

---

---

# FAITH & FREEDOM

*Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness*

---

Spring 1996

VOL. 16, NO. 1



***Standing with the Persecuted***

## **Evangelicals and Catholics Pledge New Commitment; NCC Stands Aside**

pages 8-9

### **A Seminary Professor's Lament**

Dr. Thomas C. Oden

pages 6-7

+++

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

# FAITH & FREEDOM

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

1521 16th St., N.W., #300  
Washington, DC 20036

Phone: 202-986-1440

Fax: 202-986-3159

E-mail: 102676,56@compuserve.com

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. 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

**IRD Staff:** Faith J. H. McDonnell, Craig Smith, Kendrick Mernitz Smith  
**Newsletter Design:** James S. Robb  
**IRD Consultants:** Patrick Gray, John Stumbo

## Credits

The prints on the cover and page 8 are numbers III and IX in a series of linoleum cuts entitled "Sixteen Prisoner Saints," by Edward Knippers.

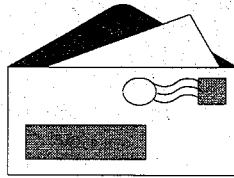
Photos: page 4 by William Grigg, page 6 by Abingdon Press, page 7 by Mark Tooley, page 9 by Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission, page 13 by Peyton Hoge, page 16 courtesy of Herbert Schlossberg.

The article on pages 6-7 is excerpted from *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements*, by permission of Abingdon Press.

The article on page 16 first appeared in different form in *The Presbyterian Layman*. It is used by permission.

In criticizing mainline church leaders for blessing President Clinton's partisan agenda ("Religious Left Defends the Welfare State," Winter 1995-96), Mark Tooley sounds a little partisan himself. Why is there no criticism directed at religious leaders who bless Speaker Gingrich and his Republican contract? One suspects Mr. Tooley objects as much to the content

## LETTERS



of the Clinton agenda as well as to the religious blessing of it.

If so, I would caution the IRD against wandering too far afield from its central purpose: To promote democratic values and religious freedom against threats from both Right and Left. One such threat, to be sure, is the disintegration of family life and the failure to socialize young people in the "citizen virtues" necessary to sustain democratic culture.

But in analyzing this threat, the IRD should maintain a balance. Cultural factors certainly play a big role. But so does the fierce downward pressure on middle class standards of living. As corporations compete internationally by downsizing and reducing labor costs, and as countries compete for investment by weakening labor and environmental standards, the elites grow wealthier while the majority grows poorer. Families subjected to the strain of both parents needing to hold multiple and insecure jobs just to make ends meet are not conducive to the cultivation of good parenting and good citizenship.

The Republican agenda exacerbates these trends, while President Clinton is at least trying to restrain them. Genuine welfare reform, if it transforms welfare dependents into

productive citizens, will require more congressional funding, not less. And I, for one, am glad that the President is speaking out about things like character education, family responsibility and teen pregnancy, even if his motives are political. I'm all for politicians arguing over who can best strengthen family life.

**David Jessup**  
Silver Spring, MD

(See page 3 for our response.)

### Your letters and information

have been a constant help to many of the conservative people in our congregation while we were badly divided with a feminist pastor who condoned homosexuality and attended Sophia worship. A Bible-believing excellent interim pastor was assigned to us and is attempting the healing process.

**Gloryl Parchert**  
Aledo, IL

I found your "Sex and the Churches' Social Witness" (Winter 1995-96) article disturbing.

If your point was "to give a clear and unambiguous call to marital fidelity, to lifelong commitment, and to the crucial importance of both mothers and fathers in the lives of children" then why didn't you do so? Instead you used several less-than-mainstream examples to suggest that church folks (meaning all church folk) seem to talk of little else but sex, especially homosexuality.

In the case of homosexuality dominating sexual discussions—well? Do you really think the subject would be as prominent as it is if we had not had such in-our-faces demands by the politically powerful homosexual lobby groups, both in the secular [world] and in the church? Of course not.

What are you trying to suggest we do? Should we follow biblical standards re adultery, fornication, homosexuality, premarital sex—most of which are heterosexual sins?

**Mildred L. Brown**  
Fullerton, CA



FROM THE  
PRESIDENT

# The Perils of Partisanship in the Church

**P**rudential political judgments are not dogma. About politics, Christians appropriately disagree. We offer an example in this issue: a letter-to-the-editor from founding IRD board member David Jessup (see page two). David suspects that we are objecting “to the content of the Clinton agenda as well as to the religious blessing of it.” It’s true that I have *much less* admiration for the Clinton administration than David expresses in his letter. About this, we will have to agree to disagree.

But it was, in fact, the *religious blessing* of the Clinton agenda by the National Council of Churches that drew Mark Tooley’s (and my) ire. We would be just as opposed if the NCC, by some fluke, similarly blessed the Republican agenda.

The IRD/NCC debate was further elaborated in a February 12 symposium in *Insight* magazine asking, “Have American churches politicized their religious mission?” I argued the affirmative. Joan Brown Campbell, the NCC General Secretary, answered in the negative.

Excerpts from my essay follow. Copies of the complete symposium are available by writing the IRD.

- Warnings against religious extremism [must] be applied to both ends of the political and theological spectrum.... [However], the religious left is more experienced in political crusading, more deeply embedded in church structures, better represented in Washington, more consumed by politics, and at least equally harsh and partisan.
- The religious left presumptuously equates the Christian vision of a just society—the Kingdom of God—with a particular current structure: the welfare state.... This doctrinaire mentality disregards the growing consensus that the welfare state has failed. It ignores the possibility that Christians might pursue the same charitable goals by other, more effective means.
- The religious right, too, can fall prey to the temptation of narrow partisanship.... If religious right leaders cannot respect the necessary distinctions between essential church teachings and debatable political positions, then they too will do damage to their own churches.
- Nevertheless, there are important differences that make the religious right, so far, less destructive than the religious left. The former is comprised primarily of self-avowed political advocacy groups—not of churches. Conservative denominations, such as the



Diane Knippers

Southern Baptists or Assemblies of God, are more reluctant to speak politically for their members.

