show forth orthodox Christian faith in an environment that was not at all hospitable to it. Besides the powerful currents of paganism among influential feminist groups within the conference (see page 7), we had to contend with the repressive anti-Christian atmosphere created around the conference by the communist Chinese government (see page 10).

## Churches on the wrong side

Moreover—and most distressing of all—we found that our own churches were often on the wrong side of the cultural conflicts that played out at the women's conference. Instead of commending the Christian faith to the

non-believers around them, they were often condemning it. Our oldline church representatives wholeheartedly accepted and promoted the radical feminist agenda of the conference leaders. We did not hear them voicing the misgivings that many U.S. church women would have about the conference Platform for Action. And our church delegates were terribly silent about the persecution of their Chinese sisters and brothers that was taking place around them (see pages 8-9).

Our Ecumenical Coalition team members were few in number—only eight among the throng of over 20,000 at the NGO Forum. But they multiplied their impact as they used every means to deliver their message. Our home base for the Forum was a booth on the edges of the exhibit area. Off the beaten path, in the midst of a field that quickly turned to mud as the rains poured down, this small and sparsely furnished booth was nevertheless the site of significant Christian ministry. Above it we draped a banner that proclaimed, “For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free.”

Women from around the world—most of them not Christians—came by our booth. We had conversations about the Christian faith with at least 100 individuals.

### Religion—the forgotten freedom

Our Ecumenical Coalition tried to throw particular light upon religious freedom as a fundamental right of all women and men. We sponsored a seminar and circulated a petition, both aimed at swaying the UN Women’s Conference to reaffirm the guarantees of religious liberty found in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Diane Knippers made the appeal: “Do not let us leave Beijing with freedom of conscience—the cornerstone of human

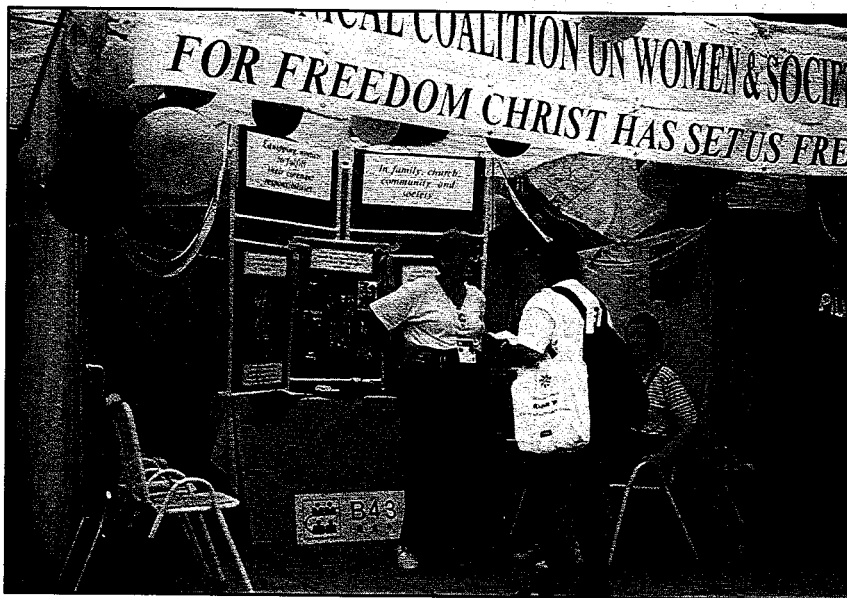
“Women are brutally denied basic human rights in many parts of the world. Women suffer denial of educational opportunities and property rights, forced abortion and forced sterilization, genital mutilation, prostitution, rape, female infanticide, the threat of execution for apostasy or blasphemy.... These blatant and egregious human rights abuses are trivialized in the context of a document that takes on the grandiose aim to redefine gender roles in every society with no reference to biological differences between men and women.”

Diane Knippers, Testimony at  
U.S. House of Representatives hearing  
July 18, 1995

rights—as the forgotten freedom.”

The featured speaker at our seminar, U.S. Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ), confronted the most immediate example of religious repression: China itself. Smith recited cases of Chinese Christians who are imprisoned for their faith. He also told of Chinese women who have been beaten, tortured, and forcibly aborted when they have refused, for religious reasons, to comply with China’s one-child policy. (Several Chinese members of the audience took strong exception to the congressman’s criticisms—see page 10.) Other seminar speakers reported women suffering abuses on account of their religion in Nepal, Sudan, Iran, Egypt, India, Mexico, and France. In addition, the ECWS women spoke at events organized by other groups.

Our coalition also directly addressed the governments that met at the official UN conference. Already in July, Diane Knippers had given testimony at a hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives. ECWS women were regular participants in meetings with the U.S. delegation to the conference. Knippers was also permitted to distribute written



The Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society booth in the NGO exhibit area was the site of many conversations on Christian faith.

(Continued on page 11)



## SELF-MADE RELIGION IN BEIJING

# Goddesses of Their Own Choosing

**W**e are building a shrine to the goddesses," announced the leader of the seminar on "Goddess and Women, Hand in Hand." This "Shrine in Praise of the Feminine" was just one example of the kind of neo-pagan religiosity that enveloped the UN Conference on Women. It was the last thing that we had expected to find on our visit to communist China.

