

FAITH & FREEDOM

REFORMING THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL WITNESS

SPECIAL
REPORT:
THE
CHURCHES
AND THE
U.S.
WAR ON
TERRORISM,
page 4



*U.S. troops pray during
Easter service at Bagram
Air Base in Afghani-
stan. Some church leaders
rejected their mission as
“a new phase of military
imperialism” incompat-
ible with Christian faith.*

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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. 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 Church Alliance for a New Sudan.

Contributions to the work of the IRD are critically needed. Your gifts are tax deductible. Thank you for your support.

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LETTERS

I'M NOT CERTAIN WHERE YOU FOUND MY NAME, BUT I APPRECIATED GETTING YOUR magazine this week as it provided provocative reading.

Most of what I read was both very self-righteous and judgmental of those who didn't crawl under your coverlet of Christian belief that appears to have as much to do with justifying our American way of life, our sacred flag, than it did with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I don't deny there is evil in the world, yet I believe we need to look at our own purchasing power in helping to create it as our great wealth has too often been amassed at the expense of our brothers who live in abject poverty and starvation. One look at our own history makes it obvious, yet too few study that past, denying historical fact as we paint the rosy pictures we can admire as we use 2/3 of the world of the world resources to maintain our vaunted lifestyles. As we see ourselves as blessed by God, I have to question how he will judge greed and that lust for power as we destroy the inheritance he gave us—this earth.

Do we walk His walk, or simply talk the talk? It appears [in your articles] that Paul is the savior, as his words often take precedence over what Christ teaches, and at times is contradictory.

Nina S. Flanders
Clearwater, FL

I JUST RECEIVED THE FALL 2001 FAITH AND FREEDOM. TOM ODEN'S PIECE ESPECIALLY interested me, as he is a friend and the scheduled speaker at Taylor University's faculty retreat next fall.

This quick note is to call your attention to what I believe is a minor error in the Oden article. On page 10 he asks, "What does it mean...to confess 'Credo in unam Ecclesiam'?"

As I recall, the Latin version of the Creed reads "Credo unam Ecclesiam." That is to say, we believe or affirm the reality of one, holy, catholic apostolic Church, but we do not believe IN the Church. We believe IN Jesus Christ (Credo IN Iesum Christum). Karl Barth (*Dogmatics in Outline*, ch. 22) called this to my attention years ago.

Dr. Ted Dorman
Taylor University,
Upland, IN

We appreciate Dr. Dorman's correction. —ED.

IRD welcomes letters to the editor. If you have a comment or question about one of the articles appearing in Faith and Freedom, please address your letter to Faith and Freedom, Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1110 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1180, Washington, DC 20005. Letters may be edited for size and clarity.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

IN GRATITUDE

By Diane L. Knippers



On March 1, I celebrated my 20th anniversary at the IRD. Naturally, many of the significant events in my life over these 20 years have paralleled key events in IRD's now 21-year history.

But there is someone on the world stage, who is much more significant than I am, whose life parallels much of the IRD's his-

tory. Pope John Paul II has interacted with many of the same world events that the IRD has addressed. In fact, much of his teaching has shaped the work and witness of the IRD, in spite of the fact that our staff has always been overwhelmingly Protestant.

Reading George Weigel's monumental biography of the Pope, *Witness to Hope*, led me to reflect on key moments in the IRD's history. It is no accident that the IRD was founded just 2-1/2 years after the elevation of the Polish Pope in 1978. Karol Wojtyla, having suffered under both fascist and communist tyrannies, brought to the papacy the realism and compassion necessary to challenge totalitarian oppression. He used his new position in Rome and his understanding of the "dignity of the human person" and the "priority of culture" to change world history.

Those underlying values, and the hope galvanized by John Paul II's elevation, are reflected in the IRD's founding statement, *Christianity and Democracy*. For over a decade, the IRD called attention to the plight of persecuted believers in the Soviet bloc,

challenged the Western church to tell the truth about communism, and joined itself to efforts that eventually brought the collapse of the "evil empire." But if any one human being deserves credit for this modern miracle, it has to be the Pope.

The IRD's paths of interest and concern crossed those of the Vatican in other places as well. The Pope's stunning 1983 visit to Nicaragua focused world atten-

tion on the abuses of the Sandinistas and launched a corrective to the excesses of liberation theology. His tireless world-wide pastoral visits illustrated not just the "Church Universal," but the trend now so apparent within Protestantism—the shift of the center of gravity of the Church from Western Europe and North America to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the last twenty years, the IRD has joined John Paul II in calling for democracy and human rights in places as diverse as Chile, China, the Philippines, Cuba, and Sudan. The Vatican delegation, under the leadership of Mary Ann Glendon, was a powerful witness to the Gospel—and a great encouragement to the IRD-led delegation of evangelical women—at the UN's 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

"The dignity of the human person" has been the hallmark of John Paul II's ministry. The crisis of modernity, he wrote, involved the "degradation, indeed ... a pulverization, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person." This degradation came not only from oppressive governments, but also from abuses of the body, sexuality, and our most intimate relationships. John Paul II outlined his "theology of the body" in early systematic teachings. Weigel calls this teaching a critical moment in Catholic theology and in the history of modern thought—a "theological time bomb set to go off...in the third millennium of the Church." The IRD has discovered in this "theology of the body" rich resources for our current struggles regarding marriage and human sexuality in all of our denominations.

I've recently encountered Episcopal ecumenists who have confided their conviction that "Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue will go nowhere until 'someone' dies." Stunned the first time I heard this, I asked in disbelief, "Do you mean the Pope?" The answer was "yes." Of course, I find such condescension toward one

of the greatest living Christians to be contemptible. But I also think it reveals his critics to be remarkably out of touch with the Spirit-led identity and direction of the Church. History will show that John Paul II was a statesman and a pastor who gave shape to the future of human society. I am deeply grateful to God that I may serve in an organization open to this Pope's teachings and influence.

"The dignity of the human person" has been the hallmark of John Paul II's ministry.

RELIGIOUS LEFT STILL OFF BALANCE AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

By Alan F.H. Wisdom

The terrorist attacks of last September 11 shook countless individuals and institutions. But few have found it so difficult to cope as the left-leaning elites of America's oldline churches. They have suffered a severe case of what psychologists call "cognitive dissonance." The events of that terrible day simply did not fit the Left's stock story line, in which the United States, traditional Christianity, and western democratic capitalism figure as the villains and radical Third World groups are cast as the heroes.

Since September 11 oldline leaders, at different times and in different manners, have exhibited all the classic responses to cognitive dissonance: Denials of the realities that contradict their political assumptions. Unbending reassertions of those assumptions, often tinged with anger at any who dare question them. Contortions of logic and distortions of evidence, trying to make the changed realities fit the unchanged assumptions.

