

Congregationalists on Social Concerns

Articles from the *Congregationalist*, 1958-1996

Readings in the History and Polity of the National
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE '60's

Youth sexuality, Marxism, Ethical Theory, Traditional Values, Middle East, Liberalism, Race, Law and Order, Drug Abuse, Death and Dying

- "The Church and Personality." Joseph Cimborra, Jr., September '62
- "Young People, Sex, and the Church." Louis Gerhardt, March '65
- "The Word of God . . . in . . . Marx & Trotsky." Henry Gray, October '65
- "What is Right or Wrong?" Russell Clinchy, May '67
- "I'm for the Upperdog!" Miller Upton, October '67
- "The Forgotten Christian in the Middle East." Henry David Gray, January '68
- "The Role of the Church." Howard Kershner, January '68
- The Car and the Pill." Harry Butman, February '68
- "About the 'Curse of Ham' On the Negro Race." Richard Kilgore & Edward Leigh, May '68
- "The Mystique of the Law." Harry Butman, September '68.
- "Call Me Nigger." Olive Walker, January '69
- "Norwich Narcotic Abuse." Karl Ostberg, April '69
- "Prolongation: How Far Do We Go?" Calvin Openshaw, September '69

THE '70's

Environment, Clerical Activism, Pornography, Capital Punishment, Abortion, Peace, Public Education, Watergate, Disabilities, Sex Roles, Animal Rights, Inclusive Language, NACCC Role

- "Man and His Environment." Norman Ream, January '70
- "Father Groppi and Christ's Church." Richard Wheeler, March '70
- "The Pervert's Revolution." Melvin Anchell
- Capital Punishment and the Christian Conscience." Calvin Openshaw, September '70
- "What If?" Norman Ream, December '70
- "How Make Peace?" Walter Judd, January '71
- "Abortion Unlimited: It's Here, What's Next?" Calvin Openshaw, May '71
- "What is Wrong with Modern Education?" Robert Thornton, June '71
- "Christ is the Answer . . . to What?" Tom Skinner, January '72
- "Watergate Then and Now." Lester Schriver, November '73
- "Independence and Responsibility for Everyone." Arlene Bryant, December '73
- "Pornography Anyone?" Melvin Anchell, January '74
- "How the New Woman Feels in the Old Worship Service." Sharon Emswiler, November '74
- "A Matter of Choice." John Hoyt, March '76
- "So God Created Persons." Robert Meyers, January '77
- "Was Jesus a Feminist?" Mary Lane, August '78
- Proposal for an NACCC Social Concerns Committee, November '78
- Reaction to Proposal for Social Concerns Committee, June '79

THE '80's

Hunger, the Middle East, Free Markets, Inclusive Language, Disabilities, Gender Roles, Aging, Mental Illness, Suicide, Ollie North, Hunger

- "What Can You Do About Hunger?" February '82
- "Lebanon: A Country of Conflicts." James Lyons, December '82
- "Religion's Stake in a Free Economy." Edmund Opitz, February '83
- "Our Images of God." Ralph and Carol DiBiasio-Snyder, June '84
- "Our Churches and the Handicapped." Mary Woolsey, December '84
- "Traditional Women's Groups in Crisis." Sara Fetty, April '85
- "No Two Days are the Same as Nursing Home Chaplain." James Lowmaster, April '86
- "How Can We Minister to the Mentally Ill?" Laurie Endicott, April '86
- "Suicide is a Recognizable Illness." George Nichols, February '87
- "Ollie North." Robin Meyers and Gerry Hoard, October '87
- "Women in the Church." Lewis Hopfe, December '89

THE '90's

Homelessness, AIDS, Death and Dying, Abortion, Second Amendment, Prisons, Affordable Housing, Literacy, Suicide, Sexual Orientation, Families, Student Activism, TV Violence, Prisons, the Holocaust

