

# RELIGION

## Rebuilding America soul by soul

President Reagan once said, "We declared war on poverty and poverty won." It is widely accepted that America's experiment with social engineering has been a failure. In almost all of the country's major cities, crime is at crisis levels, teen pregnancy levels are epidemic and homicide rates are dangerously high. It is not an overstatement to describe our inner cities as being in a state of social disintegration. By almost every quality of life measure, the condition of those receiving help from government programs show an increase in the misery of those supposedly helped by government programs.

However, more and more Christians are discovering the simple truth that people empowered by God are the most effective solution for the spiritual and economic development of the poor. In the words of FCS Urban Ministries in Atlanta, Georgia and Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) board member Bob Lupton, "We are finally willing to admit that we

cannot program poverty away. We must dust off forgotten truth and translate into the hightech age a technology that has the power to bring God's shalom to the city.

"The CCDA is an association of Christian churches, ministries, families, and individuals. Through CCDA, committed people of God are no longer working in the trenches among America's poor, thinking they are the only ones.

Members encourage each other and learn from one another.

They engage in a range of community development activities such as community development training, evangelism, housing, job creation and youth counseling.

By working together consulting one another, members of the CCDA strive to strengthen existing Christian community development organizations and provide encouragement to new Christian community development efforts.

CCDA hopes to inspire all those individuals helping develop communities in a Christian way and to help

to mobilize the body of Christ at large. CCDA works together with ministries to mobilize spiritual and physical resources in and for communities through the Church.

Christian community development is a biblical approach based on three key principles:

• *When we live among people we minister to, we become one with them. It is no longer just a matter of merely helping, but rather we become a part of the community working together to solve its problems.*

• *Reconciliation with our neighbor is the result of loving God (1 John 4:19-21). Our love for Christ should break down every racial, social, or economic barrier.*

• *When the body of Christ is visibly present among the poor, and when we are loving our neighbor the way we love ourselves, the result is redistribution—sharing our lives and skills and resources in a way that enables people to become all that God intended them to be.*

The Christian Community Development Association was born out of

a 1989 gathering of Christian leaders spearheaded by Dr. John Perkins in Chicago, Illinois.

The gathering was of individuals bonded by a significant commitment to expressing the love of Christ in America's poor communities, not just in words, but by good deeds.

From this gathering, the CCDA was formed and in a few short years, CCDA has grown from 37 founding members to over 3,000 individuals and 400 churches and ministries in 35 states and more than 100 cities.

Dr. Perkins, the Chairman of CCDA, recently wrote in his Urban Family magazine, "As African American Christians, we must be able to stand unwavering for justice—whether political or individual—and at the same time passionately insist on personal responsibility."

Through CCDA, Dr. Perkins is giving many others the chance to live responsibly and teach others to do the same.

## Mexican Government Behind Death?

A Roman Catholic church newspaper alleged Tuesday that the "highest circles of power" in Mexico were behind the 1994 murder of ruling party presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio.

The bimonthly newspaper Nuevo Criterio, a publication of the Archdiocese of Mexico, said in an unusually outspoken editorial that the Colosio slaying was clearly a plot and not the work of a lone gunman.

"The resources used to carry out the crime, but especially the way it was handled afterward, make it clear that ... the mastermind was in the highest circles of power," it said.

It added, without directly accusing Mexico's former president: "There is much evidence of the violent and vengeful way in which ex-president (Carlos) Salinas de Gortari resolved his difficulties with other people."

In a statement issued late Tuesday, the Archdiocese pointed out that the publication was not official, and did not represent the views of the Archbishop or the Catholic church as an institution. It said the editorial was intended to offer readers "ele-

ments to reflect upon."

Salinas has denied any involvement in the killing.

Authorities last year said he was not being investigated in relation to the crime but might be called to testify.

Salinas left Mexico in disgrace last year following the arrest of his brother on murder charges and lives in Ireland.

The newspaper alleged the March 23, 1994, slaying of Colosio—Salinas' hand-picked successor, who had been widely expected to win August 1994 presidential elections—was the work of "someone who had more than enough reasons to get rid of an uncomfortable and independent candidate."

The Roman Catholic church in Mexico is not generally known for such pronouncements on public affairs.

Many Mexicans said they believe Salinas was involved in the Colosio slaying, the most serious political assassination in Mexico in half a century, because Colosio was not obeying instructions from the man who gave him the candidacy.