- ♦ The traditionalist church goes who are subsidizing the religious left are largely unaware of what they are funding. Indeed, if they were aware, the likelihood is that they would not approve. The 1994 Election Study showed that 60 percent of oldline Protestants voted Republican.... On the other hand, the average Christian Coalition donor knows fairly well what political causes his money is backing—and approves.
- ♦ There is one final difference: Many evangelical Protestant leaders are warning their people against the trap of partisanship. The Rev. Don Argue, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, has said pointedly, “To wrap ourselves in the flag of any one political party is very dangerous.” This is a constant theme in

the writings of the influential Chuck Colson, the former Nixon aide and now head of Prison Fellowship. Such voices of caution are rare in the top circles of the NCC.

- ♦ The NCC is capable of better. Many NCC member denominations have a long history of responsible political involvement. They have social teachings—about rights and responsibilities, distrust of concentrated power, the importance of individual fidelity and self-restraint, and much more—that could be extremely helpful in our current social crisis.
- ♦ Perhaps the eighteenth-century Wesleyan revivals provide the best model as to how believers can relate their faith to the world. Methodism as a movement was steadfastly non-partisan. Its primary concern was the transformation of souls. But Methodists as individuals eagerly translated their faith into political action. The results included abolition of the slave trade, expansion of the franchise, improvements in prisons and urban sanitation, and a host of other reforms.

The kind of society that the NCC and nearly all churches, liberal or conservative, claim to seek will not be gained through frenzied involvement in the political arena. It will come through the Church reclaiming the world from despair and darkness one person at a time. The Church’s most potent message, when faithfully taught, is more powerful than all political dogma. **IRD**

by Diane Knippers  
IRD President

## Churches Endorse Liberal March on DC

The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is organizing a massive June 1 march on Washington, DC, to "protect" children from proposed Republican budget cuts and welfare reform proposals. Over 600 groups have so far endorsed the demonstration, including the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society and Women's Division, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office, the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs, and Church Women United.

"Marian Edelman is a modern-day Rachel weeping for our children," exclaimed NCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell, eagerly applying the Old Testament prophecy to the CDF leader. Edelman addressed the NCC's February Executive Board

much abuse, neglect and death before we say enough and vote to protect our young?"

Edelman pledged that the march would not be a "political or a partisan day." But it seemed hard to believe that the arch-liberal CDF, with its close ties to the Clinton Administration, could stay completely above the fray in an election year. At a march organizing meeting at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Washington, speakers repeatedly condemned Republican policies. "These are proposals to make the rich filthy rich," protested one speaker in referring to plans for a balanced budget and a flat tax. Edelman herself urged caution about overtly partisan statements, as the march has tax-exempt status.

The NCC president, Bishop Melvin Talbert, promised Edelman in New York that "we will be with

## NCC Releases Budget for 1996

The NCC's 1996 budget anticipates nearly \$54 million in income. The vast majority of this money—including \$26 million from public appeals and \$9 million in U.S. government grants—will go for the relief and development work of Church World Service. Member denominations are expected to contribute over \$13 million. It is from these direct denominational gifts that the council's most controversial political programs are funded.

The ten largest contributing denominations are:

Presbyterian Church USA	\$2,472,000.
United Methodist Church	\$2,300,000.
United Church of Christ	\$1,227,000.
Disciples of Christ	\$835,000.
Episcopal Church	\$608,000.
Evangelical Lutheran	\$492,000.
American Baptist	\$332,000.
Reformed Church	\$142,000.
Church of the Brethren	\$109,000.
National Baptist Convention	\$19,000.

The NCC comprises 33 denominations whose combined membership exceeds 50 million. It has a staff of 350 persons, most of whom are based at its New York headquarters.

## Divisions Within Religious Left

The "Call to Renewal" movement founded last year was supposed to have pursued a "third way" between Religious Left and Religious Right. But its February conference in Washington seemed to lean severely to one side. Many speakers blasted only conservative Christians, while ignoring (and sometimes embracing) the excesses of church leftists. The political bias and harsh rhetoric was too much even for some who had originally endorsed the Call.

Two prominent Call leaders, American Baptist evangelist Tony Campolo and *Sojourners* editor Jim Wallis, pursued a leftward course.



Joan Brown Campbell will swing the National Council of Churches behind the Children's Defense Fund march on June 1.

meeting in New York City to promote the march.

"We want to draw a moral line in the sand," Edelman told her supportive audience. "This is a pivotal year in our nation's history. Children should be a center of the debate. They can't vote. But you and I can." She asked, "How

you in the mobilization process." Campbell reported that the NCC's Washington staff was already helping with the march. The World Council of Churches also pledged to reschedule a June meeting so as to participate in the demonstration.

**Campolo** promised something different at the conference: "This movement is about transcending bitterness, about the end of demonizing." But **Boston** pastor Eugene Rivers quickly fell into a new bout of demonizing. Rivers derided the Religious Right as the "Afrikaner wing of flat-earth fundamentalism." He further condemned the "white supremacist orientation" of Christian conservatives, who promote their agenda at the expense of the poor."

When Ron Sider of Evangelicals for Social Action suggested that the Call should uphold heterosexual marriage and oppose abortion, Wallis and Campolo were not pleased. Duane Shank of *Sojourners* commented to *Christianity Today*: "We are in agreement on poverty issues, but less clear, obviously, on issues like abortion and homosexuality."

One prominent Call participant told the IRD privately that Wallis and Campolo had hijacked the Call for partisan purposes that many of the Call's more moderate endorsers had not expected. "Wallis hangs out with pro-abortion nuns, gay activists and Rosemary Ruether [the radical feminist theologian]. He has his own agenda," he said.

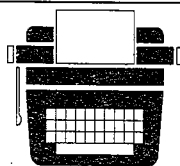
Wallis announced that the Call will distribute voter guides to counter Christian Coalition materials. "We will not endorse candidates, not endorse parties. We want to affect the quality of the discourse," he explained. But the Call conference left little doubt as to the intended beneficiaries and targets of such guides.

Citing demands for a balanced budget, James Forbes of New York's Riverside Church shouted: "Brothers and sisters, meanness is creeping across the land! Some people are claiming that God has signed the Contract With America. Somebody has forged God's name! We need a handwriting analysis!"

Wes Granberg-Michaelson, President of the Reformed Church in

America, denounced the "radical Religious Right" for "infiltrating" our churches with its supposedly "pro-life" message. He commended the National Council of Churches for its closeness to the Clinton Administration and defended the president. "Clinton is a Bible-believing Baptist who has been vilified by his fellow Christians," Granberg-Michaelson said.

*Tikkun* editor Michael Lerner alleged that conservative religious



## CHURCH BRIEFS

people were promoting racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. "The Right supports an ethos of selfishness," he charged.