- "Interfaith hospitality Networks for the Homeless." April '90
- "How Does the Church Respond to the Challenge of AIDS?" Anita Smith, December '90
- "Going Home to God." Ralph Folsom, December '90
- "Plymouth Church Deals with the Abortion Issue." John Hemruch, February '92
- "I Almost Shot Charles Manson." Harry Butman, February '92
- "Gun Control is Constitutional." Robert Goldwin, February '92
- "Even the Most Inhumane Inmates Can Learn Christian Values." Cynthia Thorpe, February '92
- "Share the Gift." Juliana Otis, June '92
- "Christian Love in Action." Ronda Wooten, October '92
- "Abortion." James Beinke, August '92
- "Why I Gave up TV for Lent." David Henry, February '93
- "Christian Counseling for the Clinically Depressed, Suicidal Individual." Giovan Venable, March '93
- "God Does Not Play Favorites." John Currier, June '93
- "Family Problems Challenge the Church." David Henry, October '93
- "What is Praxis?" Arlin Larson, December '93
- "Mustard Seed Plants 'Seeds of Hope'." Susan Jones, February '94
- "More Than Food." Barbara Hunt, February '95
- "Issues of Medical Futility." Lloyd Hall, October '95
- "Christian Compassion." Gustave Goldshine, February '96
- "The Second Parent." Betty Vos, December '96

INTRODUCTION

How have the churches of the National Association of Congregational Christian churches responded to the social problems of our day? The first thing to be said is, with one exception, not collectively. Congregationalists have traditionally worked through ad hoc voluntary societies, such as the American Missionary Association and Women's Christian Temperance Union, for addressing social concerns. There was no national mechanism for social action to which the churches were bound. Second, the founders of the NACCC in 1957 were united in their opposition to their predecessor General Council of Congregational Christian Churches' Council for Social Action. This was in part because of its tilt toward the left and in part because of its presumption to act on behalf of the churches collectively. The NACCC was, therefore, created with no provision for addressing social concerns on either an advocacy or educational basis.

Lack of collective involvement, however, does not indicate that Congregationalists do not have a social conscience or are not affected by the issues of the day. From the very circumstances of its origins, Congregationalism has been deeply involved in reforming society. It was born in civil disobedience against the established order of 17th century England. It then set about to establish a new form of society in North America, one which rejected monarchy and instituted democracy. In the early years, when colonial Congregationalists held a religious monopoly, they worked hand in hand with "the magistrates," civil government, to reform "manners" (behavior) as well as piety. The move toward ad hoc voluntary societies began, however, as early as the eighteenth century when circumstances required toleration of other denominations, especially of the Church of England. Congregational social action on the societal level reasserted itself in the American Revolution as a "black regiment" of Congregational clergy served as propagandists as well as chaplains. In the new United States Congregationalists continued as leading reformers on a number of fronts -- abolition, temperance, education, the social gospel.

In the twentieth century, however, Christian social activism was taking directions disturbing to many in the churches -- more collectivist and critical of the Protestant/capitalist order which they had helped bring into being. The Congregationalists who merged into the United Church of Christ embraced the new forms and enthusiasms. Those who joined the NACCC, for both institutional and ideological reasons, did not. Social involvement was left to individual churches; the churches were not particularly inclined to get involved in causes of either the political right or political left.

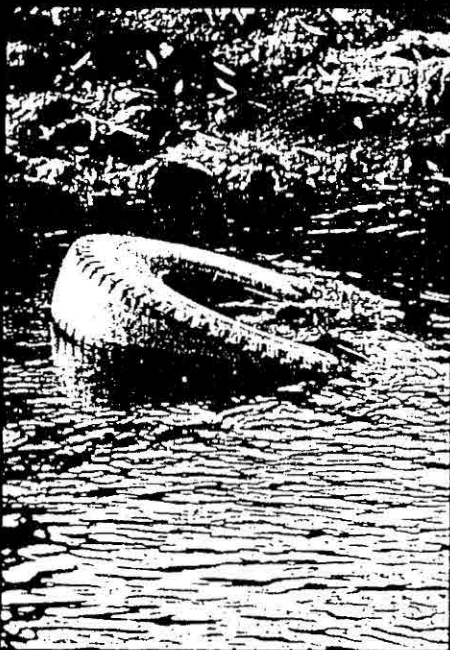
The following articles are indicative of Congregationalism's residual social concern and its generally middle of the road approach. Most of the great public policy issues of our time have made their way into the *Congregationalist*. With the exception noted above, none of the issues have moved the NACCC to collective action, but it has been thought important for congregations and church members to care and be informed. It is, however, striking that the most pressing, controversial, and disruptive issues are touched on only infrequently and lightly. These include the civil rights movement, opposition to the war in Vietnam, the social experiments of the Great Society, the anti-abortion movement, and the rise of the Religious Right.

