

Lobbyist or prophet?

tion with their past attempts at exercising direct influence on government and, as a result, considerable skepticism about the value of such an approach. The churches' record has certainly not been without success, but, as in the case of the government's shift in policy towards South Africa in 1977, these achievements are often symbolic rather than substantive in nature.

Secondly, despite this record of ineffectiveness, everyone emphasized the importance of maintaining direct contact with government and parliament. Even if their efforts had little effect on government policy, they still believed that it was important to express solidarity with the powerless, with those whose rights were violated, and to remain consistent with the churches' own values. It was realized also that if the churches chose to remain silent, the government could well interpret this as acquiescence or, even worse, consent. The churches have an obligation in this imperfect world to voice their beliefs, in effect to act as the "conscience of society." For many, then, the churches must

must continue to speak out to government, many argue that their principal role should lie in education. Accordingly, they should and do focus primarily on raising consciousness of their own constituency as to the nature and extent of human rights violations at home and abroad and as to the moral responsibility of all Christians to correct such situations. In undertaking this task their direct contact with government can often prove extremely useful. Illustrating clearly the issue at stake, the need for improvement and the inadequate performance of the Canadian government.

Modest results

If we accept that the church leaders are correct in the largely negative assessment of their lobbying activities, what factors help to explain that outcome? In my view, an adequate explanation of the churches' ineffectiveness must be multi-dimensional. *In the first place*, an answer must be sought in the specific issue of human rights and the anarch



remain faithful to their role as a prophetic voice in the world community. Acting as prophet the churches should not expect from government an immediate, favorable response to their demands. Often their proposals will be viewed by government as idealistic and therefore unattainable.

Although most accepted the fact that the churches

cal, international system within which human rights promotion takes place. Even if one were to accept the argument that the violation of human rights, particularly if it is flagrant and persistent, is of legitimate international concern, there remains considerable doubt as to what another state *should* and *can* do.

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