Lately, there seems to be a stunned silence in many quarters of the religious Left, as its dire prophecies about the war in Afghanistan have been proven spectacularly false. This period of silence may be a mere interlude. The signs suggest that many leftist church officials are prepared to sing the same old tune—the same one-sided denunciations of U.S. militarism and imperialism—when the war on terrorism enters its next phase, focused on the nations that President Bush named as the "axis of evil."

Yet we may hope that some oldline leaders will be open to a healthier response to cognitive dissonance. Perhaps this may be the occasion when they re-examine their political assumptions and readjust them to scriptural teachings, the Christian tradition, and the lessons of history. Perhaps they may yet arrive at a more positive view of America, its allies, and their common cause against terrorism.

Such a view was expressed in a February 2002 statement entitled "What We're Fighting For," endorsed by an interesting set of intellectual and cultural leaders. (See p. 7 for excerpts.) Among them were figures from the more liberal side of the political spectrum, such as philosopher Michael Walzer and former Clinton adviser William Galston. But so far no notable names from the Religious Left have appeared among the signers.

Sadly, we have not yet seen any significant re-evaluation in that part of the church world since September 11. The habits of ideology still prevail among those who are speaking up.

WCC AND PRESBYTERIAN HEADS DECRY 'A NEW PHASE OF MILITARY IMPERIALISM'

At a World Council of Churches meeting in Boston in early March, WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser condemned the war on terrorism: "This war, which is presented as a struggle for the defense of freedom and thus for a just cause, nevertheless follows the logic of war and has already claimed untold numbers of new victims." Raiser alleged that the war was actually inspired by a "new international security ideology based on the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States." He described the war as having "unlimited scope" and leading to the "harsh suppression" of "people's struggles for social justice" because those struggles are targeted as "potential manifestations of terrorism."

In a clear swipe at America in the wake of September 11, the WCC head said that we have seen the "brutal face of the spirit, logic, and practice of violence and have experienced its demonic character which captivates even the mind and soul of the victims." With the U.S. still apparently in mind, Raiser warned of a "will to dominate and to exercise power over instead of with others." He complained of the "cultivation of enemy images," the "deliberate misinformation," and the "deliberate disregard for the basic needs of the poor, the hungry, the excluded, and afflicted." None of the assembled U.S. denominational officials publicly challenged these assertions by the WCC leader.

Indeed, one top official felt compelled to echo Raiser. Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) later said he had been moved by his WCC colleagues' "deep sorrow and disappointment at what they perceived to be the 'strange silence' of the American churches as so much of the world and the world's Christian communities have been plunged into a new error [sic] of violence, conflict and injustice." So in March Kirkpatrick published an essay entitled "Following the Prince of Peace in a Violent World."

The essay resounded with a volley of anti-American criticisms that the Presbyterian clerk attributed to his WCC colleagues. Christian leaders from Iran, Iraq, and North Korea told him that "both the Christian community and their hopes for non-violent paths to peace and justice had been put in jeopardy by our nation



Presbyterian Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick said, "I know in my conscience that America's detractors are right."

Kirkpatrick said, "I know in my conscience that in many ways they are right." He urged U.S. Christians not to "ignore the perceptions of other nations, nor of many of our Christian friends around the world, that the U.S., with its unchallenged wealth and power, feels free to make unilateral decisions affecting global economics and the environment; to bend the United Nations to our will and, most disturbing of all, to initiate a new phase of military imperialism under the guise of the 'War on Terrorism,' whose true aim is to advance the interests of the United States around the world."

The Presbyterian official claimed that, after the September 11 attacks, it was "almost impossible" for Americans to obey Jesus' command to forgive our enemies. He perceived his fellow U.S. citizens to be simmering in a vile stew of bitter emotions: "In the grief, fear, and anger resulting from those attacks, our nation has responded with a full measure of patriotic fury." Kirkpatrick looked to the Church to prophesy against the war on terrorism: "It is critical in these days that the voice of the Church be heard—a voice that urges our leaders to speak not of vengeance but of reconciliation, not of war but of peace, not of annihilation but of life, not of intimidation but of negotiation, not of destruction but of human development."

A MORE SUBTLE SLANT

The anti-American slant was more subtle in a February 20 joint statement by two organizations representing U.S. Catholic monks and nuns. The Conference of Major Superiors of Men and Leadership Conference of Women Religious placed the U.S. government and the terrorists on the same moral level. They expressed grief for "the thousands of innocent lives that have

branded their nations as 'the axis of evil.'" A German Lutheran leader was in anguish over "an unwillingness by our nation to uphold global conventions for human rights such as the Geneva Convention when it seemed not to further our own military priorities." More broadly, Kirkpatrick seemed convinced that most people in other countries saw the U.S. military as "frequently in support of the rich, the powerful and, at times, the oppressor."

"While I do not agree with them [the criticisms] on every point,"

been lost on and since September 11, 2001, through acts of terror and military response." While stating that "no condition justifies use of terror," the two Catholic groups added, "We do not believe that the use of military action that causes disproportionate destruction of human life can be justified." The implication was that the U.S.-led coalition had indeed carried out such unjustifiable military action.

The specific concerns raised by the two groups were all directed against the Bush Administration. They warned that "threats to expand action to other regions and countries will lead to a rapid escalation of military action without clear objectives or reasonable expectation of success." They raised the alarm that "civil liberties are at risk when policies intended to increase security in our own country are overly restrictive or unevenly applied." They lamented that "the needs of those who are poor and marginalized in our own country are being sacrificed to fund a large increase in military and homeland security expenditures." There were no concerns expressed about dangers from terrorists and their sponsoring states.

Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, as so often previously, joined himself to the less temperate voices. In January he appeared with former Attorney General Ramsey Clark at a DC press conference to unveil a new coalition called Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER). "The greatest purveyor of violence on earth is my own government," declared Clark, quoting a sermon by Martin Luther King, Jr. He accused America of "cruelty and utter indifference to life time and again, country after country"—most recently in Afghanistan. The former attorney general was worried that Iraq would be the next victim of U.S. aggression. "We'll bomb mindlessly," he predicted.

At the ANSWER press conference, United Church of Christ pastor Graylan Hagler charged, "We [the U.S.] are becoming the terrorist agents we claim to be fighting against." He blamed America in advance for possible future terrorist attacks: "If we sow bombs on helpless civilians, this [terrorism] is the crop we will reap."