The shrine was constructed in the "peace tent" in the NGO exhibit area. It was in the form of a Christmas tree, with red ribbons streaming down from a center pole and doll figures stacked in tiers at the base. These dolls were the "goddesses." Women who visited the tent were invited to add an "icon of their own goddess" to the collection. And, if you had forgotten to bring your own idol to China, you could make one out of the conveniently supplied paper doll cut-outs, glue, and glitter.

At the Beijing women's summit, all types of spirituality flourished—except orthodox monotheism. The program book for the NGO forum listed 3,342 seminars and workshops. One in 20 dealt explicitly with religion. Half of those espoused some form of "new age" pantheism or polytheism; the next highest number was devoted to combating "fundamentalism." Some sample seminar titles: "Guided Meditation for the Healing of Mother Earth," "The Feminine Mode of Success and Power with Kundalini Yoga and Meditation," and "Celebrate the Goddess."

### Abzug group worships a pantheon

The adoration of the goddess was prominent in the offerings of the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO). Headed by flamboyant former congresswoman Bella Abzug, and funded by the United Methodist Women's Division, WEDO was widely reputed to be the most influential NGO. Its hand was detected in many sections of the conference Platform for Action.

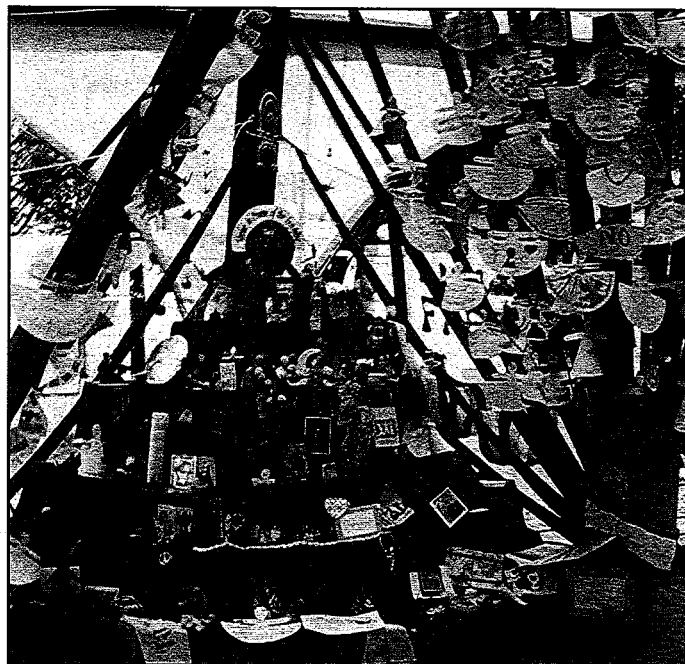
WEDO sponsored a series of daily meetings entitled "Daughters of the Earth." The first session, dedicated to the Chinese goddess Nu Kwa, included a ritual offering of various fruits to Mother Earth. The Brazilian presenter next held up a Christian cross and declared: "The people in my community used to believe in the crucifixion, but we have decided, 'No more crucifixion.' We believe in life.... We are power." Soon the entire overflowing crowd, led by Abzug, was on its feet, hands clasped overhead, and chanting passionately, "I am power! I am power!" When the chanting died down, Abzug intoned the call to worship, "Welcome, daughters of the Earth."

Subsequent sessions of WEDO's program were each dedicated to a different patroness: the Bantu goddess

Songi, the Greek goddess Athena, the Buddhist spirit Tara, the American Indian medicine woman Pasowee, the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, the Mayan goddess Ixmucane, the Hindu goddess Aditi, and the Mesopotamian goddess Nanshe.

The question arises: Why are these influential, intelligent women so eager to go back to rank paganism? Surely they should know that broken old idols can do little to help today's women. The women of ancient Babylon or the women of modern India could bear witness that the worshipers of goddesses can be terrible abusers of human women. There is far more freedom to be found in the Christian Scriptures, with their proclamation that "in Christ there is no male or female."

One explanation for this odd turn to paganism is suggested by the biblical book of Judges. It uses a three-part refrain to describe the people of Israel as they repeatedly went astray: First the people "began to worship other gods." Then "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." And finally the nation fell into chaos, subjugation, and despair. Perhaps the connection still holds today: Idolatry and self-seeking go hand in hand, and the result is social disaster.



Idols for the modern woman—the "Shrine in Praise of the Feminine."

# Church Delegates Join Attack on Faith

**A**t a conference where religion in general—and Christianity in particular—came under much attack, one would have expected the official representatives of major denominations to speak up for the faith. But in many cases our church delegates joined in the condemnation of their own scriptures, their own tradition, and their own churches. They implied that for women to free themselves, they would have to discard the Gospel that they had received and substitute a new religion of their own making.

In a World Council of Churches seminar on “Gospel, Cultures, and Women,” one presenter denounced traditional Christianity as imperialistic, patriarchal, colonialist, capitalistic, egocentric, racist, and homophobic. “The Christianity we receive in Asia and other Third World countries,” she said, “is a religion so corrupted I call it religious fundamentalism. I call it Coca Cola Christianity because it came with a rise of capitalism in the U.S.A.” The presenter advised her audience: “I want all of us to remember...we are the transformer, maker, and creator of our own religious and cultural tradition.”