Wallis nevertheless insisted: "We're not the Religious Left. What we see emerging is a genuine new coalition, a new network." Granberg-Michaelson concluded, "A silent majority in our churches today are turned off by a religious community that demonizes its opponents."

### **Church Leaders Promote Beijing Agenda**

At a February conference in Washington, liberal church leaders sought to push forward the feminist agenda that came out of last fall's UN conclave in Beijing. The February conference was sponsored by the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), a grantee of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USIA) and the UN Population Fund. Speakers denounced capitalism and the Repub-

lican Congress, while defending abortion rights and U.S. funding for the UN.

Phil Wogaman, pastor of Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, lamented that population control advocates often appear to be "anti-family" and "loose on sexual discipline." He opined that the major obstacles to women's equality come from "people who also have a faith commitment." The war over feminist issues is, he said, a "religious battleground."

Former Church Women United official Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz denied the existence of a transcendent God. God is not "an external other," Isasi-Diaz claimed, but an "experience in life" found through fighting "oppression." "You do not believe in God. You live God. We believe in radical immanence." She lamented that the Religious Right "does not believe that God happens."

Isasi-Diaz urged that the Beijing feminist program be applied to all the world's "oppressed." And she insisted that "justice" cannot be "bought" at the expense of "the earth or the animals with whom we share the earth." Unfortunately, she noted, most churches are afraid of losing financial support "if they address women's rights and justice."

National Council of Churches head Joan Brown Campbell warned that any reductions in U.S. funding for the UN would undermine the Beijing agenda. "I have a warm place in my heart for CEDPA," she declared. On reproductive rights, Campbell stated: "For many religious people the only option is abstinence. That does not mean that we deny the option for others."

The CEDPA conference also included representatives from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Washington Offices of the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Methodist Boards of Global Ministries and Church and Society.

**IRD**

# A Seminary Professor's Lament

*The reform of America's churches requires a reclamation of America's mainline seminaries by historic Christianity. An introduction to the crisis in our seminaries is offered in the following excerpt from Dr. Thomas C. Oden's Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements, published by Abingdon Press last year. A theology professor at United Methodist Drew University, Dr. Oden sits on IRD's Board of Directors.*

**T**he liberated seminary at its zenith has finally achieved a condition that has never before prevailed in Christian history: Heresy simply does not exist. (By "liberated" I mean those persons who are the sexual experimenters, the compulsive planners of others' lives, the canonical text disfigureurs and ultra-feminists.) Christian doctrine has been banished as a concept legitimately teachable within the hallowed walls of the inclusive multicultural, doctrinally experimental seminary.

Not only is there no concept of heresy, but also there is no way even to raise the question of where the boundaries of legitimate Christian belief lie, when absolute relativism holds sway. It is like trying to have a baseball game with no rules, no umpire, and no connection with historic baseball. Yet we insist on calling it baseball, because a game by that name is what most people still want to see played.

Much of what has been studied in liberated religion under the heading of "theology" has nothing whatsoever to do with God or God's revelation or God's church or the worship of God. What is meant by theology can range to anything from alpha rhythms to Zen, from comparative



**Thomas C. Oden**

"anthropology" to social-ist dialectics, from semiotics to sand castles, from gender research to flower arrangement, from chaos theory to cholesterol control.

In this way, God has become a joke in the university. I am worried about the fu-

ture trajectory of something called theology in which professors who are paid to teach about God have decided that the idea of God is absurd; where beaucoup tuition is gathered from students who come to study God but where all

Much of what has been studied in liberated religion under the heading of "theology" has nothing whatsoever to do with God... What is meant by theology can range to anything from alpha rhythms to Zen...

Thomas Oden in  
*Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements*

that is studied is comparative sociology and where the door is wide open to call anything theology except the study of Scripture as the revelation of God.

Just as the analysis of class oppression is a standard feature of Marxist sociological and historical analysis, so also it is a key figure of the politically, sexually, and liturgically liberated. The welcoming of bisexuals, transsexuals, and homosexuals is viewed as the surest litmus test of sincerity and ecumenicity. The liberated live out the fantasy of being emancipated from moral constraints, parental voices in the head, economic oppressions, and sociological biases.

The intellectual ethos I am describing is not liberal in the usual or classic sense of that word, but intolerant and uncharitable when it comes to traditionalists of any sort, all of whom are capriciously labeled "fundamentalist." To be inclusive, for them, does not mean including the voices of oppression on an equal basis with the voices of the oppressed. Hence, they do not feel that they are being exclusive when they rule out voices that they have already decided are hierarchical or patriarchal. The game focuses on who gets to name the oppressor.

Several years ago, I dawdled into the regular Thursday Holy Communion service at the theological school where I teach. The service was being led by a highly visible guest feminist leader and author, who had had for some time an uncommon fixation on the advocacy of "Sophia" as a goddess to be worshipped.

I approached the service with some disquiet. Our first hymn praised Sophia, who was vaguely objectified into a deity distinguishable from the Triune God. The homilist

recounted the stormy experience of a combat-weary feminist cleric. It was a victory story in which a pious United Methodist lay leader was counseled out of participating in her church because he believed in the confession that Jesus is Lord, in monogamous covenant sexual fidelity, and in protecting the life of the unborn.

The spare scriptures imported occasionally into the service were carefully culled chiefly from the Apocrypha and some Wisdom literature. I pondered whether I could in good conscience stay to receive Holy Communion. The homilist herself then offered the invitation to come to the Lord's Table, not in the Lord's name, but in the name of the goddess who was speaking through Jesus. The Inviter was not the crucified Lord of glory but the Sophia figure who was speaking through him, but by her own authority. Ironically, we were being invited to His table, but only so in her name. I quietly left the service.

In the last decade the curriculum of seminaries has been liberated for sexually permissive advocacy, political activism, and ultra-feminist hype that often focuses on alternative goddesses to the "male" God of the Bible. The study of the Bible and church history becomes a deconstruction of patriarchal texts and traditions. The study of ethics becomes the study of political correctness. The study of liturgy becomes an experiment in color, balloons, poetry, and freedom. The study of pastoral care becomes a support group for the sexually alienated.

The tenure principle, which was designed to protect academic freedom, has become so exploited as now to protect academic license, absenteeism, incompetence, and at times moral turpitude. Once tenure is offered, it is virtually impossible to withdraw.