METHODIST RANTERS

Prominent United Methodist pastor James Lawson followed the same line in his keynote address to the Episcopal Urban Caucus in February. He charged that the war on terrorism was driven by "stealth government, financial interests, and colonialism." The objective, according to Lawson, was to ensure that the "flow of wealth is toward us [the U.S.], not for their [poor nations'] benefit."

In a March meeting of leftist religious leaders in Washington, United Methodist Bishop Joseph Sprague condemned most churches for not speaking more forcefully against the war. "There has been a bastardization of the just war theory," Sprague raged. "When in the

name of God will the religious community stand up and be the religious community?"

On January 26 a conference on "The Impact of War on Children" was convened at the United Methodist-owned United Nations Church Center in New York. The conference, underwritten with \$5,000 from the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, quickly turned into a bash-America festival. "The U.S. has no passion or feeling for what's going on in the world," opined conference organizer Lenora Foerstel of Women for Mutual Security. "They bring nations to rubble." Wars waged by the United States have "racist underpinning," she alleged.

"I haven't paid a dime in taxes to the U.S. government since 1980," boasted Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness, another sponsor of the conference. "It would be like giving to gangs."

Popular evangelical speaker Tony Campolo was distressed about the war's impact on U.S. churches. Speaking to a North Carolina Baptist men's meeting in March, Campolo claimed that since September 11 it had become taboo to quote Jesus even in church. "I'm not sure we want to hear about this Jesus who says, 'Those who live by the sword die by the sword' as we engage in a military buildup," the Eastern College sociology professor said. He charged that U.S. Christians had taken off their WWJD (What would Jesus do?) bracelets and put on American flag pins.

"What's our answer to terrorism?" Campolo asked. "It's going to set missions back a thousand years. We're going to kill them. We're going to root them out and kill them." He compared this approach to fighting malaria by killing mosquitoes. "You get rid of malaria by destroying the swamps in which the malaria mosquitoes are bred," Campolo said. "There's a swamp out there called poverty and injustice." He implied that nothing could be done about terrorism until poverty and injustice were eliminated from the earth. Perhaps, pursuing Campolo's analogy, he would command the mosquito-afflicted farm family to put away all bug spray until the Corps of Engineers had completed its 20-year drainage project.

AN AMBIGUOUS SILENCE FROM OLDLINE OFFICIALS

Of course, Tony Campolo represents only a small segment of the evangelical community. Likewise, individuals like Joseph Sprague and James Lawson do not speak for most United Methodists or other oldline Protestants. Nor would the organizations of monks and nuns find widespread concurrence among Catholics in the pews.

In fact, the anti-American and quasi-pacifist views of the Religious Left do not have the endorsement of top leaders of U.S. Roman Catholic and evangelical churches. When the Roman Catholic bishops and evangelical officials spoke up last fall, they reaffirmed

traditional Christian teachings on "just war." They upheld the duty of the U.S. government to protect its citizens from grave evils such as terrorism.

The same cannot be said of the officials and agencies of the oldline Protestant denominations. Their reactions last fall ranged from an outright condemnation of the war to a grudging, qualified, skeptical acceptance. Since last November, however, they have been largely silent, with a few exceptions such as the Presbyterian Stated Clerk.

This silence may spring from an observation of the war in Afghanistan. Contrary to the assumptions of the Religious Left, the U.S. military did not "bomb mindlessly." Our troops did not suppress the "people's struggles for social justice." Instead they presented a mostly grateful Afghan population with a new opportunity for freedom and development. Prudent church officials do not criticize such results.

But will there be a larger, long-term change of perspective? The test will come when the Bush Administration takes action to counter the threats posed by regimes like those in Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. Will oldline leaders again march arm-in-arm with the likes of Ramsey Clark, accusing America of "cruelty and utter indifference to life"? Or will they begin to understand the God-given responsibilities of government and appreciate the difficult choices that President Bush must make to fulfill those responsibilities? **f**



An Afghan girl laughs with a friend while studying to become a tailor at the Kandahar Women's Association. Their new-found freedom belies the assertion by WCC General Secretary Raiser that the war on terrorism leads to "harsh suppression" of "people's struggles for social justice."

WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR

Below are excerpts from a statement entitled "What We're Fighting For," released in February by the Institute for American Values. The principal drafter was Jean Bethke Elshtain, an ethics professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Endorsers include IRD President Diane Knippers and several IRD board members. The full text may be found at www.propositionsonline.com.

We affirm five fundamental truths that pertain to all people without distinction:

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
2. The basic subject of society is the human person, and the legitimate role of government is to protect and help to foster the conditions for human flourishing.
3. Human beings naturally desire to seek the truth about life's purpose and ultimate ends.
4. Freedom of conscience and religious freedom are inviolable rights of the human person.
5. Killing in the name of God is contrary to faith in God and is the greatest betrayal of the universality of religious faith.

We fight to defend ourselves and to defend these universal principles....

The leader of Al Qaeda described the "blessed strikes" of September 11 as blows against America, "the head of world infidelity." Clearly, then, our attackers despise not just our government, but our overall society, our entire way of living. Fundamentally, their grievance concerns not only what our leaders do, *but also who we are....*

At its best, the United States seeks to be a society in which faith and freedom can go together, each elevating the other. We have a secular state—our government officials are not simultaneously religious officials—but we are by far the western world's most religious society. We are a nation that deeply respects religious freedom and diversity, including the rights of nonbelievers, but one whose citizens recite a Pledge of Allegiance to "one nation, under God"

... there are times when the first and most important reply to evil is to stop it. There are times when waging war is not only morally permitted, but morally necessary, as a response to calamitous acts of violence, hatred, and injustice. This is one of those times....

Just war principles teach us that, whenever human beings contemplate or wage war, it is both possible and necessary to affirm the sanctity of human life and embrace the principle of equal human dignity. These principles strive to preserve and reflect, even in the tragic activity of war, the fundamental moral truth that "others"—those who are strangers to us, those who differ from us in race or language, those whose religions we may believe to be untrue—have the same right to life that we do, and the same human dignity and human rights that we do....

The individuals who committed these acts of war [on September 11] did not act alone, or without support, or for unknown reasons. They were members of an international Islamicist network, active in as many as 40 countries, now known to the world as Al Qaeda. This group, in turn, constitutes but one arm of a larger radical Islamicist movement, growing for decades and in some instances tolerated and even supported by governments, that openly professes its desire and increasingly demonstrates its ability to use murder to advance its objectives....

This radical, violent movement opposes not only certain U.S. and western policies—some signatories to this letter also oppose some of those policies—but also a foundational principle of the modern world, religious tolerance, as well as those fundamental human rights, in particular freedom of conscience and religion, that are enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that must be the basis of any civilization oriented to human flourishing, justice, and peace. This extremist movement claims to speak for Islam, but betrays fundamental Islamic principles....