Congregationalists on Social Concerns

The 1970's

*Environment, Clerical Activism,
Pornography, Capital Punishment,
Abortion, Peace, Public Education,
Watergate, Disabilities, Sex Roles, Animal
Rights, Inclusive Language, NACCC Role*

MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT



There was a time when men thought they were going to make unending and inevitable progress toward the complete control of their environment. Those who are most wise in this area now have serious doubts about the achievement of any such goal.

But one of our nation's politicians is not among this group of wise men, for he recently insisted that the time was not far off when people in America would never see a housefly or mosquito.

How will this come about? Presumably with more effective insecticides. The problem, as has already been recognized by many, is that each of these efforts to control or master the environment tends to upset the balance of nature and leave us with a greater problem than the one solved.

If we do away with all flies and mosquitoes we most likely do away also with those birds who survive by eating them. That's quite a price to pay in the eyes of nature lovers. I'd rather slap a few mosquitoes.

Some there are who would favor the eradication of all weeds. But what is a weed. Perhaps it is only a flower growing in the wrong place. When he was young, one of my sons used to thank God for the dandelions. Who is wise enough to judge whether or not every dandelion in the world, or any other "weed" for that matter, ought to be destroyed?

This world is God's creation. In His sight it may very well be perfect as it is. We humans can remove a weed here and there, eliminate the flies from our own kitchens, and spray an occasional tree with DDT. But when we try to eliminate entire species of life, when we attempt massive changes in the environment, we can never be sure that the consequences of what we do will not in the long run result in a world vastly worse off than it was when we began our tampering.

In the Book of Genesis (2:15) it is recorded that after God had created man he "put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." The Revised Standard Version reads "to till and to keep it."

If we translate "garden of Eden" to mean the good earth and man's ecological environment which has been friendly to man's existence, then it must be said that man has failed miserably to live up to the charge laid upon him by the Creator.

Last year, meeting in Paris, two hundred experts from fifty countries agreed that within twenty years life on earth would be showing definite signs of succumbing to pollution. For one thing, the atmosphere will become unbreathable for men and animals. Life will cease in rivers and lakes, and plants will wither from poisoning. Not a very pretty picture. Not a very good stewardship by man of God's good gifts.

Man's power over his environment has become so great, his desire for further mastery has become so insatiable, he has placed himself on the knife edge of extinction. Nature rules, not man. When the balance of nature is tampered with beyond a certain point man, who is utterly dependent on nature, will perish.

We have dumped so much sewage into our lakes and streams many of them have died. The United States Public Health Service has warned shippers in Lake Erie that water within five miles of the shoreline should not be used for drinking or cooking. This stretch of near shore water is so polluted that even boiling or chlorination will not remove the contamination.

Man's conceit and arrogance have led him to believe he can be independent of nature. His greed has led him to ignore the welfare of future generations.

There is a point beyond which if we alter and destroy nature we destroy ourselves. □

Norman S. Peam



FATHER GROPPPI and CHRIST'S CHURCH

Richard S. Wheeler

Father James Groppi, Milwaukee priest who shepherds a flock of black sheep, has taken to finding similarities between himself and Jesus Christ. His numerous admirers agree. They reason that Father Groppi has suffered much in behalf of the poor, the black, the dis-franchised; and so, too, did Jesus.

Those who note the common suffering of each, however, rarely ask what each suffered for. Were their ends the same? Are the similarities deep or superficial?

Photographs courtesy of *The Milwaukee Journal* and *The Milwaukee Sentinel*.

Have those liberal divines who endorse Fr. Groppi's class-war approach discovered some aspect of Christianity that has escaped the more orthodox?

To resolve these questions, we must determine first what Jesus Christ was *not*. He was not, for example, a social revolutionary, despite all efforts to portray him as one. The massed evidence of Scripture points in just the opposite direction. He did not try to liberate Israel from the boot of Imperial Rome. He did not even oppose or detest the Roman Imperialism that held Israel in its grasp during his lifetime. Nor did he propose to violate the laws of Rome or the Jews, or encourage others to do so. "Render unto Caesar the

things that are Caesar's . . ." he said in his famous formula. When he was ultimately brought before the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, the Roman could find no wrong in him. The closest Jesus came to the modern doctrine of civil disobedience was to urge us not to fear those who merely had the power to cast a man into prison, but to fear Him who had the power to cast the soul into Hell. But even this was not an invitation to civil disobedience. It was, rather, an ordering of priorities: men should heed God first; rulers second.