## Clinton, Gore help rebuild church

Preaching against racial intolerance, President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore last week pounded nails to help rebuild a black church destroyed by fire in a hard-scrabble town in west Tennessee.

Clinton and Gore, joined by their wives Hillary and Tipper, came here to celebrate the spirit of togetherness shown by the congregations of a black church and a white one who joined forces to rebuild their burned houses of worship.

"You're not just rebuilding your churches here. You're showing America what's right with America and in doing that you're leading us to a bright and better future," Clinton told the two congregations outside the Salem Missionary Baptist Church construction site under a punishing sun that parched surrounding fields of corn, cotton and soybeans.

Before the black Salem Missionary Baptist Church and the white New

Shiloh United Methodist Church in nearby Humboldt burned, the congregations had never met. But in the wake of the Methodist church destruction in 1994 and the Baptist one in 1995 they came together and are helping each other build new churches on the same land where the old ones stood.

"It seems like everything has come together in the right way," Gore said.

The white church fire apparently was accidental, but the black one is being investigated as arson. The FBI and other federal and state agencies have been investigating a series of fires that have destroyed more than 70 churches since January 1995, mainly in the South and most attended by blacks.

In Fruitland, Clinton said Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Rwanda and Burundi have all suffered bloodshed and heartache from ethnic differences and he was determined not to let

America go down that "dark alley" of despair. "I think it is a test of the character of our people," he said.

It was a birthday appearance for Clinton, who turned 50, and for Mrs. Gore, who turned 48. Clinton had celebrated his birthday with a star-studded show in New York Sunday night.

"You have given us a great gift today ... You have shown us that we have more than we think and that we can give more than we think," he told the worshippers.

After their speeches, Clinton and Gore, clad in blue jeans and sport shirts, stepped inside the newly constructed walls of the church, put on heavy work gloves and helped put up some sheetrock. They tacked it in place with nails, then Clinton struggled with a power drill to put screws into the wall.

Mrs. Clinton, Mrs. Gore and their daughters busied themselves inside

as well.

The setting allowed the Democratic incumbent to show some youthful vigour, pounding nails in 90-degree (32-degree C) heat, in contrast to Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole's 73rd birthday celebration at an ice cream social in Kansas in July.

The Rev. Dan Donaldson of the Salem Missionary church told the crowd he realized there was possibly a political element in Clinton's visit but he said the president was also a human being and a man of compassion.

### Online with Jesus

A new software program that offers shy cybersinners the chance to confess to their own computers drew a rebuke Friday from Germany's Roman Catholic Church, which was clearly not amused by the novel disc.

"This does not conform to the Catholic understanding of confession," a spokeswoman for the German Conference of Bishops said. "You cannot have sins forgiven by the push of a button."

The "Confession by Computer" disc, marketed by the Cologne-based Lazarus Society, lets users select their shortcomings from a list of 200 failings that can be customized for especially original sinners.

"As soon as the sin is selected on the basis of the Ten Commandments, the computer searches out an appropriate penance," the disc's promotional literature says.

It displays on screen or reads out audibly the words to the prayers "Our Father" and "Hail Mary," then suggests how to get in touch with priests, ministers or a pastor on the Internet.

The "Online with Jesus" disc, dreamed up by a Duesseldorf programmer and developed with the help of theologians, also offers more than 50 prayers, the text of the rosary, the order of the Catholic mass and a Protestant church service.

"The sermon, written specially for this disc, can be read or listened to," it added.

Lazarus, which describes itself as an ecumenical humanitarian organization, is selling the discs for \$52 — part of which will go to charity.

### Interfaith Grandparents

With the surge in intermarriage in recent years, a new generation of grandparents is learning how to strike a balance between passing on the traditions that are important to them and respecting the wishes of their children and children-in-law of different faiths. It is increasingly common for grandparents to find that their grandchildren are being raised in a different faith, or in a combination of two faiths. When this occurs, grandparents are often left searching for sensitive and meaningful ways to connect with their grandchildren.

According to the Jewish Outreach Institute, there are over 800,000 children under the age of 18 living in interfaith households. Yet there are only a handful of balanced, respectful resources written to strengthen the ties between these children and their extended families.

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*Birth Announcement*  
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8 lbs, 21 & 1/2 inches  
Father: Andre M. Petett  
Mother: Stacey Pettett