Correspondence

Christian Communication

To the Editors: Richard Neuhaus's article in the June issue ("Toeing the Line at the Cutting Edge") raises a number of issues concerning the relationship of bodies like the World Council of Churces and the World Student Christian Federation to their constituencies—real or potential—in the United States. Since our connections with the WCC are negligible, we shall not comment on the exposition of these relationships. Being at least on the margins of the World Student Christian Federation, through our role as Lutheran campus pastors, we would make some comments on the exposition of those relationships.

The first comment is that his conspiracy theory is not new or original. It has been spoken in Lutheran circles for several years now, so that every recent meeting of the North American regional committee has had to deal with this feeling on the part of some denominational representatives.

The second comment is that since the mid-sixties and the suicidal demise of the University Christian Movement in the USA, WSCF communication with anyone in the U.S. was difficult at best. There hasn't been anyone to talk to for years besides some affiliated groups, like the Lutheran Student Movement.

The third comment would be that if WSCF has really tried to hide its position from its North American—especially U.S.—constituencies, it has done a marvelously poor job. We can personally attest to representations and discussions of the Socialist/Marxist perspective within WSCF in LSM sessions, with Lutheran Church executives present; and of converstion with broader segments of the Lutheran constituency that covered the same ground, much of it deriving from their presence at WSCF meetings or consultations.

In addition, WSCF publications—from the *Student World* of the 1960's through more recent works on *Peasant Theology* and actual items of Bible study in a materialistic perspective, to Socialist critiques of the energy problem in North America—all represent their positions openly.

The primary evidence for Neuhaus's conspiracy-of-silence theory is the letter from former General Secretary Feliciano Carino, so extensively cited in the article. Just enough of the letter is left out to submerge the fact, however, that Dr. Carino's letter was written by a WSCF staff person to an executive in a North American denomination, *not* another WSCF staff person. The "official staff report" referred to (p. 19 of the Neuhaus article) is not a WSCF staff report but a report of a denominational executive to his own USA constituency.

Admittedly, things are not all roses in WSCF, any more than is the case in any organization that seeks to be international, pluralistic, and interdenominational these days. Furthermore, that Marxist/Socialist analysis informs the thinking of most of the top WSCF leadership may be true. However, as any observer of the Sri Lanka Assembly of the past February (including one of the undersigned) could note, the diversity of WSCF is evidenced in its national movements. There is no one political philosophy pervading all SCMs. While some national SCM leaders and movements work hard at doing Christian theology using Marxist or Maoist categories, others have only a mild interest in Marxism.

But WSCF has not struggled to hide its position. Indeed, a careful reading of the Carino letter might lead to the conclusion that U.S. denominational leaders are afraid to tell their constituencies about the place of Marxism within the WSCF. In some denominations this has been no secret, although it has been the subject of debate and extensive reports.

There are a good many things in WSCF that need change, but we do not think the problem is doublespeak. That problem lies with the bureaucracies of the U.S. denominations, who, knowing full well what is up with WSCF, do not trust their own people enough to let them have the same information.

There is a final comment that needs to be underscored, for Neuhaus alluded to it but it tends to be forgotten. The WSCF cannot easily be placed beside the WCC, as if they were the same type of international organizations. Churches and denominations are not represented within the WSCF councils; student and university ministries are so related. The channels of accountability and resource development, therefore, are not at all

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0084255900021859 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Profiles in Belief: The Religious Bodies of the United States and Canada, Vol. I by Arthur Carl Piepkorn

(Harper & Row; 324 pp.; $15.95)

This is the first in a seven-volume work that Martin E. Marty, in the introduction, confidently calls "a classic." The confidence is warranted. It is the magnum opus of the late Arthur Carl Piepkorn, a Lutheran theologian who devoted years to the meticulous gathering and checking of information about religious groups in North America. This volume treats Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches—and that, the reader quickly discovers, means literally hundreds of small and large communions ranging from the well-known to the esoteric and bizarre. While the focus is, as the title suggests, on belief, Piepkorn includes relevant information about organization, membership, and history. Succeeding volumes will treat Protestant Denominations, Holiness and Pentecostal Bodies, Fundamental and Independent Bodies, Metaphysical Bodies, Judaism, and Oriental, Humanist, and Unclassified Bodies. *Profiles in Belief* will certainly be a basic reference work in any library of consequence.