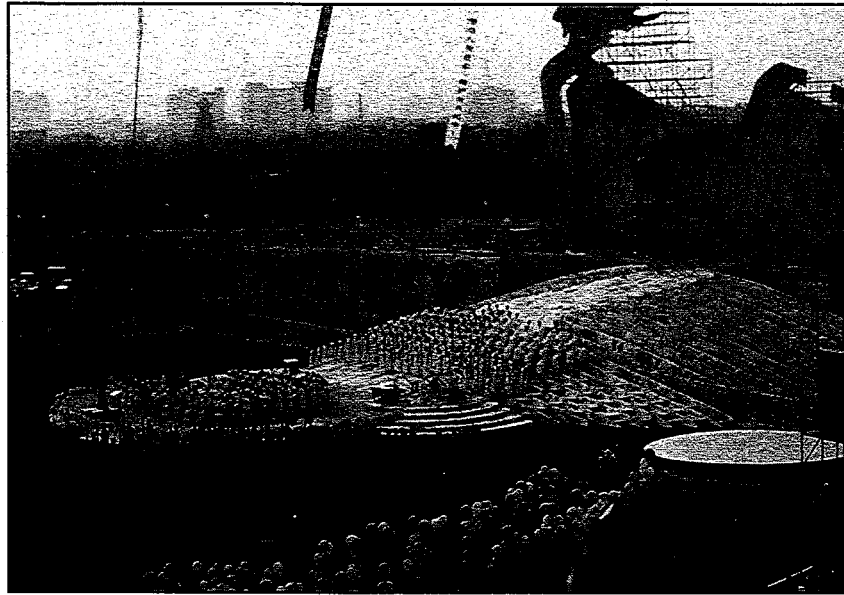
## Claiming their own theology

The WCC's own Ecumenical News International (ENI) reported on another WCC seminar under the headline “Christian Tradition Perpetuates Violence Against Women.” The ENI story featured remarks by Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) staffer Rebecca Peters, who blamed “messages from the Bible, from church tradition and authorities” for “domestic violence, incest, child abuse and sexual exploitation of girls and women by clergy.” Peters suggested, according to the ENI piece, that “any element of Christian tradition that denies the full humanity of women...must be discarded, ignored, or transformed.”

Speaking at a seminar on “Feminism and Religion: Can They Co-exist?” Rosemary Radford Ruether concluded: “Protestantism has failed equality.... Christianity, the way it is expressed now, is more in support of vio-

lence.” Ruether, a Roman Catholic who teaches at the United Methodist Garrett Seminary, is considered one of the top feminist theologians in the United States.

Emmy Lou John of the World Federation of Methodist Women described a poster of a woman bent under a heavy load.



**The opening ceremony of the NGO Forum, with a steel-gray image of “the Goddess of Joy” presiding in the background. The goddess was acclaimed as “holy and pure” in the program.**

Stacked on the woman's back were “the Bible, the Koran, Family Laws, Penal Laws.” John said, “Those are the books that are pushing women down into the ground.” She encouraged women to throw off these religious burdens and “claim our spirituality..., claim our theology.”

In the face of these frontal challenges to Christian faith, there were

very few in Beijing who stepped forward to defend it. The Vatican delegation, headed by Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, was a stalwart—and bore the brunt of much feminist scorn. The Southern Baptist Convention sent a delegate, as did the the National Association of Evangelicals. And there was a scattering of women from conservative Catholic and Protestant parachurch groups.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of U.S. churchwomen at the UN conference came from the oldline denominations. Thirty-five Presbyterians, over 30 United Methodists, over 50 Episcopalians, and more from other communions made for a sizable presence. The cost certainly ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

What return did all this personal and financial investment produce? Overall, it lent support to the radical feminist agenda that was driving the conference. The WCC workshops dovetailed neatly with the Beijing Platform for Action. Besides repudiations of traditional religion, other themes common to the WCC and the UN feminist elite included: health care as a “human right,” the call to combat Western racism, and the need to forgive debts contracted by Third World governments.

The worldwide Anglican Women's Network declared



that its purpose in Beijing was to oppose “economic, political, domestic, cultural, environmental, religious, and sexual violence against women.” The ideological bias of this agenda showed through in the elastic Anglican definitions of “violence.” For example, “economic violence” included “unequal distribution of wealth...as evidenced by world debt.” “Political violence” ranged from genuine atrocities—“acts of war including rape and forced relocation”—to “women’s exclusion from decision-making.” “Religious violence” was “intolerance and persecution of women who will not conform.” “Sexual violence” entailed “compulsory heterosexuality.”

### A blind eye to paganism and persecution

Oldline church reports on the women’s conference were relentlessly cheery. They portrayed it as a great step forward on the road to worldwide empowerment of women. They could not conceive why all good Christian women should not immediately enlist in this great feminist movement. When other Christian groups (such as the IRD) raised questions about the conference, the official church agencies reacted defensively. They adamantly denied that the UN conference was anti-family or anti-religious. They quickly dismissed warnings about the temptation to swell the powers of the state excessively.

Church publications said nothing about pagan or non-Christian elements that might need to be challenged or evangelized in Beijing. One United Church of Christ minister even stated explicitly in a seminar: “I have not come

Methodist Janice Love, the leader of the WCC delegation, faulted the Platform for being weak on “economic justice” and racism. Another WCC spokeswoman blamed Western

“My concern is that much of the Platform for Action assumes the power model. It assumes that women must achieve power and that this will liberate women and bring just development and peace to human society. Much of the Platform calls for government action to redress wrong and introduce equality. Here, it seems, we are overlooking the major lesson of the twentieth century -- the enormous danger of government tyranny.”

