

# Correspondence

## IRS vs. the Churches

To the Editors: Frank Patton's lament ("Internal Revenue vs. the Prophets," June, 1972) about Government repression of the churches' social witness is a necessary service, no doubt. But it also misses several important points. First, he does not mention that this problem is not his unique discovery; there are several bills in Congress now that are designed to prevent precisely the kind of IRS intimidation that Patton deplors. Second, why focus so singularly on the churches? The fact is that foundations and other voluntary associations are encountering the same difficulties, and, no disrespect to the churches intended, their social concern has frequently been more evident and effective than the concern of religious organizations.

Third, is there not a legitimate concern on the part of the State to prevent excessive political powers being wielded by essentially private agencies that are in no way accountable to the public? This is the other side of the foundation picture, especially where wealthy individuals can establish well-endowed foundations to push their own political viewpoint, whether conservative, liberal, or other. One thinks, for example, of the disruptive influence of the Ford Foundation in sponsoring irresponsible educational experiments in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville sections of Brooklyn. Fourth and finally, perhaps one of the reasons for the growing resistance to the churches' social involvement is that groups such as the National Council of Churches have lost contact with their own constituencies. In NCC pronouncements it is frequently impossible to distinguish any peculiarly "religious" or "Christian" content in positions that seem rather automatically to reflect whatever is "in" among the liberal-radical intellectual establishment. Maybe if the quality of religious social involvement were improved, the Government would be better able to distinguish between

genuinely religious and purely partisan political activities. Instead of simply deploring IRS policy, we should perhaps be grateful to the Government for raising some fundamental questions about the role of religion in American society.

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Frank Patton responds:

The problem of IRS and Government interest in the activities of non-profit groups is hardly my unique discovery, but it surely isn't the unique discovery of the foundations. The latter were marvelously silent about the subject until, to their shock and amazement, Congress passed the Tax Reform Act of 1969, imposing severe restrictions on the retention and use of funds by foundations like Ford, Rockefeller, etc., the so-called "private foundations." They began to yell, in a dignified way, of course, and legislation was introduced to permit specified efforts by certain non-profit groups to influence legislation. It's not at all a sure thing that any such legislation will be adopted.

Why focus on the churches? Why not? One hesitates to say it, but churches *are* different from other groups. Churches enjoy the protections of the freedom of religion provision of the First Amendment, and it may well be that churches have a special commission to affect public affairs insofar as the public affairs relate to the church. Aha, but what relates to the church? Should the church make that determination or should the State? At this point I would be happier that the church determine it because I fear the church a good deal less than the State. Others may differ.

But we must remember that there are two political functions at issue. One is the right to participate in partisan political campaigns; the tax laws (and I) say that churches, as well as foundations, educational institutions and other exempt organizations had better keep hands off. But the other is the right to speak, to influence, to be heard on public issues—a different bag entirely. We

need to hear the church, just as we need to hear all groups and people, and we need not fear information as long as we hear it from all sides. At the point the Government chokes off the right to speak, then we have got troubles. (We must even hear from the whipping boy, the National Council of Churches, which is considered shockingly radical when, in fact, it is often more conservative than the national administrations of its member churches.)

Finally, the role of the church in public affairs is a new game now. The 1950's and '60's are over, and the church is looking for a new identity. There is, of course, the danger of the church's trying to be "with it" too much, to be merely visibly relevant and contemporaneous, and to perform for the media. But that is only to say that the church must set itself the task of defining a serious role in public affairs in the coming years. Religious worship must be relevant and significant and must reflect more than the stylistic fads of the moment. Therefore, the church must measure its response to public issues, and perhaps be far more sophisticated about its response; but to fail to respond would be to recede, to diminish and perhaps to perish.

## The Greek Colonels

To the Editors: In his *Art of Clear Writing*, Rudolf Flesch developed a Fog Index for rating the clarity of a piece of writing. It penalizes lengthy sentences, prevalence of polysyllabic words and avoidance of the concrete in favor of abstractions. David Holden's piece on "The Greek Colonels and Their Critics" (*World-view*, May) rates less than a "fair" by this stylistic index, which judges only the *how* and not the *what* in written expression.

There are also *functional* fogs in need of an index. The criteria for rating the credibility of the *what* would necessarily be more amorphous and subjective than Flesch's. . . . Pragmatically, though, stylistic fog usually serves as accessory to functional fog. [continued on p. 62]