Once a faculty has been amply stocked with a simple majority of tenured radicals, its members have the unique privilege of cloning themselves with look-alike future colleagues. The selection of course topics may focus more on the professor's personal fulfillment and private interests than on curricular needs.

Brilliant academics with no experience whatever in the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and pastoral care are often those who compete best in the race to become teachers of ministers in the trendy, fad-impaired seminary. The fact

that theology has no grassroots support or ties with a worshipping community is considered a badge of honor.

There are signs of hope within the seminaries. Suffering seminarians who do not wish to be liberated are becoming more aware of how they are being ripped off. Ordinarily they do not become upset until their last year, as they belatedly realize that they are leaving the skepticism factory with heavy debts. Some find that they are not deemed ready to preach or to administer sacraments they do not understand or to take on the tasks of pastoral care.

Another sign of hope is that funding sources for seminary education are belatedly learning to insist on accountability to grassroots constituencies.

Where faculties have blocked out ancient ecumenical teaching, they cannot expect traditionalist lay support. Funds may need to be withdrawn altogether if the pattern persists. That may be the only available mechanism by which recalcitrant

faculties can be taught that they must be accountable to their actual traditions and worshipping constituencies.

When God's name has been dishonored and mis-



**Rosemary Radford Ruether, a top feminist theologian who teaches at the United Methodist Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Chicago, led a chapel service last summer in which goddesses were evoked.**

Where faculties have blocked out ancient ecumenical teaching, they cannot expect traditionalist lay support. Funds may need to be withdrawn altogether if the pattern persists.

Thomas Oden in  
*Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements*

placed as to mean little more than weight loss, dream analysis, exotic vitamins, salesmanship, yoga, LSD and psychodrama, then someone has been asleep at the wheel. Some of us still have guardianship tasks for looking after the tradition that has celebrated the acts of Yahweh, and come to call him Abba. It is never too late to rediscover the joy of studying God.

**IRD**

**by Thomas C. Oden**

*Standing with the persecuted*

## Evangelicals and Catholics Pledge New Commitment; NCC Stands Aside

In Cuba today, popular Pentecostal pastor Orson Vila continues to languish in a labor camp, serving a year and a half sentence for holding "illicit" worship services in his home. In Nepal, 11 evangelical Christians remain in prison on charges of attempting to "proselytize" Hindus. And in China, "unofficial" house churches have come under new surveillance and harassment.

According to human rights organizations, these are just a few examples of the pervasive religious persecution that continues to threaten Christians in many nations. Often such incidents take place without coverage by the international news media or church agencies—and without U.S. government comment.

However, a wide-ranging coalition of evangelical and Catholic leaders is pledging to change that with a new mobilization of Christian concern for religious persecution.

The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) has called on mainline churches to join the effort. "Christians across the political and theological spectrum can come together in this new campaign against international religious intolerance," said IRD President Diane Knippers.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) announced that it has "made common cause" on the issue; however, council officials have refused to endorse a "Statement of Conscience" on religious liberty released by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).

Much of the new momentum on religious persecution began in late January. Leaders of more than 40 evangelical and Catholic organizations gathered in Washington to strategize about ways to raise the level of awareness within the Christian community and to lobby the U. S. government to use its international influence to help promote reli-

gious liberty.

"Our consciences have been seared...by the indifference, the lack of moral outrage [and] the absolutely scandalous silence of the Christian community toward the persecution of Christians worldwide," said former Watergate figure Charles Colson, president of Prison Fellowship International and a keynote speaker at the meeting.

Several church leaders then testified about the persecution of Christians at a February 15 hearing of the House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights. Committee Chairman Chris Smith (R-NJ) said this was the first hearing to focus specifically on persecuted Christians.

IRD, which has worked on religious liberty issues since 1984, has been closely involved with the new efforts to raise public and government awareness about the persecution of Christians. IRD helped plan the January 23 meeting, and Knippers moderated a discussion at the conference. IRD staff members also worked with congressional aides in identifying wit-

nesses for the House hearing.

Knippers said she is "incredibly encouraged" by the new attention church leaders are giving to religious liberty. "Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a declining interest in general in human rights and religious persecution, even though religious persecution of Christians is as strong as it ever was," Knippers said. "It's heartening to see new energy and major Christian leaders such as Chuck Colson coming to the fore and saying they are going to stand with their brothers and sisters."

As part of the new grassroots effort, the National Association of Evangelicals has released a "Statement of





Conscience" calling on the U.S. government to enact new policies to counter religious persecution. "We know that the United States government has within its power and discretion the capacity to adopt policies that would be dramatically effective in curbing...reigns of terror and protecting the rights of all religious dissidents," the NAE asserts.

The NAE urges initiatives including more public acknowledgment of anti-Christian persecution; improvements in government documentation of religious liberty violations; changes in immigration policy regarding refugees fleeing persecution; and suspension of non-humanitarian aid to countries that allow persecution.

"We are dismayed that the United States government has been indifferent to its obligation to speak against reigns of terror now being plotted and waged against Christians," the NAE call states. "At the same time, we confess our own culpability in failing to do all within our power to alleviate the suffering of those persecuted for their religious beliefs."

### **Episcopalians Endorse Evangelical Statement; NCC Declines**

At the IRD's suggestion, the Episcopal Church Executive Council adopted a resolution in February endorsing the NAE statement. In a February 16 press release, NCC President Joan Campbell said: "The NCC intends to work together with the NAE and other concerned people of faith to address this serious matter of worldwide concern."

However, the NCC has decided not to endorse the NAE statement formally. NCC Associate General Secretary Albert Pennybacker said that while "there is much in that statement that we agree with, we would have some different points on strategy."

For example, while the NAE statement calls for the appointment of a special advisor to the president for religious liberty, the NCC believes such an appointment would be "premature," Pennybacker said. The NCC first suggests that a commission be established to investigate the situation of religious persecution and recommend "an appropriate course of action" to the president, he said.

Knippers said the call for such a commission was "a recipe for delay and inaction." She also expressed concern about the level of the NCC's commitment to fighting the persecution of Christians.

At the February 15 congressional hearing, Pennybacker urged that efforts to promote religious liberty be kept in the "deep-seated, complex" cultural contexts of various nations. "The evangelistic zeal of outsiders, openly voiced or even subtly imposed, may encounter an authentic resistance as it moves on unfamiliar ground," Pennybacker said. "What may appear as 'persecution' and indeed is resistance may in fact be the wish to preserve authentic religious and cultural traditions."