Diane Knippers at National Institute of Womanhood conference, NGO Forum, September 1995

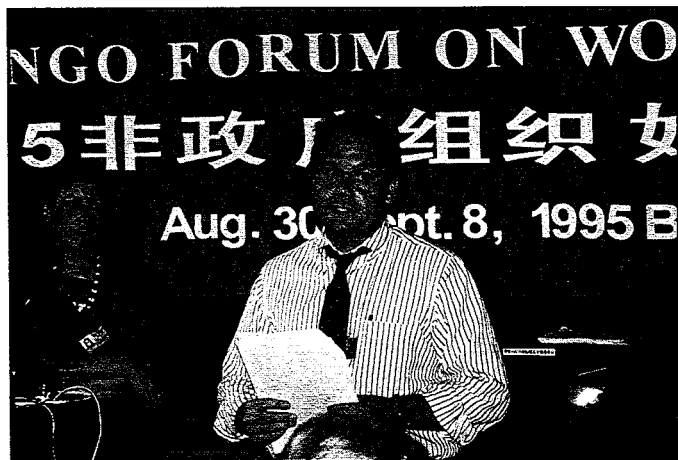
governments for their unwillingness to commit more money in foreign aid to Third World governments. She also objected to the “watering down” of language condemning religious fundamentalism.

On only one point, as far as we can tell, did the oldline churches act as a moderating influence. Renate Bloem of the World Federation of Methodist Women spearheaded an effort to get oldline church women to support religious rights. This effort aided that of the Vatican and our ECWS team to see that the Platform contained forceful assertions that religion has helped many women, and that all women may claim the freedom of religious belief and practice.

Ironically, the oldline church representatives did not apply these principles in the most obvious case: China. When criticisms of Chinese human rights abuses surfaced, church spokeswomen almost unanimously brushed them aside as irrelevant. “This is a conference about women, not about China” was the scripted response—as if a gathering of the world’s women could overlook the plight of 600 million of their sisters close at hand.

WCC officials complained during the conference about heavy press attention focused on Chinese repressive tactics. “I’m afraid they’re not dealing with the important women’s issues being discussed here,” lamented Baerbel von Wartenberg-Potter. Apparently, she did not consider the persecution of Christians and others to be among those important issues.

IRD



**U.S. Representative Christopher Smith denounces Chinese repression at ECWS seminar on religious freedom. Oldline churches tried to ignore the problem.**

to these meetings to proselytize.” It was as if she believed that sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ would have violated UN etiquette.

Oldline church representatives had few criticisms of the Platform for Action, and those were mostly because they found its final form not radical enough. United

# The Lack of Liberty—An Object Lesson

It was almost impossible to go to China for the women's conference and *not* notice the repression. The UN-sponsored meetings took place behind a figurative wall of "security," erected to keep all us unpredictable foreign women *inside* and the average Chinese person *outside*.

Among the foreign "infections" that the Chinese government feared, religion figured quite prominently. All conference attendees received a flier from the Chinese "security committee" listing eleven "points of attention." Alongside injunctions against prostitution, drug trafficking, and pornography, we saw an admonition against unauthorized religious expression. We were to "refrain from staging religious activities or distributing religious publicity material"—except in two remote locations.

Of course, the limitations on us as visitors were far fewer than those on ordinary Chinese. There was a sharp police crackdown in Beijing just before the opening of the women's conference. Amnesty International reported accelerated arrests and executions of criminals, dissidents, and other undesirables, in a campaign to clean up the city for the big event.

## Chinese crack down on church

The crackdown struck at the church, too. According to News Network International (NNI), "Public Security Bureau officials have visited the homes of numerous Beijing house church leaders over the past two months." The

"Women should have the right to engage in religious practice, to change their religion, and to propagate religious faith, particularly to their children. Women who change their religion should be free of the threat of state-imposed divorce or the threat of having their children taken from them. The irony is that this conference is being held in a country which currently imprisons women for practicing their faith."

Diane Knippers in testimony  
before Congress, July 1995

Chinese Christian leaders were questioned about their congregations and warned against meeting with foreign delegates attending the conference.

Meanwhile, NNI reported, in the central Chinese province of Henan, two female house church leaders were sentenced without trial on August 14 to three years in a labor camp. The women were accused of membership in an outlawed religious sect and involvement in anti-government activities.

## Continuing pattern of religious repression

These actions reinforced a continuing pattern of religious repression. The Puebla Institute has a growing list of over 200 Chinese Christians who have recently suffered imprisonment, beatings, fines, or property confiscation for their faith.

These include 21 Catholic bishops and at least 25 female Protestant preachers who have refused to abide by tight state restrictions on religious activity. The Puebla Institute report cites official Chinese Communist Party documents indicating that the party views religion, and especially Christianity, as a major ideological threat.

We in the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society felt that we could not ignore these sufferings of our fellow Christians while we were in China. So our workshop on religious freedom gave special attention to the Chinese situation. We invited U.S. Rep. Christopher Smith (NJ), a leading congressional critic of China's human rights record, to address the gathering.

As Smith was speaking, suddenly a disturbance broke out in the audience. One Chinese woman shouted, "Liar!" at the congressman. Another grabbed a stack of ECWS petitions for religious liberty and dashed out of the meeting tent.

"Obviously, the Chinese participants in the forum had been carefully vetted by the government," commented IRD President Diane Knippers. "I chased after the woman who confiscated the petitions, but there was no way I could have stopped her short of tackling her. She was so angry. Perhaps she had never heard these facts about her country before—or perhaps she just couldn't tolerate hearing these abuses discussed openly."

