

EXCURSUS 1

Bruce Nichols on THE PRESIDENT AND THE PATRIARCH

Let us pray for the salvation of all those who live in totalitarian darkness, pray they will discover the joy of knowing God....But until they do, let us be aware that...they are the focus of evil in the modern world.

—President Ronald Reagan

It is with bitterness and grief in my heart that I read your belligerent calls...wrapped in the attire of Christian morals. It is not we who would remind you, Mr. President, [that]...“Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13).

—Pimen, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

When a president defending American policy goals on theological grounds is met by a Russian Orthodox patriarch defending the political innocence of Mother Russia, we are faced with a painful symmetry.

Though public policy today is crafted in forums that rarely engage in theological reflection, political leaders occasionally attempt to explain their actions to the public in theological language. President Reagan, “enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus,” did so bluntly in his speech to the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in Orlando, Florida, on March 8. He spoke directly against a nuclear freeze, warning that Russia is an “evil empire,” and editorialists of the Right and Left alike responded in secular shock. Among public leaders, only Archbishop Pimen of Moscow, in an open letter published in the Easter Sunday *New York Times*, replied in

specifically theological terms. Seen together, the speech and the prelate’s response tell a tale of the public uses of theology in a period of international tension over nuclear policies.

The president’s theological analysis had to do with the doctrine of sin in international affairs. According to Mr. Reagan, the threat to America’s current “great spiritual awakening” is modern-day secularism. This secularism is epitomized by communism, though he allowed that “no government schemes”—including those of the secular United States Government—“are going to perfect man.” The West, however, collaborates in communism’s “attempt to make man stand alone without God” when it is indifferent to its own religious heritage. Mr. Reagan counseled the NAE not to “ignore the facts and history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire” in considering their stance on the nuclear freeze.

Not surprisingly, Pimen took up the challenge on behalf of the Russian church. His scorching attack on Mr. Reagan’s theology, complete with more biblical references than a page of the *Times* has seen for decades, overflowed with religious imagery: the Golden Calf, Isaiah’s spears and pruning hooks, the Annunciation, Armageddon.

In substance the letter was little more than an embrace of Russian nationalism. “The Soviet Union is a vast and multifaceted country where people of various religions and non-believers live together in full harmony and respect the right of every man for freedom of conscience,” he said, referring to, among others, Jews, Baptists, and Muslims. “We wholeheartedly support the noble efforts of the Soviet State aimed at the prevention of nuclear war....[With] all our hearts we approve the great peace-making actions of the Soviet State....You, Mr. President, take a great sin upon your soul when you speak about a horrible Soviet threat. There has been no such threat.” Surely Mr. Andropov him-



*“We have reached agreement on a number of trivial details.
Only basic differences remain to be worked out.”*

self could not have asked for more (or demanded less).

This joint exercise in self-righteousness and theological justification is an instructive if dangerous failure. First, it proves once again that theology itself is debased when used to legitimate public political ends. The state has no role dictating the results of theological reflection, particularly in the United States. Theology grows from communities of belief; and while it frequently leads believers into political engagement, the form of that engagement cannot be imposed by political expedience or design. President Reagan told the NAE not to "declare yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault" in the disarmament issue.

Perhaps the recognition of fault on both sides is closer to the theological task at hand. On that score Pimen's letter was a greater failure than the president's speech. The speech had the virtue of making the public sit up and take notice. Pimen's remarks on religious freedom could be dismissed out of hand on the basis of years of contradictory testimony from those who have fled religious persecution in the Soviet Union.

Politically, the president's speech was a failure. It certainly irritated those outside the Christian faith, and it failed to achieve its short-term political goal—a public anti-nuclear-freeze resolution from the NAE. A significant bloc of the evangelicals remained committed to a freeze or to other disarmament goals. This failure to get public support from the NAE has gone unnoticed in editorial analysis of the speech.