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comparable. Some of us believe that this will continue to bring lively debate and new support to the World Student Christian Federation.

The Rev. Dr. Ted Fritschel
The Rev. Louis A. Smith
The Rev. Albert R. Ahlstrom

The writers are Lutheran Campus Pastors in Honolulu, Hawaii, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and at Columbia University, New York, respectively.

Richard John Neuhaus Responds:

First, the article was chiefly about the World Council of Churches (WCC) and only incidentally about the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). In agreement with Ahlstrom et al., the article made clear that these are two very different creatures, although they are suffering a similar erosion of credibility for largely similar reasons. Second, the article said nothing about a "conspiracy theory" or "conspiracy of silence" with respect to WSCF, although whether such a theory is "new or original" would have nothing to do with whether or not it is true. To be sure, WSCF publishes regularly, but who reads the stuff? As far as I can discover, in North America no more than a few hundred people stay marginally in touch with the WSCF and its materials, and most of them are in official positions of the ecumenical establishment and are thus required to maintain the bureaucratic contact. I don't see that it matters to whom Dr. Carino wrote his letter. It was accurately quoted in the article, and its message is deeply troubling. To say that "Marxist/Socialist analysis informs the thinking of most of the top WSCF leadership" is a delicacy at the edge of deceit—although unintentional on the part of the letter-writers, I am sure. As quoted in my article, Carino puts the question more forthrightly: "Is Marxism-Leninism simply the instrument of political analysis, or has it become...a creed to which everyone is called to adhere, and which is the tacit basis of the work of the Federation?" He leaves little doubt that he has been forced reluctantly to the conclusion that it is, or is fast becoming, the second.

But above all I wish to support wholeheartedly the writers' contention that the chief failure has been with North American church executives. They have not had the interest or the courage to communicate to their constituencies what is happening in the WSCF and other agencies. Especially is this true of the WCC, where North Americans and others who know better "go along" with outrageous posturings in order not to jeopardize their "identification" with the presumed radicalism of the Third World, or simply because they think that what the WCC says and does isn't all that important. As a result, of course, these agencies become less important than they already are to North American church members.

Church leaders with whom I have spoken agree that probably no more than 10 per cent of the people in member churches here have any more than a vague awareness of the existence of the WCC. Of that more knowledgeable 10 per cent, a majority likely views the WCC negatively. Of the commitedly Christian students on North American campuses, it seems certain that only a very small fraction of 1 per cent even knows there is a WSCF. And that is a great shame, for we desperately need agencies that bring Christians together across national and cultural lines to celebrate and advance the mission of the One Church. The letter-writers are more confident than other informed observers that the WSCF could once again be that kind of agency. I hope they are right, but the evidence suggests that students who really care about transnational Christian sharing are not and will not be looking to the WSCF.

"The Same Old Illusions"?

To the Editors: At the end of my article on "Morality, Law, and the New World Order" (*Worldview*, September) I concluded that "the United States is charged by the elementary logic of the present world situation with pursuing in good faith, assiduously and generously, its professed national purpose of contributing toward the construction of a viable internationalism. That way lies international morality." Professor Paul Ramsey, in his Response in the same issue, takes exception, saying that it would be a mistake to take my statement as "a signpost pointing toward an adequate public philosophy for world order in our time." We have in my article, he says, "the same old illusions, the same escalation of political expectations, the same reach beyond grasp that Browning used to justify heaven."

The purpose of my short article was not quite as comprehensive as suggested; I simply set forth some general arguments regarding the present