We in the IRD and ECWS remain committed to speaking these hard truths. We feel bound by our solidarity with Christian sisters and brothers who suffer such violations and worse every day. We will speak on their behalf—even when political authorities take offense, even when our own churches choose to remain silent.

IRD

(Continued from page 6)

comments on the Platform for Action to all the national delegations. And throughout the governmental meeting, ECWS women were buttonholing delegates in the halls, soliciting information and offering suggestions.

We expressed numerous concerns about the Platform for Action that the conference was to adopt. The 150-page document was excessively long, turgid, and filled with excursions into every tangential issue that a leftist special interest group could think to mention. There were plugs for environmentalism and pacifism and indigenous peoples, and warnings about AIDS and multi-national corporations and Third World debt.

Yet in the original drafts of the Platform, there was next to nothing said about religion—a major force in the lives of millions of women. The only references were a few negative remarks about “extremist” religion.

Likewise, the family, marriage, and child-rearing were slighted in the draft Platform. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had declared the family to be “the natural and fundamental group unit of society,” and most of the world’s women rely on their families as their main support structure, the Beijing document paid little attention to these obvious truths. It portrayed women more as autonomous individuals than as members of families. Women’s aspirations were defined in terms of economic and political power rather than the opportunity to form strong families and rear healthy children.

We saw attempts in Beijing by the more radical feminists to undermine or relativize the traditional family. The proposed language on “children’s rights” was a concealed attack on parental authority. Children were said to have special rights to “information, privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent.” Parents could be left powerless in the grips of state agencies empowered to enforce these “rights.”

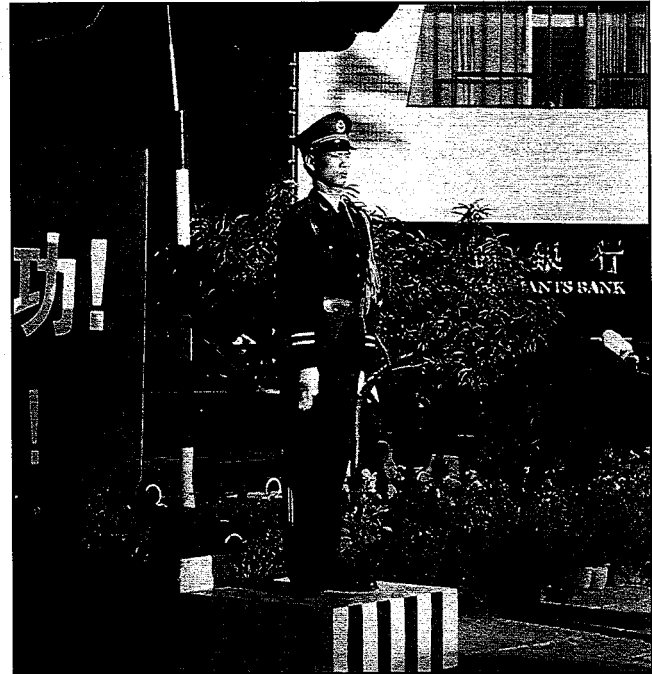
### In search of semantic subterfuge

In addition, there were semantic subterfuges. It was suggested that all reference to “the family” be changed to “families.” The implication was that there was no normative model of family—that there was nothing special about the lifetime commitment of one man and one woman in marriage, that any other relationship could just as easily be called a “family.” Along the same lines, U.S. and many European delegates made efforts to legitimize and protect homosexual relationships.

“Gender” was also a tricky word in the conference Platform. Used over 200 times, it was never defined. By choosing habitually to speak of “gender” rather than “sex,” the UN drafters were echoing the common feminist assumption that all distinctions between men and women are “socially constructed.” This assumption—never proven—

runs counter to the biblical teaching that “God created them male and female,” and that this differentiation serves a good purpose.

A final problem in the Platform for Action was the



**Tight security and the threat of repression surrounded the women’s conference. Here, a Chinese soldier stands guard.**

way in which it tried to resolve women’s grievances. Almost always, it turned to the coercive power of the state. It called for male-female quotas to be imposed in all leading social institutions. It recommended all kinds of new government subsidies to benefit women. It endorsed intrusive government programs to re-educate children into new sex roles. What the Platform drafters appeared to have in mind was a massive project of social engineering, all entrusted to the direction of the state.

Our eight ECWS women could not stop this entire conference agenda. But we and others did make a difference in Beijing. Together with Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists and other Christian friends, in cooperation with delegates from many countries, we secured changes at several crucial points in the Platform.

Language was inserted to acknowledge that “religion, spirituality, and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men.” The revised Platform recognized that “the serious issues with which the world is confronted today require a more effective response by societies not only to the material, but also to the spiritual needs of individuals, including women.” It reiterated the promise of religious freedom “in worship, observance, practice, and teaching,” from the Universal Declaration of

## Human Rights.

Similarly, the role of the family as the fundamental social unit was reaffirmed. Efforts to relativize "the family," by making it "families," were defeated. Gay-rights advocates also failed in their attempts to win the blessing of the UN women's conference. "Sexual orientation" was not included among the characteristics entitling a person to special government protection.

Nevertheless, the issues raised by the Beijing conference remain very much alive. The final Platform for Action displays the same basic flaws as the earlier drafts: a narrow focus on the economic and political empowerment of the autonomous woman, an indifference toward religion and the family, and an attachment to big-government solutions.