Finally, both the speech and the archbishop's letter mock the public uses of theology today. When religious language degenerates into self-justification, boundaries harden and communication evaporates, leaving closed communities and cutting off dialogue. Pimen's letter is full of closed, defensive rhetoric; it is little more than Bible bullets from the ramparts.

It may be that the president's theology was fairly summarized in his NAE speech. But as much as Americans may want their president to share their religious commitments, the nation's pluralism and its post-World War II global leadership role have rendered explicitly Christian language from government officials increasingly hollow and meaningless. In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt could write to the U.S. Catholic bishops that the U.N. would seek "the establishment of an international order in which the spirit of Christ shall rule the hearts of men and of nations." Such an evaluation might be possible today from religious leaders, but it would not be tolerated from the nation's chief executive.

Neither democracy, pluralism, nor secularism has diminished inherent tensions between church and state. The late Anglican leader Max Warren called God and Caesar "beloved enemies," and so they remain. When in a secular democracy a president publicly offers theological rationales for national foreign policy, or when in a Communist dictatorship a bishop parrots state-approved fictions, that love-hate tension in unproductively eased. Theology becomes militant and nations prepare crusades.

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EXCURSUS 2

Mark A. Bruzonsky on THE PARIS DECLARATION

On July 2, 1982, during the height of Israel's massive and relentless bombing of Beirut, three of the world's most respected Jewish statesmen—Nahum Goldmann, Pierre Mendès-France, and Philip Klutznick—issued a plea for Palestinian independence, mutual recognition of Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms, and negotiations between Israel and the PLO. On July 3, Yasir Arafat sent a thoughtful response from his bunker in West Beirut. For two days the exchange dominated the front page of France's leading newspaper, *Le Monde*. The plea and the response from the chairman of the PLO helped set the stage for direct PLO-American Jewish and PLO-Israeli contact. Though largely unreported in the press, there have been exploratory meetings between top officials of the American Jewish Congress and the Zionist Organization of America and very high-ranking PLO personalities. In March, a delegation of Israelis sponsored by the newly created International Center for Peace in the Middle East attended a dinner in Hungary with the PLO's number-two man, Abu Syad. The most significant contact took place last January, when Arafat, accompanied by senior PLO figures, openly received an Israeli reserve general, the former director of Israel's Finance Ministry, and the publisher of one of Israel's leading weekly magazines.

Two of the July signatories, Nahum Goldmann and Pierre Mendès-France, have since passed away, and their plea, eventually known as the Paris Declaration, has become their final appeal to the Jewish people. Goldmann was of the company of Herzl, Weizmann, and Ben-Gurion—a towering figure of modern Zionist history and one who had major influence on Jewish life. It was he who, in order that expression be given to both the unity and diversity of Jewish life, inspired and was a co-founder of the World Jewish Congress. Mendès-France, French patriot and statesman of international stature, combined Jewish values with a socialist outlook; and to his last days he anguished over the predicament of the Jewish people. Philip Klutznick, the third signatory, was secretary of commerce during the Carter administration. A former president of both B'nai B'rith International and the World Jewish Congress, he was co-founder, with Dr. Goldmann, of the Presidents' Conference of Major American Jewish Organizations.

In retrospect, the Goldmann-Mendès-France-Klutznick statement seems to have brought into public view the widening fissure between important segments of diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel over the "Palestinian problem." Not until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon had three major Diaspora personalities come together with a statement so critical of the Israeli Government, so publicly in favor of Palestinian independence and of negotiations between Israel and the PLO. Why the change?

Simply put, the "Jewish problem" has not been solved by Zionism. In some ways it has only been exacerbated. After some three-and-a-half decades of independent existence in the historic homeland of the Jewish people, Jews remain fearful, uncertain, and insecure. Furthermore, there is an uneasy feeling that Israel's current military strength does not in itself guarantee the viability and longevity of Jewish independence in the Middle East; and Israel's attempts to command the political loyalty of the Jewish diaspora have caused a rebirth of the debate over the meaning and legitimacy of Jewish life in the Diaspora.

Today, an old and rejected form of Zionism has revived