Those who slaughtered more than 3,000 persons on September 11 and who, by their own admission, want nothing more than to do it again, constitute a clear and present danger to all people of good will everywhere in the world, not just the United States. Such acts are a pure example of naked aggression against innocent human life, a world-threatening evil that clearly requires the use of force to remove it....

We pledge to do all we can to guard against the harmful temptations—especially those of arrogance and jingoism—to which nations at war so often seem to yield. At the same time, with one voice we say solemnly that it is crucial for our nation and its allies to win this war. We fight to defend ourselves, but we also believe that we fight to defend those universal principles of human rights and human dignity that are the best hope for humankind....

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

COMMENTS ON IRD'S NEXT 20 YEARS

On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, IRD President Diane Knippers asked various distinguished friends and observers of the Institute to offer their reflections on what may lie ahead. Below are excerpts from some of the responses that she received.

DR. RICHARD LAND

President, Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Southern Baptist Convention

The biggest challenge that lies ahead for today's churches is the post-modern view that there is no absolute truth. Unfortunately, this philosophy has invaded our learning centers at every academic level. Many young people in church today are uncertain that there is any such thing as absolute truth. As these young people become the leaders in our churches, they will bring that philosophy with them into their places of leadership. A church whose leaders are uncertain about absolute truth will have great difficulty dealing with internal differences on everything from doctrine to social mores. This same church will also have great difficulty presenting a witness to the world. If the church is unconvinced about the gospel imperative, it will not be able to convince members to witness or to become part of a worldwide missionary movement.

A vigorous Christian witness is necessary for democracy both at home and abroad in the following areas:

- ✦ The Judeo-Christian understanding of human depravity can make a significant contribution to democracy because it will remind people that despotism is a real danger for any society. Democracy helps to protect people from despotic leaders by placing in the hands of the majority the power to govern and to change government.
- ✦ The Judeo-Christian understanding that a person's relationship with his or her God is so sacred that no government has a right to interfere with it will help preserve "soul freedom" as an "inalienable" right.

✦ The Judeo-Christian understanding of grace can make a significant contribution to democracy because it will teach the principle of mercy. This principle is imperative in a democracy since the will of the majority can be used to oppress the minority. Mercy focuses on helping the weakest, not taking advantage of them or oppressing them.

✦ The Judeo-Christian understanding of God can make a significant contribution to democracy because it reminds people that they are accountable to a personal God....

DR. EDMUND W. ROBB, JR.

Founding Chairman, the Institute on Religion and Democracy

The Institute on Religion & Democracy is unique. It is an ecumenical movement that proclaims a social witness in the context of the historic Christian faith. We are entering a new era and must be courageous and bold. Neo-paganism is a cancer that is spreading throughout Western civilization. Historic Christian morality is being challenged even by some old-line denominations. We believe that immorality and true freedom are incompatible....

The decline of the old-line denominations is well documented. Radical theology is impotent before secularism that could ultimately destroy Western civilization. We must cooperate with the reform movements in the old-line denominations and supply them with materials and resources to strengthen their witness for freedom and faith.

The most dynamic Christian movements in the nation today are the independent, evangelical and charismatic churches. We need to identify the leaders

and seek their involvement and participation, and sensitize them to the human rights issues.

Theological education is in transition. Some young scholars are open to IRD concerns. We must supply them with resources that are academically astute and present our position with respected scholarship. We cannot surrender our seminaries to leftist radicals.

The IRD is not a separatist movement. We are determined to work within the established churches with a social witness and commitment to the historic Christian faith.



DR. MARTIN E. MARTY

Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago

The biggest challenge for the Christian church in the U.S. is to find ways to revivify what I call "basic faith." Often their, our partisan contentions and choosing of issues overlook the fact that faith is not self-replenishing. To "fear and love God" (as we Lutherans inherit the phrase) is a notion clouded, obscured, disguised. If we really got that right—in experience and reflection and then action—faith would be seen and known as intrinsic, not merely instrumental.

Some points for the most vigorous Christian witness would include, first, summoning people from experiments with individualized "spirituality" into community and communities of faith. It

would then build into these communities agencies that will help them engage in self-criticism before they move into other-criticism. That will also lead them to engage in criticism of "the powers" in church, state, market, and voluntary associations.

I don't know the inner workings of the IRD. I think it will have to take care to make its positive case without depending so much on typing, sometimes stereotyping, "the other" that the other will reflexively counter similarly and no conversation or argument will occur; mere mutual dismissal or using the image of the other as ogre is satisfying within a camp, but it leaves so many of the uncommitted and semi-committed doing their shoulder shrugging on the sidelines. I don't know how one goes about this, but one goes about this.



FREDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN
Syndicated Columnist

I would like to see the IRD, and ... In fact all the forces of small-orthoodoxy, resolve to present the faith as something challenging rather than soft and consoling. We, too, pander when we present Jesus as the great Listener and Security Blanket. He came to do something much more harrowing; he came to save us from hell, which we had thoroughly earned. I'd like to see Christians stop being mealy-mouthed and return to a strong, challenging witness that is forthright about supernatural realities, sin and repentance. I think it would be better respected than the usual couch-potato faith; I think it would have greater impact than outdated rationalism in an increasingly new-agey world; and I think it would be the truth.



DR. MAXIE D. DUNNAM
President, Asbury Theological Seminary

In my observation, three of the ... most significant signposts of the religious landscape are—one, the parachurch movement; two, the independent church movement; and three, the charismatic movement. I believe that all of these have arisen in large part because of failure on the part of the old-line denominations—and for that reason, the internal vitality and the external witness of old-line denominations are tied up with these three phenomena. The parachurch movement, I believe, had a rapid growth in our country because it provided hands-on involvement, especially in mission—a hands-on kind of involvement that was missing from the mainline church. The independent church movement, I believe, has grown up rapidly—in large part because of its emphasis on Scripture and biblical preaching. In the perception of many, this was missing from most of the old-line denominations. And, of course, the charismatic movement has arisen because old-line denominations have been reticent and even negligent in teaching about and responding to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.

For recovery of internal vitality and effective external witness—these three ingredients that have been missing must be recovered—hands-on ministry/missional involvement, centering on Scripture—preaching and teaching God's word, and an openness to the Holy Spirit.

DR. DEAL HUDSON
Publisher and Editor, Crisis

The major question will be whether or not the post-Vietnam anti-Americanism will continue to be heard from the mainline denominations during the war against terrorism. There is little hope for them to renew a commitment to traditional family morality, given the influence of feminism and homosexuality, but will they renew their commitment to the basic defense of America?

