

Editorial

Faith, Freedom and Democracy

Today the call for democracy resounds round the globe. In the last two astonishing years, the desire for democracy has stirred hearts, created martyrs and impacted global politics to a degree seldom if ever before experienced.

Eastern Europeans' longing for democratic freedom (and Western consumer goods) overthrew well-entrenched totalitarian governments. Black South Africans' yearning for political rights is finally demolishing apartheid. Using ballots rather than guns, Chileans replaced a military dictator and Algerian fundamentalists overwhelmed secular politicians. The brave students of Tiananmen Square failed momentarily, but the democratic vision lives on in China. And in the name of democracy, Mr Gorbachev has introduced unheard of change in Soviet society. As both vision and reality, democracy is on the move.

This issue of *Transformation* poses a basic question: is there anything biblical at stake in the struggle for democracy?

We must be careful. A quick look at church history reminds one of how quickly and easily Christians have often provided moral and theological sanction for current political practice. Nor dare we overlook the fact that theocracy was the norm in the Old Testament, and monarchy prevailed throughout most of Christian history. Only since the eighteenth century (and partly because of the secular Enlightenment) has democracy spread significantly. Donald Shell charts the sources of democracy.

On the other hand, modern democracy did arise first in Christian lands - in particular Protestant England and the United States. Should people committed to biblical values prefer and promote democratic forms of government? As the following article by Richard John Neuhaus and the responses demonstrate, many think the answer must be some kind of cautious "yes".

Further important questions also press upon us. Is there also some

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connection between a democratic political order and a market economy? And if the democratization of power is good and explains why democracy is important, then is not the democratization of economic life equally important? And does not this principle apply just as much to huge multi-national corporations as to centralized, communist state bureaucracies?

Donald Shell raises these and other questions as he examines the development of democratic ideas and practice since 5th century Athens. Democracy is a much an ideal and an attitude as an institution.

Finally, why, as Rene Padilla and Jim Wallis ask so pointedly, are today's democratic societies responsible for so much economic injustice? Christopher Smith gives a telling biblical study of the judgement of God on economic injustice in Revelation 18.

The following articles make no claim to resolve these momentous questions. But they do join the debate with vigour and clarity. ●

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