Moreover, the New Testament is studded with exhortations to obey legitimate rulers and civil law. St. Paul repeatedly warned against disobedience, and said the secular authorities are ordained by God for the good, and are a terror unto evil. Christianity never intended to be seditious; it did not customarily engage in plots and cabals; it rarely sought to shatter public law. Early Christians were sometimes confronted with laws they could not obey: emperor worship, for example. But this narrow disobedience did not involve confrontations with the Establishment; it did not seek to destroy secular authority. It sought, rather, an exemption. They were conscientious objectors, not revolutionaries. Jesus warned that the Pharisees were hypocrites, but he did not incite a mob against them. He simply urged his audience to be more righteous than the Pharisees. Jesus himself addressed civil magistrates respectfully. There is, in short, no Scriptural evidence that Jesus or his apostles sought to overthrow Roman rule or the Jewish State. There is no evidence that they counseled future generations to defy secular powers. The Kingdom of Heaven has never been considered a secular, or worldly, power.

Fr. Groppi, on the other hand, has encouraged disobedience of civil law and authority, and not necessarily on the grounds of Christian conscience. He has heaped coals of fire on the civil authorities. He has condemned his enemies, scuffled with police, and personally violated laws. He has directly challenged the state. One can scarcely imagine Jesus Christ leading a march to Madison to inform the state legislature that its welfare budget cuts were intolerable. But Fr. Groppi did just that. There is, in fact, a deep chasm between the tactics and beliefs of Fr. Groppi, and the ministry of Jesus.

The revolutionary militance of Fr. Groppi differs theologically from the ministry of Jesus. Groppi pursues the Secular City of liberalism: the ideal commonwealth here on earth, where men will presumably be brothers; the poor will vanish; there will be abundance and equality for all; and peace will reign.

If the secular city cannot be achieved through normal political processes, the liberal prescription is for militance: marching, disobedience, silencing the reactionaries, and overthrowing those antisocial capitalists who are allegedly thwarting justice, peace and plenty for all. And if the militance fails, the prescription is for the demolition of the whole edifice: houses, factories, churches, stores, schools, people. For all of it is deemed rotten and egalitarian justice requires the reduction of it all to the equality of the damned. It is

envy gone berserk. This, essentially, is the secular ideology undergirding Fr. Groppi's struggle. It has little similarity to orthodox Christianity, no matter how much it co-opts the trappings of the church and the doctrines of Christ.

The secular city is, moreover, environmentalist: it begins by altering environments, and ends, theoretically, with the liberation of persons. It holds there are crushing evils institutionalized in the social milieu that must be eradicated to free suffering men. Hence the now-threadbare formulae: tear down the slums and the blacks will become responsible, happy citizens; open up good jobs and they will progress automatically; mix them with whites in classrooms and they will learn faster—etc. In short, renovate the environment on every front and New Men will arise. There is a certain practicality and compassion in much of the theory, no matter how inefficient and narrow it may seem. A good job, good schools, good house, all help. Environmental engineering works sufficiently well to continue to attract ardent proponents. But environmentalism is not Christianity. The two conflict sharply on both means and ends. Efforts to wed secular liberalism to the Church of Christ are failing, even as the secular city is failing; even as the radicals now seek to tear the secular city to shreds.

What, then, is the traditional Christian way? For one thing, Christ dealt with individuals, not environments or social abstractions. He spoke to crowds, but he addressed persons, who were his starting points and his building blocks. He did not advocate structural changes in society, or what we call "social reforms." It is not recorded that he proposed a system of social security for the aged of Israel, or sought to lobby it through the governing theocracy. He did not advocate better housing for all, on the supposition that it would make man happier. He did not propose minimum wage laws, or laws requiring universal education, or child labor laws. He did not propose a graduated income



tax or soaking the rich. He did not support laws compelling integration with the despised Samaritans. He did not suggest that *any* structural reform would add one whit to the blessedness of the Jews, nor did he suggest at any point that men should be social and financial equals—except before God. On the contrary, he assumed great and continuing social inequalities. He proposed that servants should be good servants; masters good masters; employers good employers.