There needs to be a witness regarding the basic right of a sovereign nation to defend itself, to raise an army, and to kill the enemy. This is not simple patriotism; it is the understanding of a state's legitimate role, a role that has sanction in Scripture and Tradition.



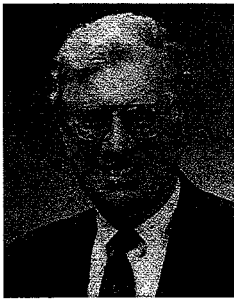
DR. ALLEN HERTZKE
Professor of Political Science, University of Oklahoma

I think that one of the greatest emerging challenges for the churches is providing a counterweight to the commercialization and materialism of the broader culture. Providing vivid alternatives to such a shallow existence is becoming a more pressing issue for parents, especially. And this need, in some ways, transcends the old ideological lineaments.

This intersects the international arena in some intriguing ways. Will America be identified mainly with its entertainment industry and its commercialism, or with its values of religious freedom, the freedom of conscience, and democratic governance? I applaud IRD's work on religious freedom issues in part for this reason, that it helps to project the best of the nation's heritage abroad, rather than its more hedonic side.

A final challenge for the churches lies in preparing the moral groundwork to

enable us to deal with the biotech and genetic revolutions coming our way. If the churches are not doing serious theological and moral reflection and education, then the scientific imperative will sweep away old taboos and usher in an age when life, and its God-giveness, will be in flux....

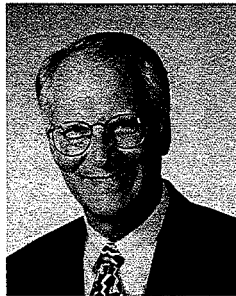


MICHAEL MCMANUS
President, Marriage Savers

I agree with the IRD criticism of the old-line denominations. But that criticism has become as effective as a nagging wife, who forces her husband to withdraw. After a while, he no longer hears her complaint. What she needs to do is to praise him for what she admires, and he will be encouraged to work on the issues she has been harping about.

...I believe an effective strategy for the IRD is to work with the leadership of the denominations on one very important issue on which you and they agree. Both are concerned about the central problem of our time, the disintegration of the family. Divorce has been a cancer in many mainline churches. Pillars of the church split, and the giving of that family drops through the floor, if it does not disappear with the individuals. More than half of those who do come to get married are living together... Yet the church has become a blessing machine, in these cases, which produces only more marital and church disintegration....

The IRD ought to put its shoulder to this wheel and help the leadership of mainline churches to become part of this movement. You helped draft the Christian Declaration on Marriage, as did the NCC leadership. Though the NCC later disavowed it, I believe it is possible to get almost all of the NCC churches to sign the Declaration....



PARKER WILLIAMSON
Editor and Chief Executive Officer, The Presbyterian Layman

With the fall of the Wall...some have wondered what would become of the IRD. After all, has not its nemesis disappeared?

Of course, it has not, for the penchant to forge statist solutions to problems arising from the human heart continues to drive old-line church bureaucracies. Having sucked transcendence from religion, they promote salvation by politics, a scheme that inevitably denies human freedom and threatens the viability of our democratic social order.

Much work remains for the IRD. Old-line denominational structures will die—prognosis that I deem worthy of celebration—but not before they have thoroughly syncretized the gospel with pagan alternatives and undermined any objective standard for moral behavior. God's people need help in discerning truth from falsehood, right from wrong.

But the rise of evangelicalism presents problems of its own. Often ego-centered, its theologies lack a Biblical understanding of the nature of the Church, fail to acknowledge the corporate dimension of human sin, and show little interest in pursuing and protecting a social order that is both just and free. Politically, there is a disturbing similarity between highly individualistic evangelicalism and its secular opponent, the cult of the imperial self.

Barbarians gather at the gate. St. Augustine's *City of God* should be revisited. Might the IRD assist thoughtful leaders of US churches to appropriate a similar vision for our time?



JAMES NUECHTERLEIN
Editor, First Things, and IRD Board Member

The biggest challenge to the vitality and witness of the mainline churches in the U.S. is what it has been for a very long time now: the challenge of misplaced or lost faith. Some mainline leaders have gone along with the translation of traditional Christian affirmations into a new creed of secular political yearning out of a muddled desire to appear progressive or relevant. They mistakenly believe that Christianity can retain credibility only if it adapts its message to the presumed felt needs of disenchanted modernity and postmodernity. They are sincere—and are still themselves believers—but are guilty of a failure of nerve. Other mainline leaders—more of them, I fear—are Christians only out of habit, occupational necessity, or an inclination to subversion. They cannot say the creeds of the Church without entering endless mental reservations, and theirs is a genuinely religionless Christianity. Their *Eschaton* is a political utopia established along lines ranging from over-the-counter liberalism to varying expressions of root-and-branch radicalism. They preach, they intend, another gospel.

The challenge for traditional Christians in fighting these enemies of Christ—for so, whether they will it or not, they are—is to affirm the compatibility of Christianity with democratic political culture without turning ourselves into mirror images of our opponents by conflating our ultimate theological commitments and our penultimate political allegiances. We are not the Right fighting the Left. We are Christians fighting perversions of the faith into which we have been baptized and which it is our gift and task to witness to through faithful obedience.... We must be at once relentless and winsome.

CHURCH NEWS

CHURCH COUNCIL
STRUGGLES FOR SURVIVAL

At its February 2002 meeting, the National Council of Churches executive board heard warnings of another year of red ink, after previous deficits had almost exhausted the council's reserves.

"We believe it's possible to sustain ourselves, but it will take a great deal of effort," admitted NCC treasurer Phil Young. The NCC faces a projected deficit of \$600,000 for this fiscal year ending in June. But Young pledged that the council would reach a balanced budget by June.

Young noted that the NCC had already cut its budget by \$1 million this year. And staff has been reduced to just 36 people, down from 102 people just two years ago. The current budget stands at \$5.7 million. After deficits totaling more than \$10 million since 1997, virtually all of the NCC's available reserves have been spent down.

The largest donor to the NCC is the United Methodist Church, which gave

\$917,419 this year. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gave \$582,178. The Episcopal Church gave \$218,203.

Few NCC board members had anything to say openly about the council's budget travails. They were more engaged when two guest speakers urged a more positive view of Islam. "Muslims in this country need understanding as never before," declared former U.S. Representative Paul Findley of Illinois. He described Islam as a religion of "peace with justice, harmony, cooperation, compassion, charity, family responsibility, tolerance towards people of other faith traditions, and respect for the environment."