### Lasting impact of the Beijing conference

We in the United States will be seeing the effects of the Beijing conference for years to come. It was billed as a "conference of commitments," and the Clinton Administration delegation representing the U.S. came prepared to make commitments. It promised a raft of new federal government programs, ranging from gender-sensitivity training for U.S. foreign aid recipients to increased distribution of contraceptives to teenagers.

In the churches, too, the Beijing conference will have a lasting impact. Radical feminism is perhaps the strongest movement today in many seminaries and headquarters of U.S. denominations. Drawing inspiration from the Re-Imagining conferences and other sources, the radical feminists aim at nothing less than a total overhaul of the Christian faith and Church, in order to fulfill their vision of women's empowerment. The international imprimatur of

the Beijing conference, and the enthusiasm of the churchwomen who attended, will only reinforce this movement.

At the same time, Beijing can also reinforce the ranks

**"Religious faith is central to the lives of women around the globe. It is the source of our understanding of the meaning and purpose of our lives... It is the way we define who we are and why we are. For example, my own faith teaches that men and women are equal because they share their essential nature as beings created in the image of God... No merely human institution could give me the confidence or security in my essential nature as do my religious convictions."**

Diane Knippers, Comments to Government Delegates at Beijing, September 1995

of Christian women on the other side of the debate—women who are striving to uphold their faith against the radical assault. The conference gave the IRD and ECWS a platform to reach a wider audience. Our daily *Beijing Bulletin* reports were faxed to over 1,200 media outlets and members of Congress. Diane Knippers spoke about the conference on Voice of America, National Public Radio, and National Empowerment Television. She and other ECWS women also did scores of print, radio, and television interviews with local U.S. media. Our ECWS team members continue to give speeches to groups around the country. We have received many encouraging responses to our message of faith, family, and freedom in Christ.

Finally, the experience of the UN conference has prepared our "ECWS eight" for further action. They are now a tested multi-denominational team that is attuned to the challenge of radical feminism and ready to respond. The ECWS leadership is already planning new initiatives to reach more Christian women in 1996.

We want to proclaim in every way: The tree of healing for wounded women and men is found in the place where Christ reigns.

**IRD**



**A woman meditates before a large, quilted tapestry in the "Quiet Tent," prominently located in the NGO exhibit area.**

## Margaret Thatcher's Path to Power

"Our lives revolved around Methodism," recalls Margaret Thatcher about her childhood in *The Path to Power*. The daughter of a "powerful" Methodist lay preacher, the former British premier explains in this second volume of her autobiography that Christianity shaped the worldview that guided her during a 40-year political career.

"Our religion was not only musical and sociable," she recalls, "it was also intellectually stimulating." Thatcher attended Methodist Sunday school, played piano at church concerts, and ate sumptuously at church socials. But the sermons were most important to her.

She remembers one sermon that deplored the stigmatizing of illegitimate children. Thatcher now regrets that the stigma no longer falls even on the parents. "We still have to find some way of combining Christian charity with sensible social policy," she insists.

Even in college Thatcher never

**"We must not go to church simply because we want social reforms but because we accept the supreme sacrifice of Christ."**

Margaret Thatcher

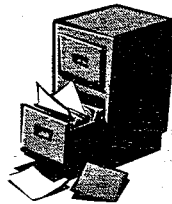
lost her faith: "Methodism provided me with an anchor of stability." She gladly attended chapel and listened to C.S. Lewis's radio broadcasts.

Thatcher laments that Methodists in her hometown of Grantham were "left wing." Her conservative family was aghast at church support for appeasing Hitler. She praises the character of a liberal minister, but stresses that "personal virtue is no substitute

for political hardheadedness."

Early in her career, Thatcher grudgingly supported liberalizing British laws on homosexuality, divorce and abortion. She now speculates that these "reforms" created a "more callous, selfish and irresponsible society."

"I find it difficult to imagine that anything other than Christianity is likely to resupply most people in the West with the virtues necessary to remoralize society," Thatcher



## RESOURCES

surmises. She resists arguments that a Christian has to be conservative. But she affirms that there is a "deep and providential harmony" between her brand of "political economy" and the "insights of Christianity."

While prime minister, Thatcher warned Christians against "collectivist" tendencies. "We must not go to church simply because we want social reforms but because we accept the supreme sacrifice of Christ." She salutes Catholic thinker Michael Novak for his insights on the linkage between democracy and Christianity.

After leaving office, Thatcher visited a Polish church. As she listened to the hymn-singing, she was reminded that "I was one soul among many in a fellowship of believers that crossed nations and denominations." That "fellowship" and its Lord motivated Thatcher on her *Path to Power*. **MDT**

## Tom Sine's Ceasefire

In his new book, *Ceasefire: Searching for Sanity in America's Culture Wars*, Tom Sine berates the

"increasingly shrill rhetoric" among America's warring religious factions.

Sine is an evangelical Episcopalian who is politically "progressive." Defending Christian orthodoxy, he criticizes the excesses of feminist theologians, homosexual activists, and oldline Protestants who equate the Gospel with liberal politics.

Yet most of Sine's fire is aimed at the Religious Right, which he portrays as paranoid and hateful. He is distressed about "right-wing" money going to the Moral Majority, Pat Robertson, and the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Sine's lumping IRD with the Moral Majority reveals a flaw common throughout his book. He does not distinguish among the conservative Christians whom he criticizes. They are all, by his definition, selling out the Gospel to American patriotism, materialism, and individualism.