Knippers said such statements "appear to justify persecution" of Christian minorities. "He echoed the arguments of Russian Orthodox leaders and Islamic militants—arguments that are used to defend the persecution of evangelicals and Catholics," Knippers said.

IRD will continue urging the NCC to take a stronger stand. A good first step, Knippers said, would be endorsement of the NAE's statement. "It would be wonderful to see unity, such as a joint effort by the traditionally liberal NCC and the more conservative NAE on this one unquestionably biblical and just cause," she said.

Knippers also praised the efforts of Jewish activist Michael Horowitz, who has spearheaded much of the new public campaign for religious liberty. A former Reagan administration official, Horowitz has become an ardent advocate on behalf of persecuted Christians.

Horowitz, who is a senior fellow at the Washington-based Hudson Institute think tank, describes himself as "rootedly Jewish." He says he feels so deeply about persecuted Christians because the situation resonates with his own background. According to Horowitz, there are three factors that "eerily parallel" the case of European Jews in the late 19th century and early 20th century:

- ♦ "Evangelicals are the perfect scapegoats...who pose powerful threats to anti-democratic regimes";
- ♦ "Western elites are indifferent about their fates";
- ♦ "The Western Christian community has maintained



**Dr. Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission (center) testified at the House of Representatives hearing on religious freedom.**

tongue-tied silence" about the ongoing persecution.

Knippers pledged that the IRD will continue making religious liberty a priority issue. "Christians around the world are being murdered, tortured and enslaved for their faith," she said. "Every American Christian should speak out now."

**IRD**

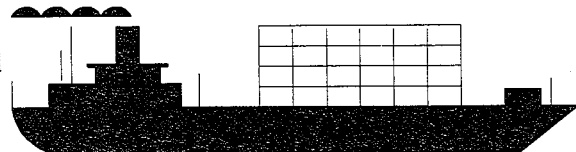
*Based in part on Religion News Service articles by Kim A. Lawton*



# Aid to North Korea: Dilemma of Charity

**A** friend called our IRD office last December with what seemed a simple question: Should her church give money to help starving people in North Korea? Unfortunately, I couldn't give her a simple answer. North Korea is one of those cases that shows Christian charity is no business for simple-minded people.

My friend had received an appeal from the World and National Councils of Churches. It described a catastrophe in North Korea: Floods last summer had washed away most of the rice crop. Now, in the bleak Korean winter, millions of people were hungry. Our church councils had decided to send food and other supplies.



I had no question that the NCC and WCC were responding to a situation of deep human need. North Korea's communist regime presides over an unfolding economic disaster. Its gross national product has fallen seven straight years. All it took was a flood to turn chronic scarcity into impending famine. According to the Red Cross, 130,000 persons are at risk of starvation.

But there is a further twist to this tragedy that went unmentioned in the church appeals. It is not possible for the churches to monitor the distribution of aid within North Korea. They must simply trust that the communist regime will actually deliver the food to the people who are starving.

Any shipments unloaded at a North Korean port will go into government trucks, to be stored at government warehouses, to be distributed according to the government's rationing system. That system is calibrated to reward ruling party members—and to punish Christians and other undesirables.

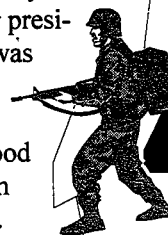
One of the most favored groups in North Korean society is its million-man army. These troops are slowly being moved closer to the border with South Korea. Official North Korean media heighten the tensions with daily denunciations of the democratically-elected southern leaders as "traitors" and "puppets." According to

intelligence analysts, the North Korean army has stored up food to last three months in a war.

The larger question is this: Will famine relief to North Korea do more to help the people—or their oppressive and aggressive government? The danger is that generous foreign donors would become complicit in the persecution of North Korean Christians, and in the threats against South Korea.

These are tough moral dilemmas that anyone considering help to North Korea must face. Yet, as far as I have seen, the church appeals do not even mention these questions. So I raised them with Dr.

Syngman Rhee, a top mission official of Church (U.S.A.) and president of the NCC. His frank: Foreign churches could give no guarantees as to where their would go. Some of it end up in the army



donated food might even stockpiles.

Nevertheless, aid was justified. that, in North Korea situation, injecting more

top mission official of Church (U.S.A.) and president of the NCC. His frank: Foreign churches could give no guarantees as to where their would go. Some of it end up in the army

Rhee felt that the He contended rea's famine supplies into the system would surely result in more

help reaching the neediest. Lives would be saved. In addition, Rhee suggested, the assistance from foreign churches might serve to raise the profile of North Korean Christians in the eyes of their government. Rhee asserted

that any gesture of goodwill would be a contribution to keeping the peace on the volatile Korean peninsula.

Is this appeasement, or is it Christian realism? These are the sorts of decisions that must be made all the time in the exercise of Christian charity. It is not easy to be wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove.

So I couldn't give my friend a simple answer. I gave her my best information, and left her to make her own choice in faith. I wish that the World and National Councils of Churches would show the same confidence in their constituents.

IRD

by Alan F.H. Wisdom  
IRD Vice President

**G**ifts from U.S. churches reach North Korea by a roundabout route. They go from the local church to its denomination, and thence to the NCC. The NCC forwards the money to the Amity Foundation in China. Amity buys supplies there and ships them to North Korea. The shipments are received by the government-approved Korean Christian Federation, but quickly pass into the larger government supply network. So far \$50,000 apiece has come from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Methodist Church.

## **Weak Response to Orphanage Abuses**

The oldline U.S. churches' mission partner in China has responded cautiously to an explosive scandal involving Chinese state orphanages. The Amity Foundation—set up by the government-sanctioned China Christian Council to channel all foreign church aid — issued a statement deflecting charges that children were being deliberately starved to death in the orphanages.

The scandal was detonated by a January report from Human Rights Watch entitled *Death by Default: A Policy of Fatal Neglect in China's State Orphanages*. "Many institutions, including some in major cities, appeared to be operating as little more than assembly lines for the elimination of unwanted orphans," the report asserted. It cited Chinese government statistics showing that 24.7 percent of the institutionalized orphans died in a single year nationwide.

In trying to account for these extremely high mortality rates, Human Rights Watch collected extensive documentation and eyewitness testimonies from a large orphanage in Shanghai. The report concluded: "The brutal treatment of orphans in Shanghai, which included deliberate starvation, torture, and sexual assault, continued over a period of many years and led to the unnatural deaths of well over 1,000 children between 1986 and 1992."