RELIGIOUS LEADERS CALL FOR
"CLIMATE JUSTICE"

Twelve hundred leaders of major U.S. religious denominations signed a February 2002 letter advocating energy conservation and criticizing Bush administration proposals for increasing domestic oil production. "Conservation and reducing our dependence on oil and other fossil fuels is critical to achieving energy independence and can be accomplished in economically responsible and economically beneficial ways," the statement claimed.

"The President's energy plan would have us drill in the Arctic, increase nuclear power, and subsidize big polluting energy companies," explained National Council of Churches General Secretary Robert Edgar. "There are safer, more sustainable strategies."

The statement was signed by leaders from most oldline Protestant denominations, including Frank Griswold, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; Mark Hanson, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); and Melvin Talbert, Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church.

The NCC recently joined with the Sierra Club to create television and newspaper advertisements denouncing Bush's proposal to open 2,000 acres of the 19

million acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration. The ads imply that oil drilling would destroy the refuge. The Sierra Club paid for the ads, while the NCC supplied staff assistance.

In January the NCC announced that it had received a major grant from the Turner Foundation—the philanthropic arm of media mogul Ted Turner—to underwrite its environmental advocacy. Turner is known for his public tirades against Christianity, deriding it as a "religion for losers." But he apparently found value in the church council.


OLDLINE CHURCHES LOBBY TO
ROLL BACK WELFARE REFORM

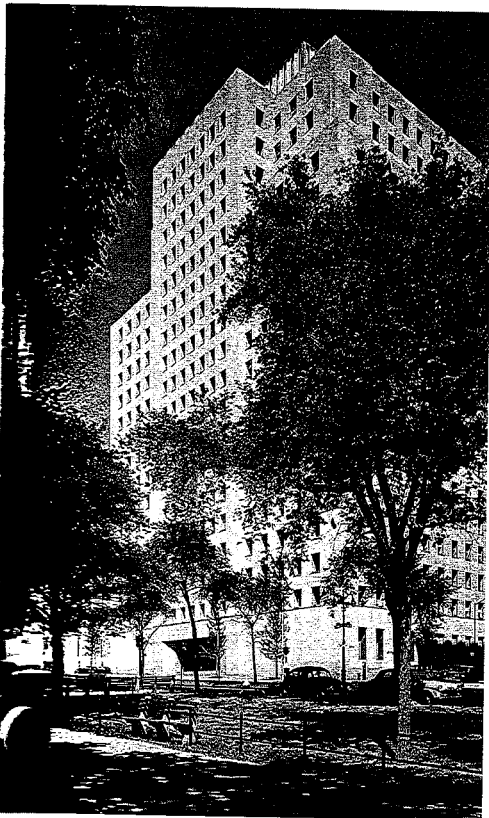
The National Council of Churches is organizing its member denominations to oppose the Bush Administration's welfare reform proposals.

This year Congress is expected to reauthorize the landmark 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. The administration wishes to maintain the welfare program at its current annual \$16.6 billion level, while stiffening work requirements for recipients.

The NCC and other oldline church lobby groups vehemently opposed the 1996 act. They do not call for its repeal in 2002, but they aim wherever possible to undercut the requirements imposed on welfare recipients. Brenda Girton of the NCC Washington Office objected to the employment requirement: "It's not enough to just say, 'Go to work,' if the job doesn't add dignity to that person, if there's no opportunity for growth."

"The President's proposal does not increase the block grant [to states], does not increase any funding for child care, and yet it increases the amount of work that is expected," complained Kay Bengtson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Washington Office. "Without more money, how in heaven's name can we support those families?"

The church lobbyists were also upset that the administration intended to continue the policy of prohibiting welfare payments to non-citizens until they have been in the country for five years. 



The National Council of Churches' headquarters in New York—often called "the God Box"—is getting angrier all the time.

A CONFESSING PRESBYTERIAN COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET

By the Rev. Steven S. Bryant

As a Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), it is time for me to come out of the closet.

My closest friends have been suspicious all along. My dear wife has known for 15 years, but she married me anyway. And now, I'm compelled to be open about my true self.

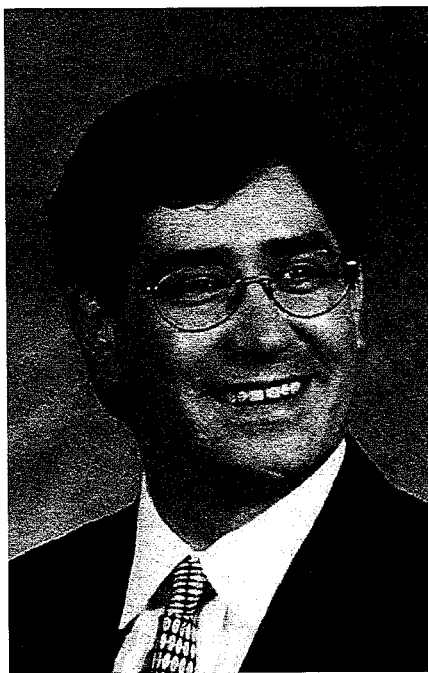
I am a Confessing Presbyterian. Being a Confessing Presbyterian means that I have a predisposition toward seeking the truth of God's Word. It means that I have a proclivity toward insisting that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And it means that I can't help but insist that God has a design for human sexuality within the covenant of marriage.

My identity as a Confessing Presbyterian is so much a part of me that it possibly could be a matter of genetics, although I need no scientific study to validate my nature. Of this I am sure: It is not a reversible dysfunction, nor is it a tragic sickness. It simply is who I am as a human being. God made me this way.

No doubt you're wondering, "Have you shared this with your parents?" Yes, I have. I broke the news to them over a lovely dinner last week. They didn't seem shocked. Could it be they've suspected it all along? I did sense some embarrassment and awkwardness, but I know they still love me. My mother said she always thought I was just an independent thinker, a little more conservative than normal. But now she knows the truth. She raised a Confessing Presbyterian.

And now that I'm out of the closet as a Confessing Presbyterian, let me assure you that I'm here to stay. I'm not asking for you simply to tolerate me, I'm out to change you and your children. I'm determined to change your church and wield a powerful influence over every major institution in this culture.

Do not be deceived. I am not alone. There are thousands, if not millions, of



us within this denomination and we will be in your face with the Word and the transforming grace of the gospel every chance we get.

The PCUSA moderator, Jack Rogers, called the Confessing Presbyterians "a threat to the church" and said they should be "dealt with seriously." He said we've lifted three little "things" from our Book of Confessions and elevated them to the status of all-important. These are the three "things" to which he referred:

We confess and believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, the only infallible rule for life and faith. (Is that just a "thing"? Last time I checked, this "thing" qualified as a foundational belief of the Christian faith.)

