

Religion and science

A group of British scientists (who are also Christians) is trying to help the Methodist Church educate its congregation on some moral issues of science and technology policy. Last week the group published a controversial document to guide the church in its task.

The document, called *Shaping Tomorrow*, is essentially a statement of how scientists working in several different fields reconcile their work with their faith. Topics it tackles include nuclear energy policy, the electronics revolution and its impact on employment and the implications of advances in the life sciences for the ethical issues surrounding human reproduction. The idea, according to Mr Edgar Boyes, vice-principal of Luton Industrial College and editor of the document, is partly to provide lay people with facts and partly to put on record the moral judgements of scientists who are enthusiastic about technology and are also Christians.

The idea for the document originally came from scientists working at the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority who felt that a grass-roots response was needed to counter certain anti-technology statements made by the clergy. Scientists who are also Christians, they felt, could help the church out of its confusion by providing facts on technological issues and by explaining why they felt justified in pursuing both their careers and their faiths with clear consciences.

Although the document is a Methodist Church publication, the clergy have not greeted it with unanimous approval. In particular, the section on nuclear power is proving contentious. The scientists admit that they have not taken into account judgements contrary to their own but believe that bias may be the key to the document's success in stimulating serious discussion. Debates amongst small groups are already planned in Luton Industrial College and, the scientists hope, churches throughout the country will soon follow suit. **Judy Redfearn**

Third World support

US policy emerges

Washington

The US State Department seems to have given its tentative blessing to a new initiative being promoted by seventeen developing and so-called "middle-tier" countries to support the growth of science and technology in the Third World.

Their goal is to find a way of matching three components: the scientific, technical and institutional needs of the world's poorest nations; the knowledge and know-how that has already been built up by industrialized countries; and access to public and private capital in both these and the oil-producing nations.

But bending to economic and political realities, the hope is that this can be done without provoking the conflicts and confrontations which accompanied recent efforts to carry out the same task in the name of the new International Economic Order — and which have subsequently fallen victim to the stalemate in North-South negotiations illustrated by last month's United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in Nairobi.

Earlier this year a delegation of ministers and civil servants responsible for national science, technology and economic development policies from ten of the nations visited several oil-producing countries — including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Nigeria and Venezuela — to enlist their support for this new approach (*Nature* May 14, p.103).

Following the apparent success of this mission, an expanded delegation headed by Minister Ben Dhia of Tunisia visited Washington last week for what were later described by its members as "very productive" talks with State Department and other Administration officials.

Well aware that requests for increased foreign aid are unlikely to generate any sympathy from the Reagan Administration's budgeteers — or, indeed, from Congress — the delegation is said to have played down this part of their proposal. However, the State Department seems to have been more interested in those aspects of the new initiative which coincide with its own view that technical assistance to developing nations has an important contribution to make towards national security through reducing political and economic instability in these countries.

In line with this approach, President Reagan's new science adviser, Dr George A. Keyworth, visited Mexico two weeks ago to discuss increased collaboration with the United States in a range of scientific and technological areas, including agriculture, energy, remote sensing and basic sciences.

Dr Keyworth's visit was aimed primarily at reviewing the status of projects initiated under an agreement set up by President Carter. However, a communiqué issued after a meeting with Dr Edmundo Flores, head of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT), emphasized that the goal of the meeting had been to agree on "mechanisms and procedures for the period 1981 to 1983 that adapt the scientific cooperation to the general objectives of bilateral cooperation recently defined by President Ronald Reagan and [Mexican] President José López Portillo."

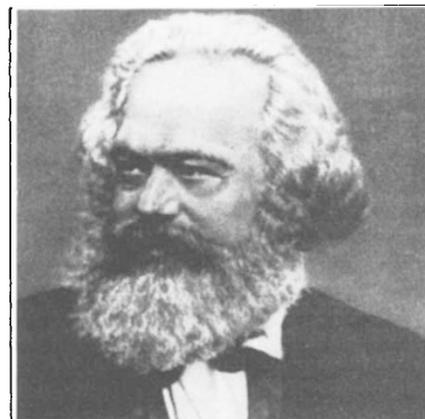
Following their visit to Mexico, the ministerial delegation flew to Bonn for discussion with German government officials, and subsequently to Paris and Brussels for talks with the European Economic Community. The immediate goal is to produce a common position

among the developing countries themselves on their principal needs in building up their scientific and technical capabilities in a form that can be agreed on at a general ministerial meeting being hosted by the Venezuelan government in Caracas early next month.

After that, the next formal step would be to present the proposals to the Second Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, which meets in New York in November. This committee must decide what to do about the Interim Fund for Science and Technology, set up on a two-year basis under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the Vienna Conference, whose mandate will technically run out at the end of December.

Before the committee meets, however, it is widely expected that any proposals agreed to in principle in Caracas will be made known to the heads of state attending the summit meeting on North-South issues taking place at the end of October in Cancun, Mexico, at the invitation of President López Portillo — and with the expected attendance of President Reagan. If this meeting turns out to be successful, those who have been developing the new science and technology initiative — including officials from UNDP — hope that it may prove to be the right size and shape to be endorsed by both developed and developing nations.

David Dickson



Karl Marx — PhD

The Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (GDR) recently discovered new documentary evidence about the awarding of a Doctorate in Philosophy to Karl Marx. A university archivist stumbled on an entry relating to Marx's degree in the records of the Philosophy Faculty for 1841 which has apparently been overlooked by all the biographers and collators of Marx, including the compilers of the *Complete Works of Marx and Engels*. A facsimile of the entry will be reproduced in a history being published to coincide with the university's 425th anniversary in 1983.

Vera Rich