The Amity Foundation statement danced carefully around the questions raised by Human Rights Watch. "Although we do not know the actual situation at Shanghai Orphanage," Amity Associate General Secretary Ting Yenren said, "we cannot believe that the social workers we have come to know through working with various orphanages over the years would share such criminal intention."

Yenren conceded that "some children may die of malnutrition or the

lack of adequate care." But the Amity official asserted that the problem was merely "insufficient funding" of the orphanages.

## **CIA and Missionaries: More Confusion**

Religious groups across the spectrum are alarmed at the possibility that the CIA might be using missionaries as intelligence sources.

It had been thought that this issue was settled by a 1977 rule that prohibited the CIA from establishing any intelligence relationship "with any U.S. clergy or mission-



## **INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS**

ary, whether or not ordained, who is sent out by a mission or church organization to preach, teach, heal, or proselytize."

But the matter resurfaced at a February hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee. CIA Director John Deutch suggested, in answer to a question, that certain restrictions on CIA activities might be waived in cases of "unique and special threats to national security." He mentioned the ban on use of journalists as an example of a restriction that might be waived.

Church officials quickly surmised that this "national security loophole" might also permit the recruitment of missionaries. Their protests were heard almost overnight.

The evangelical relief agency World Vision warned, "The use of even one missionary to gather intelligence can cast suspicion on all

Christian workers, foreign or national." The National Council of Churches insisted "that there should be a prohibition on collaboration between religious personnel and the intelligence community and that this should have the force of law, without loopholes."

## **New Russian Report Looks Back in Sorrow**

A new Russian government report on religious repression in the former Soviet Union confirms the enormity of the martyrdom suffered by Soviet Christians. Drawing on formerly secret government documents, a commission appointed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin traced religious persecution all the way from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 to the fall of the Soviet empire.

A campaign of terror against the clergy began as early as the spring of 1918, according to the commission's report. Orthodox priests, monks, and nuns "were crucified on the Royal Doors [in front of the altar], shot in the dungeons of the Cheka [the secret police], strangled with their vestments, drowned in ice-covered rivers."

The harshest repression came under Joseph Stalin in the late 1930s. In the year 1937 alone, 136,900 Orthodox clergy were arrested and 85,300 of them shot. The persecution diminished in later years, but continued in some forms into the 1980s.

Michael Bourdeaux of Keston College, who wrote about this persecution while the Soviet government (and many Western churches) denied it, made a suggestion in an article last November. Now that Russians were confronting their bloody past, Bourdeaux said, perhaps the Western churches should also "conduct a major self-examination of their role in relation to the churches of the former Soviet bloc." Perhaps they, too, might find some cause for repentance. **IRD**

## Challenging a Bishop

# The IRD and Bishop John Shelby Spong

**H**ere at the IRD, one controversy has a way of leading to another. So it was with a seminar on homosexuality at Foundry United Methodist Church last November 10. The keynote speaker, Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong of Newark, attacked not only the traditional family, but also the Scriptures that undergird the family and every other aspect of Christian life. Spong denounced the Ten Commandments as "immoral," dismissed the Hebrew prophecies foretelling Christ, and denied the historicity of the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus.

We in the IRD reported on the bishop's remarks. (See Diane Knippers on "Sex and the Churches' Social Witness" in the last *Faith & Freedom*. A fuller report by Mark Tooley is available upon request.) Spong took offense. We thought our readers might wish to draw their own conclusions from the correspondence that ensued:

### **Bishop Spong to Mark Tooley February 12, 1996**

I have read a copy of the article that you wrote on my address at the Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC last November. I have seldom seen an article that was more distorted, filled with half-truths and misleading statements than this.

There are only two conclusions I can draw. One is that you were so ignorant you did not understand the issues at all, a conclusion that I seriously doubt. The other is that you are so malevolent that you are willing to distort in order to gain points for your particular point of view.

In either event, it is a disservice to the task of journalism, and it is not something to which I would attribute the slightest shred of integrity. You really ought to be ashamed.

### **Mark Tooley to Bishop Spong February 15, 1996**

I was sorry and perplexed that you thought my article about your November address at Foundry Church was "distorted" and "misleading." You did not specify what the inaccuracies were, so I reviewed the tape of your speech after receiving your letter yesterday. The tape confirmed what I had written.

Still, I would like to give you the opportunity to clarify your views on the issues that you discussed at Foundry Church. Your answers to the following questions will be provided to the publications that ran my article. [Tooley

then asks ten questions about matters that had been raised in Spong's talk, such as whether Jesus was physically raised from the dead.]

### **Bishop Spong to Mark Tooley February 21, 1996**

...I thought the primary issue was malevolence when I read your article, but from your questions I think the primary issue is ignorance. Your questions are framed in such a way as to be almost nonsensical except to the most extreme biblical fundamentalist. I have written on many of these subjects. They are in my books for people to read. They do not take a fundamentalist position, and they do not narrow the scriptures to a place where the only answer that one can give is 'Yes, it did happen' or 'No, it did not happen.' The point of view that you present in those questions would be satisfactory only to the Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts school of American Protestant Christianity.

If you are going to write for the general press, you certainly need to be educated about biblical scholarship in the last 150 years....

I will not respond further.

### **Mark Tooley to Bishop Spong February 24, 1996**

[Tooley notes that Spong has not yet specified any inaccuracy in his reporting. He adds that "your published works confirm nearly all of what you said at Foundry Church as I reported it."]

I am truly sorry that you declined to answer the questions I posed to you, choosing instead to deride Christians who do not accept your theological revisionism as "ignorant."...

You wrote that you could not respond with a "yes" or a "no" to such "fundamentalist" questions as, "Did Jesus physically rise from the dead?" But St. Paul forcefully affirmed that the validity of Christianity depended on an affirmative answer to this issue.

Your views about religion are provocative, but they do not correspond with the doctrines of your denomination, nor of any major self-described Christian body of the last 2,000 years. How do you justify accepting a senior position and generous salary from an organization whose core beliefs you publicly assail and ridicule?

**IRD**

# Finding 'Common Ground' in Schools



INTERVIEW

## An Interview with Charles Haynes

*Dr. Charles Haynes is the editor of Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education. He is a scholar in residence at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. Copies of the book may be obtained from the center at 1207 18th Avenue South; Nashville, TN 37212; phone (615) 321-9588.*

**Q** The title of your book suggests that there is some significant "common ground" between the parties fighting over religion in the schools. Can there really be any coming together of those who favor a "strict separation" of church and state with those who seek an "accommodation" of religion?