We confess and believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the only way to eternal

salvation. (No, Jack, this is not merely a "thing," but the central affirmation that distinguishes between that which is uniquely Christian and that which is merely religious.)

We confess and believe that marriage is a sacred gift of God, and that His intent for human sexuality is that it be reserved for a faithful marriage between a man and a woman. (A "thing"? No, it is the ordinance of God the Creator and the fabric of social order.)

Confessing Presbyterians are gladly a threat to the kind of church that the moderator envisions. And the Confessing Church is here to stay. Nothing like this has ever happened in the life of the PCUSA.

After last year's General Assembly, I gathered with a large group of disturbed elders, mortified deacons and bewildered members. The question on most of their minds was this:

"Why in the world should we remain in a denomination that apparently can't affirm the lordship of Christ and no longer knows what's right and wrong in sexual matters?"

It's clear as a bell. God wants us here. This is my case for staying:

It's a matter of faithful witness. God has given us a glorious opportunity to work for the transformation, no, the resurrection of a once great denomination. The General Assembly was a wake-up call for the people who sit in the pews. It is time to wake up and seize the opportunity presented by God to be a faithful witness, not only to a denomination, but to an entire culture. **f**

The Rev. Steven S. Bryant is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Vicksburg, MS. The year-old Confessing Church Movement now comprises more than 1200 congregations with more than 450,000 members—over 15 percent of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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OUR PLENARY SPEAKERS



Dr. Thomas C. Oden — The Henry Anson Buttz professor of theology and ethics at the Theological School, Drew University. Oden is an expert on the early church fathers and is a United Methodist theologian widely respected in mainline Protestant, evangelical, and ecumenical circles.



Dr. Edith Mary Humphrey — Professor of Scripture at Augustine College, Ottawa, and Lecturer for Carleton University's College of Humanities. She is the author of, *A Solid Foundation? The Seven Pillars of the Jesus Seminar Re-examined.*



Dr. Maxie D. Dunnam — President, Asbury Theological Seminary. Former pastor of Christ United Methodist Church, Memphis and leader in the World Methodist Council. He is the former World Editor of the *Upper Room*.



Rev. Thann Young — Pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, is currently employed by the Congress of National Black Churches, Inc. as manager of the Health and Wholeness Program. He is a board member of the Alliance for Marriage, an interfaith national organization, Washington, D. C.



Mrs. Diane Knippers — A laywoman in the Episcopal Church. She is President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy in Washington, D.C. Diane is also on the Executive Committee of the National Association of Evangelicals.



Dr. Jerry Kirk — A pastor in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and founder of the National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, with headquarters in Cincinnati. He served as senior minister of the College Hill Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Dr. Dennis F. Kinlaw — Founder of the Francis Asbury Society, which is committed to the spread of scriptural holiness via evangelism, retreats, and scholarly publications. He is the former President of Asbury College, and an author and teacher.

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National Alliance of Covenanting Congregations — United Church of Canada
RENEW Network for Women — Renewal for United Methodist women
Presbyterian Layman — Presbyterian Church U.S.A.
And others...

SMASH AND DESTROY: CHINA'S POLICY ON CHURCHES AND OTHER "CULTS" REVEALED

By Faith J.H. McDonnell

A former official of China's Ministry of State Security is in hiding. The story behind his disappearance into anonymity rivals any Hollywood espionage adventure. This "defector of conscience" and several provincial officials, disgusted with China's draconian policies against peaceful religious "cults," surreptitiously made photocopies of classified government documents detailing those policies. They smuggled the documents out to Shixiong Li and Bob Fu of the U.S.-based Committee for Investigation on Persecution of Religion in China. Now those documents have been published as *Religion and National Security in China: Secret Documents from China's Security Sector*.

The seven documents, authenticated by a distinguished Chinese expatriate government journalist, clearly prove that the crackdown against the esoteric Falun Gong movement is not an exception.

The 1999 laws against "heretical cults" threatening national security have been applied against a vast array of unregistered Christian churches. The documents demonstrate that this escalating repression of churches is a policy that emanates from the highest levels of government. It is not merely a matter of "overzealous local cadres" who "misunderstand" government policy, as the U.S. National Council of Churches likes to assert.

One document in the book, dated March 6, 2001, recommends the use of "secret agents" to infiltrate "cults." It states, "Secret forces are the heart and soul in covert struggles and the crucial magic weapon in our battle against and victory over the enemy." Another, dated October 9, 2001, urges the destruction of the charismatic "Real God" Christian church: "We need to work more, talk less to smash the cult quietly.... The key to thoroughly containing the spread and development of the cult is to get rid of the core of the cult, and to completely destroy its organizational system." On August 9, 2001, a directive bearing the official seal of the Beijing Bureau of Public Security detailed plans to "punish the leaders and core members" of the 50,000-strong South China Church and to "complete smashing of its organizational system."

Shixiong Li joined the damning documents with his own veritable mountain of affidavits from persecuted Christians and other religious believers. Interviewed by journalist Tony Carnes for *Christianity Today*, Li recounted how the Chinese house church networks provided him with evidence of persecution, sometimes in recorded testimonies. "Listening to these disembodied voices talk about their sufferings," he says, "is like sitting in a dark jail hearing the screams and the nightmares." The testimonies are the stuff of nightmares, or perhaps more appropriately, the stuff of *Foxe's Book of*

Martyrs. The deaths of 129 Christians are recounted in agonizing detail, often by their families.

Recent testimonies include letters from three young women, members of the South China Church, who were tortured by the authorities to obtain false allegations of rape against their pastor, Gong Shengliang. Pastor Gong and four of the other church founders were sentenced to death in secret trials held in December 2001. They are now appealing that sentence.

Just prior to President Bush's February 2002 trip to China, Li, Fu, and their associates unveiled an impressive archive of 22,000 documents—5,000 individual testimonies of Chinese Christians describing their arrests, interrogations, and imprisonments and 17,000 other partial reports. The president urged China to end the persecution.

Through the years voices shouting about persecution of the church in China have grown hoarse. Advocates have grown weary of the evasive responses of those who do not want to listen—U.S. businessmen looking to China as a potential market, U.S. government officials eager to enlist the Chinese regime as a "strategic partner," and, most shamefully, U.S. churches who want to ignore anything that might disturb their carefully-cultivated relationships with the "official" registered churches in China. Such apologists assure us that China is a "complex situation" that is always improving. They quickly dismiss any complaints of abuses as "isolated anomalies" that will soon be remedied.

Now we are all faced with the simple truth conveyed in the directives of the Chinese government itself and the words of its victims. After hearing the poignant voices of the fellow believers whom Beijing vows to "smash and destroy," Western Christians have no further excuses for silence.