Sine proposes a "radical Biblical way that transcends highly politicized agendas." This "third way" is vague.

He wants Christians more involved in direct ministry to the poor. Few would disagree. He also wants Christians to stay out of the "culture wars."

Sine salutes the new "Cry for Renewal" group, whose leaders were recently arrested in the Capitol for protesting Republican budget cuts. He does not explain how this "third way" is different from the Religious Left's old ways.

Sine also declares that most of our nation's founders weren't Christians. This claim is dubious, but even if true, the Founders were overwhelmingly religious and would not have supported today's secularists.

It is the rise of radical secularism that has impelled the Religious Right to enter the public arena as a counterforce. Sine would have done better to consider how these legitimate concerns of conservative Christians might best be addressed. Instead, he simply denigrates their motives. **MDT**

# Religious Left Defends the Welfare State

**D**uring the November budget confrontation between the President and Congress, 15 leaders of the National Council of Churches "laid hands" on President Clinton and prayed that he would be "strong for the task" of resisting the Republican Congress. "In the name of human decency," they claimed to represent 50 million American church members as they urged Clinton to veto legislation that "further diminishes the lives of those in need."

## A 'blatant misuse of prayer'

IRD President Diane Knippers called the White House encounter a "disturbing misuse of prayer for blatantly partisan purposes." In a letter to the NCC, she urged that the NCC's prayer list include both Republican and Democratic leaders.

But on November 18, only Clinton was the beneficiary of the NCC's very public prayers. NCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell led 14 other church leaders into the Oval Office. They included United Methodist Bishop Melvin Talbert, who is now NCC president, United Methodist Board of Church and Society General Secretary Thom White Wolf Fassett, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Stated Clerk James Andrews, Episcopal Bishop Craig Barry Anderson of General Theological Seminary in New York City, Pamela Chinnis, who is president of the Episcopal House of Deputies, Disciples of Christ President Richard Hamm, and United Church of Christ President Paul Sherry.

Calling President Clinton the "guardian of the nation," the NCC leaders acclaimed him for protecting the "vulnerable, children, families, and the elderly" from Republican budget proposals. Earlier in the week, the NCC's General Board, meeting in Oakland, California, had pronounced itself "deeply offended" by congress-

sional efforts to balance the budget.

The NCC board alleged that such proposals "serve military interests at the expense of family life" and "take food and health care from the destitute." It unanimously concluded that "appalling, in the name of balancing the budget, the moral vision is discarded."

At the end of the 45-minute Oval Office meeting, the President thanked the church leaders for giving him a "fine way" to start his day. Campbell afterwards enthused that the "emotional moments" with Clinton were "a recognition in the Oval Office that prayer changes things." Responding to IRD criticism of the meeting, Campbell called the IRD "prayer police." She expressed surprise that praying for the President could be seen as "partisan."

It was not the first time that the NCC chose sides in the stand-off between Clinton and the Republican Congress. In October, Campbell and Talbert were joined by 13 other church leaders, including Episcopal Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, in asking the President to "resist the tide of destructive legislation that is currently rolling through Congress." The NCC condemned proposed welfare reforms and increased defense spending.

Earlier in the fall, Campbell joined Jewish leaders and a Roman Catholic bishop to denounce "unholy legislation" that would undermine "our national government" as the "bearer of our covenant as Americans." The statement "exhorted" Americans to phone the White House to urge resistance to federal budget cuts.

Last spring, Campbell denounced congressional welfare reform measures, which she claimed would create "a human deficit more damaging to our country than an un-

balanced budget could ever be." She thanked the President for his "commitment to assuring that children are not victimized by welfare reform" and "his emphasis on education and job training contained in his welfare proposal."

"We need to stand for what is right, even if it is unpopular," said Bishop Talbert last May about the NCC's opposition to budget and tax cuts. "We cannot remain silent." The bishop promised that the NCC would increase its "communication" with political leaders "who are being flooded from the Religious Right."

"People are more important than weapons stockpiles and tax cuts," declared Mary Cooper of the NCC Washington office. The NCC Executive Coordinating Committee pledged to "mobilize our grassroots networks" to fight the "rising tide of racism, a fear or hatred of strangers, and pitting of 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the United States."

## Pray and fast against the GOP

In the NCC's most colorful action against the Republican Congress, Bishop Talbert and Campbell urged last April that Holy Week be enlisted in the struggle against the Republican "Contract with America." At a Washington press conference, the two NCC leaders declared that the days between Palm Sunday and Easter should be devoted to "prayer and fasting" against the Republican agenda.

NCC member congregations were instructed to hang purple draperies (a symbol of Christian repentance) on the exteriors of church buildings to illustrate resistance to the Congress. "Politics means working in, for and with the masses of people. So in that sense, we unashamedly say we are political," exclaimed Bishop Talbert.

In a further display of the NCC's "political" nature, Campbell testified in February before a congressional



committee about her opposition to the Contract with America. The debate, she claimed, was part of "an old confrontation between those who give primacy to private property in its most narrow sense and many in our society who favor the poor, the abused and... the future of God's Creation."

### **NCC stands by Clinton**

In a November interview with the *San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, Bishop Talbert defended the NCC's close ties to Clinton. "He is advocating many of the things we advocate, like health care for all of the citizens of this nation. He's hanging in there on affirmative action, which is where we stand as a church." But the bishop insisted that the churches were not "in the pocket of the White House."