**A** Most American leaders, from strict separationists to accommodationists, agree on the guiding principles of "no establishment" and "free exercise" that provide the framework for negotiating our differences in public education. In 1993, for example, a remarkable coalition of more than sixty religious and civil libertarian groups, ranging from Concerned Women for America to the ACLU, worked together to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. This act requires that public school officials take claims of conscience very seriously, and do what is reasonable and feasible to accommodate those claims.

Though there is less agreement concerning the application of the Establishment clause, much common ground does exist. For example, leading education and religious groups recently endorsed the following definition of religious liberty in public schools:

*Public schools may not inculcate or inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious convictions are treated with fairness and respect.... Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.*

**Q** If it is legal to teach about religion, then why do so many school officials act as if religion is forbidden territory?

**A** The political shouting match that followed the 1960s prayer decisions obscured the actual rulings of the Court. Many school officials got the false impression that God had indeed been "thrown out of the schools." Most textbook publishers, no doubt afraid of possible

controversy, avoided references to religion wherever possible.

Textbooks are now beginning to improve, and educational leaders are beginning to get the message out. But we have a long way to go before religion is taken seriously in the public school curriculum.

**Q** How do you make the argument to conservative Christian parents that they should trust the schools to teach about religion?

**A** Given the track record of public education concerning religion in recent decades, conservative Christian parents have grounds to mistrust current efforts to include study about religion.

Teaching about religion is risky and challenging. But what choice do schools now have? The greater risk is to do nothing. To ignore religion denies students a complete education and ill prepares them to be citizens in a nation and a world where religion plays a major role. Ignoring religion also sends a dangerous and false message that religion does not matter to people.

The solution is to end the silence by providing teachers with good training and resources. The training our First Amendment Center does in California, for example, helps teachers avoid the traps of relativism and reductionism. An approach that suggests that all religions are equally true (or untrue) is just as unconstitutional and educationally wrong in public schools as an approach that promotes a particular religion (or hostility to religion).

**Q** Can we arrive at any common ground on the free exercise of religion by students?

**A** Widespread agreement now exists on the religious liberty rights of students. Students have the right to pray alone or in groups, as long as such prayer is not disruptive of the educational process or coercive of others. Students have the right to share their faith with others, to express themselves religiously in class discussions or projects, and to distribute religious literature subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions. In secondary schools, students have the right to form religious clubs if the school allows other non-curriculum related clubs.

Religious speech by students in public schools may make others uncomfortable, but it is protected speech. [But] students do not have the right to coerce or harass other students about religion or anything else.

IRD

## Congressional Staffers Speak

# Evaluating Church Witness on Capitol Hill

*IRD often examines church lobbying from the perspective of people in the pews. But for this issue of Faith and Freedom, we decided to go to the other end and find out what congressional staff aides have to say.*

Republicans and Democrats agreed that they receive surprisingly little lobbying from church groups, when compared to the massive efforts of other organizations. Staffers said they hear most from the Roman Catholic Church and then from various mainline denominations. Most offices said they hear very little directly from theologically conservative churches and denominations.

The staff aides unanimously agreed they were most interested in hearing directly from church people in their districts. "Anytime we get a letter signed by the national president or the Washington office of a church group, we have to ask ourselves, is this reflecting the folks in the pews back home," said Greg Van Tatenhove, chief of staff for Rep. Ron Lewis (R-KY). "The most helpful thing is, where are the folks from Grayson County, Kentucky, on this?"

For this reason, Bill Wichterman, chief of staff for Rep. Bill Baker (R-CA), said his office rarely finds it helpful to hear from mainline denominational leadership. "They carry no votes with them," he said. "For example, when you get a letter from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), you know it doesn't necessarily mean that Presbyterians are going to vote that way...The Presbyterian rank and file are not overwhelmingly liberal Democrats, [but] their leadership is overwhelmingly liberal."

Many staffers said predictable partisanship lessens the impact of

church lobbying. "Frankly, the Catholics are the most credible because you can't always predict what their position is going to be," said an aide to a Southern Democratic senator. "You can't write them off as in the Republicans' back pocket or the Democrats' back pocket. When the Methodist Church weighs in, they are always going to be with the Democrats."

Some staffers said they like to receive information from churches to help them interpret specific bills. For example, churches could offer international insights gleaned from work on the mission field or health-care insights gained in church-related hospitals. "All lobbyists have gotten a bad name, but the fact of the matter is that we need information," said John Townsend, communications director for Rep. Scotty Baesler (D-KY).

However, several aides said they find most of the information coming from churches to be irrelevant. "The Methodist Church and others will send us their monthly bulletins. Sometimes I glance at it and throw it away, and sometimes I just throw it away," said the Democratic senator's aide.

In the view of Mark Rodgers, chief of staff for Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA), it is inappropriate for churches to become *de facto* lobby groups. "I'm not for a denomination opening up a Washington office which is trying to tell congressmen that they should vote this way or that way on a particular bill," he said. "The [church's] job is to equip the saints to do the good works of ministry. Then it's our job as individuals informed by our faith...to apply those principles to specific political

issues that we have before us."

Rodgers suggested churches would be more helpful if, rather than lobbying, they were to facilitate open discussions of how biblical principles are applied to difficult issues.

According to many staffers, the

When you get a letter from the Presbyterian Church, you know it doesn't necessarily mean that Presbyterians are going to vote that way....

Bill Wichterman

most important witness of church representatives on Capitol Hill may not be in WHAT they say on a particular issue, but rather in HOW they say it. "When they are raising the issues, the manner in which they lobby, their demeanor and their tone can also strengthen or hurt their witness," said Robert Zachritz, legislative assistant for Rep. Tony Hall (D-OH).

The deputy legislative director of a Democratic senator agreed. The staffer said one of the few pieces of "hate mail" he has ever received came from a group of Methodist women from his district. "They were appalled that my senator didn't have more particular opinions about their issues, and they jumped all over me," he said. "Afterward, they sent a nasty letter."

Still, staff aides agreed that church members have every right to be part of the political process. "Christians should never shrink from making their views known," said Townsend.

IRD



REFORMING  
THE CHURCH

# ● COCU: Is This the Way to Christian Unity?

*The call to Christian unity is clear. But the method by which genuine unity is to be achieved is less so. Below, Dr. Riley Case takes a look at COCU.*

## **W**hat is the COCU proposal?

COCU stands for the Church of Christ Uniting, and is the proposal by nine denominations to enter into a "Covenant Communion" that will live out a visible unity that will be truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed.