Gong Shengliang, pastor of the 50,000 member South China Church in central Hubei Province. His death sentence is being appealed.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

CHURCH GROUPS
DENOUNCE ISRAEL

In the face of escalating military conflict in the Middle East, the World Council of Churches and related bodies sided decisively with the Palestinian Authority and against Israel. "Israel is rapidly re-occupying Palestinian lands by military force, raiding Palestinian refugee camps and engaging in mass indiscriminate detention of civilian inhabitants under the most degrading circumstances," declared a March 15 open letter from the council. "Attacks on medical and rescue staff, coupled with severe new restrictions on access to hospitals and other medical facilities, add to the systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law."

The WCC proclaimed its "united message...[that] the illegal occupation of Palestine must come to an end. It is at the root of the violence. Unless this is addressed, there can be little hope for a just and lasting peace." The only reference to Palestinian terrorist bombings was a vague phrase discouraging "violent responses" to the Israeli occupation. The letter did not identify any party other than Israel that engaged in "systematic violations of human rights."

U.S. church leaders followed the WCC lead. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sent a scathing letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on March 11. "While we do not condone the acts of violence by certain Palestinian extremists," Kirkpatrick said, "we are appalled that Israel, in response, has continued to punish the entire Palestinian population...with merciless attacks." The Presbyterian official begged Sharon to "renounce and stop this violent madness." But he sent no similar letter to Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat.

FORMER NORTH KOREAN
PRISONER TESTIFIES

On January 24 the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom heard dramatic testimony from a North Korean refugee. Soon-Ok Lee, a survivor

of seven years in a prison camp, said that North Korean Christians had one desire: "Their hope and wish is to proclaim God openly while on earth. I hope you as a commission will help them with their goal. Lots of Christians in North Korea keep their faith in their heart."

Christians are regarded as "political criminals" by the communist regime in North Korea, according to Lee. Hundreds of the 6,000 interned with her in the prison camp were being held simply because they were Christians. Lee said that the Christians were kept apart from non-Christians in order to prevent the former from influencing the latter.

"I didn't know God when I lived in North Korea because I was brainwashed to worship [North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung]," the former prisoner testified. She said that North Korean children were taught that "Christianity is like opium" and Christians are "puppets of invaders."

The tortures in her camp included forced abortions, Lee remembered. Since the government regarded the prisoners as "people with bad ideology in them," they were not permitted to bear children. When mothers forced to undergo abortions would cry, the guards would kick them and sometimes shoot them to death, Lee said.

WCC CRITICIZES ZIMBABWE
ELECTION, GINGERLY

An international team of observers from the World Council of Churches

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe claimed re-election. A WCC delegation said delicately that its "observations preclude us from confirming the elections to be universal, transparent, fair, or free."

and the All Africa Conference of Churches rendered a restrained verdict on the March presidential election in Zimbabwe. Official returns gave a 54 percent victory to incumbent President Robert Mugabe, but the opposition disputed that result. Mugabe has been a longtime favorite of the WCC, back to his days as a Marxist guerrilla in the 1970s.

The WCC delegation noted irregularities in the Zimbabwean elections. "Huge numbers of people were denied the possibility of voting" by long lines at the polls and election officials who rejected their credentials.

The most serious problem, according to the delegation, was the rampant political violence leading up to the election. "Many incidents of harassment, rape, malicious damage to property and general breakdown in the rule of law were reported to us," the WCC group reported. It delicately remarked that "the violence comes from the rivalry between the two leading parties," but then conceded that "the clear majority of cases should be blamed on the ruling party."

The conclusion of the delegation's report was phrased with striking indirection. "These observations preclude us from confirming the elections to be universal, transparent, fair or free," the report said. But it did not therefore assert that the elections were unfair or unfree.

Other observers were not so reticent. Retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu urged frankness: "When democracy is not being upheld, we [South Africa] ought, for our own sake, say it is not so." **f**



LET THE CHURCH BE THE CHURCH

By Erik Nelson

In December 2001, the Institute for Democracy Studies (IDS) released an exposé of the Episcopal renewal movement. (The article is available online at www.idsonline.org.) The IRD figured quite prominently in the article due to its long-standing support for Scripture-based renewal.

If the IDS hoped for a negative response from IRD, it must have been sadly disappointed. It was a cheerful moment for us when we first read that article. To be attacked by a secular organization—an affiliate of the leftist *Nation* magazine—for our work in our own churches! Wow, we thought, we must have been doing something right to have attracted such notice. My only disappointment was that I had not been on staff long enough to have been criticized by name.

The IDS tried to place the IRD at the center of a vast right-wing conspiracy. It accused the IRD and friends of plotting to destroy American democracy and the church's commitment to social justice. At the heart of the attack is the misguided notion that the IRD is primarily about politics—in particular, an extreme right-wing brand of politics.

We do not see ourselves that way. The IRD's founding statement states that the

first political task of the church is “to be the church.” That is, our first commitment is to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to any political movement or ideology.

Most of us here at the IRD are conservatives. There is a reason for that. Our church leaders typically assert what amounts to a far-left political position on most issues of the day. We are offended because our church officials are condemning our views as contrary to Christian faith. And we know that they have no warrant in Scripture to make such judgments.

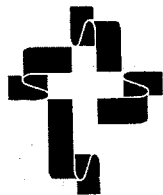
This habit of appropriating the moral authority of the church for partisan political purposes has been the source of great division over the past thirty years. It is a habit that IDS wishes to perpetuate.

But the IRD understands that “God has given us no one pattern for the ordering of societies or of the world.” In those matters where Scripture is not clear about what precise policy should be taken, the church should proclaim biblical principles and leave specific policies open to public debate. No doubt we all have opinions on these issues, but we believe that those policy opinions should not be given the force of church authority. We do not wish to see either political liberalism or conservatism imposed as church doctrine.

“Within our several churches, disagreement about the meaning of social justice should not merely be tolerated; it should be cherished,” our founding statement asserts.

As Christians we are united in our commitment to the Gospel and to principles of justice, love, and peace. But the practical implementation of those values is often not stipulated by Scripture. In those cases God has left us free to seek whatever wisdom can be found in reason, tradition, and experience, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Far too often, however, our church leaders attempt to take that freedom from us.

In short, we want the church to preach and demonstrate the Gospel. To call both individuals and society to repent and be transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ. To encourage private and public institutions to take into account those things with which Christ has charged us—peace, justice, love for neighbor, and concern for the poor. Those goals are not served by a church that has been co-opted by a single political ideology that is not representative of church members. This is what reform of the church's political witness means to us—simply that our church leaders offer sound moral guidance grounded in the truths of Scripture. ■



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