Bishop Talbert blasted the proponents of lower taxes who "want to put more money in your pocket." He asked, "To do what with? Life is meant to be shared." He continued, "As a welfare state, one thing we have prided ourselves on is working toward the common good of all. Taxation is a way of doing that." Rather than cutting taxes, he implored, "we need to be challenging people to give to the common good of all. That's what money is all about."

Talbert, Campbell and other NCC leaders insist that current government entitlement programs are essential components of Christian compassion for the poor. They insist that Clinton NOT compromise with the Republican Congress. Are their policies wise?

First, their claim to speak politically for 50 million Americans is spurious. Polls show that 60 percent of oldline Protestants voted Republican in 1994. Oldline churchgoers, according to most surveys, are consistently more conservative than the general population, much less the NCC leadership.

Secondly, Talbert and Campbell

along with most NCC leaders lack economic expertise. They have succumbed to a temptation common among liberal clergymen who liken the economy to a church budget, collecting money from the faithful for its redistribution to the needy, without regard to the wealth's initial or future creation. Thirdly, the NCC policies are passé. The current welfare system is nearly universally seen as a failure. The debate is over alternatives. Some Christian leaders advocate tax credits for donations to private charities. Why is the NCC not examining this proposal?

assisting the needy for four centuries in this country. Uninhibited by the power of the state, religious charities distinguished between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. They recognized that spiritual needs accompanied material needs, and they employed their relief work evangelistically.

But the NCC is content with secular, federal dominance of charity. In her testimony to Congress, Campbell said that "kings of old were judged for their public exercise of power—not their private rectitude or their personal religious piety." Perhaps she had forgotten God's judgment of King



**NCC delegation meets with President Clinton at the White House.**

Finally, the NCC has offered no critique of federally subsidized welfare dependency. Does the current arrangement foster Christian virtues such as work, thrift, and self-restraint? Outside liberal church circles, few think so.

Oddly, the NCC's November resolution affirmed that America has "committed itself to being a decent society" for 60 years. Did our country only discover "decency" with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal?

In fact, Christians have been

David's committing of both adultery and murder.

"Personal religious piety" has long ceased to be an NCC focus. Its replacement has been the "public exercise of power."

Perhaps if the NCC rediscovered historic Christian teachings, which require concern about material needs as well as about personal salvation and moral conduct, our nation would be less in need of welfare, public or private.

**IRD**

**by Mark Tooley**  
Research Associate



FROM THE  
PRESIDENT

# Sex and the Churches' Social Witness

The Church used to be criticized for avoiding the topic of sex. Not now. Today church folks seem to talk of little else, especially about homosexuality.

This year has seen a prominent United Methodist staffer announce that she is a lesbian. The Episcopal Church awaits the results of a heresy trial on charges filed against a bishop who ordained a gay man.

Here in Washington in mid-November, Foundry Church (an influential UM church where presidents from Lincoln to Clinton have worshipped) hosted a "celebration" for gays and lesbians. Episcopal bishop and keynote speaker John Spong argued that St. Paul was a homosexual and declared the Ten Commandments "immoral" because they "define women as property."

The churches' conflict over sexuality has internal and external dimensions. Internally, we ask who may be ordained and under what conditions. Who is eligible for Christian marriage? How does one discipline church leaders who flout official church teaching? These questions are rooted in the dissension over the basic teaching of the church. What is sin? What does the Bible say—or does the Bible even matter?

Bishop Spong manages to offend even his gay audiences with his low view of Scripture. At Foundry, he dismissed Jewish prophecies foretelling Christ. "I don't think Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the Psalmist anticipated the life of Jesus of Nazareth," Spong said. "...It's a magical view of the Bible." One gay convert to Christianity from Judaism expressed distress at this denigration of the Scriptures that had led him to faith.

Externally, the churches debate how the state should treat homosexual persons. Can and should we draw a line between basic civil rights and affirmative action programs which promote homosexual behavior? There are also debates over appropriate ministries to the homosexual community. No one denies that this is a community that suffers devastating problems—high

rates of alcoholism, promiscuity, AIDS, suicide, and physical attacks. How do our ministries lift up a Gospel of holiness *and* grace?

But the debate over (some would say fixation on) homosexuality has tragically sidelined our churches from addressing a more serious social ill—the disintegration of the family. This is the major threat to the security and well-being of our nation.

Whatever statistics you accept, there are many more heterosexuals than homosexuals in our society and our churches. A lot more church members are divorced than are gay. A lot more church members are engaged in *heterosexual* fornication or adultery than are engaged in homosexual behavior. (Of course, fornication and adultery are less openly commended as a



Diane Knippers

legitimate "alternative lifestyle" by church hierarchies.) Without judging which behaviors are more destructive of individuals, the numbers alone guarantee that heterosexual sins have a more devastating impact on society.

The bottom line in the debate over homosexuality may be what it says to the heterosexual majority. Is the church holding up a model of family life that is ordained by God and beneficial to human society? Or is it prepared to give its blessing to any arrangements that individuals might choose?

In the course of addressing our churches' social witness, IRD staff occasionally report on the conflict over homosexuality. We do so in the context of our defense of Christian marriage and family. Our society urgently needs churches that give a clear and unambiguous call to marital fidelity, to life-long commitment, and to the crucial importance of both mothers and fathers in the lives of children. This may be less shocking, sensational, titillating or, well, sexy, than discussing homosexuality. It's also more important.

IRD

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