## *What do these denominations have in common?*

Declining membership, hazy theology, entrenched out-of-touch liberal bureaucracies, and unclear purpose.

## *Is "Covenant Communion" the same as merger?*

No, it is a quasi-merger. It is not the merger of church structures but a "communion of sacred things." Churches would recognize a common baptism, accept each other's ministries as valid, and celebrate open communion.

## *Why not a full merger?*

It won't fly. For most of the past 35 years COCU has been proposing full merger, but no one seems interested. "Covenant Communion" supposedly allows diversities to remain while the covenanting partners become truly one.

## *Does this make any sense?*

No.

## *What will COCU mean practically?*

To begin with, we would need to be ritually "reconciled." "Bishops," or in the new jargon, "authorized ministers of oversight," would have hands laid on them by "authorized ministers of oversight" of other denominations. Since this has no precedence in church history, and since there is some ambiguity as to what this means, the laying on of hands would be administered in silence.

*In other words, I am not now presently reconciled to all these Christians. But if an Episcopal priest lays hands on me, I am then reconciled to all Presbyterians?*

At least in the COCU way of thinking.

## *What else?*

The gatherings would also inaugurate national, regional, and local covenanting councils organized to carry on the work of the covenant communions.

## *To do what?*

To express visible unity and to carry out mission initiatives. It has been suggested that local churches would get together four times a year to share the sacrament.

## *What kind of mission initiatives will be undertaken?*

Presumably more of what the liberal bureaucracies are already doing: fighting racism, sexism, handicapism, ageism, capitalism, and like things.

## *Who is going to pay for all of this?*

Each congregation would have to fork over more money, how else?

## *Who's for this, anyway?*

Mostly denominational bureaucrats.

## *What is the doctrinal basis?*

There is none basically. The book entitled "The COCU Consensus" is supposed to represent the theological basis, but is frighteningly vague. The book speaks much of unity and inclusiveness but nothing of such truths as Christ dying for our sins. It recognizes the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed as a "Witness of Tradition," but adds that these creeds are conditioned by the language and thought of their times. The prayers in the reconciling covenants speak of the Triune God, but address this God as "Creator, Redeemer, Helper" and not as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## *Are there other benefits from COCU?*

We can all add "The Church of Christ Uniting" to our church sign boards and stationery to indicate our new Covenant Communion relationship. We can also learn from the traditions and insights of our several denominations. The United Church of Christ, for example, has indicated by denominational resolution that the gift they intend to share with the Covenant Communion is the ordination of gays and lesbians as pastors and the willingness to discuss alternative names in the baptismal formula besides "Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

## *Are all the denominations mentioned going to do this?*

The Episcopalians are dragging their feet. The Presbyterians have delayed their decision.

## *Why would we ever want to do this?*

The church does strange things.

IRD

**by Dr. Riley Case**  
Pastor, St. Luke's UMC, Kokomo, IN



# 'How Long Do We Stay?'

*Dr. Herbert Schlossberg, author of books such as Idols for Destruction and A Fragrance of Oppression, is on the Steering Committee of the IRD-affiliated Presbyterianism for Democracy and Religious Freedom.*

Lately we have been hearing renewed talk about a split in my denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One elder in a local church asked my wife, "How long do we stay? How bad do things have to get before we can leave?" I don't think that question can be answered, because it is the wrong question. Let me explain.

One distinction of our faith is that it does not regard the church as a voluntary organization. That will amaze some people who think the church is like a fraternal group or social club which you belong to as long as you think it is giving you the return you expect from your investment of time and money.

But our theology teaches that the church is something very different. It is the body of Christ, and it functions in a connectional way just as the parts of the body do. When Paul described how this works, he said that if the foot or the eye should declare that it is no longer part of the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body (I Cor. 12).

But someone answers, "I am not talking about leaving the body of Christ. I am just going to another portion of it that has not gone to pieces and begun serving evil." This explanation will not do. It implies that if we leave our own church with all its problems, we'll find something approaching perfection elsewhere. But this is not true. There are serious problems everywhere in the worldwide church.

This is just what we should expect, because there have always been serious problems—even in the apostolic church. The early chapters of Revelation speak of churches which tolerate false teaching, idolatry, lukewarmness, and other weaknesses, and demand that they

repent. But in none of these cases do we find pulling out of the church given as a remedy for the problem.

When Christians pull out and abandon the rest of us who are trying to reform the church, they leave a serious gap in our ranks. A departing eye leaves us with only one eye remaining, which impairs both our peripheral vision and our depth perception.

It is difficult to be part of a church that has been sailed onto the reefs by an irresponsible leadership. You watch in disbelief as church people in positions of authority echo the demands of tyrants, provide a forum for the advocacy of immoral acts, and ignore the central doctrines of the faith. This is hard to take. It seems easier to pull out and belong to a group that does not indulge in such evils.

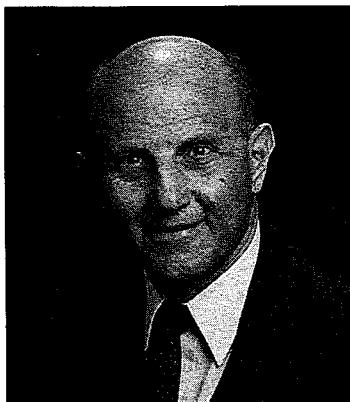
It seems easier. And that should alert us to the problem. Although it is easier to abandon ship than to reform it, what doctrine declares ease as a criterion in deciding the church to which we should belong?

In the vision of Ezekiel, Jerusalem was condemned to destruction. The only ones to be spared were those "who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it" (Ezek. 9:3-10). In other words, the people who were faithful to the Lord were the ones who were agonizing over the debased state of the Temple and the society. The covenant of God would not allow them relief from that burden by pulling out.

In most mainline denominations, there are statements of principle specifying that the Bible and the creeds form the basis of our beliefs. The fact that this may sometimes be honored in the breach more than in reality does not alter the fact that we have an unchanging standard to which we can appeal, one that forms the basis for our continued call for repentance and reform within the church. So long as we have that standard, it is too soon to quit.

IRD

by Herbert Schlossberg



Herbert Schlossberg



The Institute on Religion and Democracy

1521 16th Street., N.W., #300  
Washington, DC 20036