Secular men and sentimentalists interpret Jesus as a sort of super-liberal, wandering the earth to assist the needy and heal the sick. But it doesn't wash. This is a narrow, unbiblical, untraditional version of Jesus and his works. It is on this point precisely, that believers and nonbelievers part company. Fr. Groppi comes closest to being Christian when he ignores class confrontations, the marches and militance, egalitarianism, the black commandos—and appeals humbly, in Christ, for respect, opportunity and alms for his black flock. He wanders farthest away when he behaves like Rap Brown.

What are the evidences of Fr. Groppi's Christianity? Does he adhere to the Golden Rule, doing unto others as he would that they should do unto him and his followers? Is he a peacemaker, reconciling white and black? Is he meek? Does he turn the other cheek? Does he teach his young commandos to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks? Does he preach the glory of God; keeping the sabbath; honoring one's parents? Does he inveigh against murder, adultery, envy and lust? Does he heed the Great Commandment, loving God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself? Does he preach redemption, heaven and hell, and the doctrine of hope, *especially* hope? Does he counsel faith and patience and hard work? Does he love his enemies and do good to those who abuse him, resisting not evil?

It is not for us to judge him, for we all fail to meet that test. But, at least, we do not all fail to recognize that it *is* the test; that these are the central teachings of the church. We do not all flout these teachings or transmute them into secular radicalism. He means well, of course. But in the end, he must be assessed by his fruits. Truly, he has witnessed for the blacks, and drawn our attention to their suffering. But what a strange witness! Love, yes. But also defiance, class war, hatred, rank materialism, and instant utopia!

Liberal churchmen, abetted by such secular liberals as one finds encysted in the editorial strata of *Look Magazine*, are fond of posing a false dilemma: either the church must plunge into politics and secular life with militance, or it must remain cloistered in the pews, piously praying while coldly ignoring the suffering world. Militant activism or passive piety, they put it. It is true that some pietistic Christians are modern pharisees, flaunting their faith but doing no good works. But it is not necessarily true that the church's sole alternative is to plunge into politics. It is not true, that is, that a reverend divine must charge his flock with the duty to battle for more social security, more welfare, slum clearance, coerced bussing, or a Vietnam

bugout. (If he does, he further weakens the church by shifting responsibility away from it and to the state.)

There is a middle road, a traditional Christian road, that is all but ignored today. The traditional work of the church has been to shoulder, where possible, the entire charitable function in any society. To build hospitals, heal the sick, comfort and feed the poor, provide alms for the needy, teach patience and hope to the suffering, build retreats and homes for the aged, train a class of pure altruists—such as the brotherhoods of the Roman church—to organize charity. And all without so much as a nod to politics, secular life, and militance. Indeed, to the extent the church succeeds in its charitable mission, the public issues which so concern Fr. Groppi, such as whether the Wisconsin legislature should allot an iota more welfare money—fade into insignificance. That, then, is the traditional social role of the organized church. But there is more: the invisible, non-institutional church, composed of believers. Must they become leftist radicals, march in the streets, wrapping the mantle of God around this or that side of a political issue? Not at all. Christians in their private capacities can do much. A devout and charitable person has a light within him that shines as a beacon for the hopeless. He has a pool of love that can gladden the lonely. He makes his benefactions quietly: alms to a beggar, a college education to the son of a widow, and hospitality—that lost Christian virtue—for the forgotten. Calls on shut-ins, service in hospitals, volunteer welfare work—the list of private endeavor is endless.

Fr. Groppi is a tragic man. The whole world, white and colored, suffers, but he knows only the suffering of the blacks. So much does he share that suffering that it is said of him by his fellow priests at St. Boniface's that he is a black man inside. He suffers; he is overwhelmed with compassion, and yet, tragically, he hinders the progress of his flock. He has outraged Milwaukee's whites, which further ghettoizes the blacks. In abandoning his faith, he has ultimately abandoned his flock. He has wounded his church both financially and spiritually. He is tragic because he loves, and his love is poisonous. He knows the slum room, the rats and rotgut, the soul food and voodoo; the broken family and the stifled heart. All this grieves him. And yet he is not a Christ of the ghetto, healing, redeeming, educating, offering comfort and hope.

The rest of us are not blameless. If we were there would be no Fr. Groppi roaming the streets in despair. The coldness of the post-Christian world is a coldness indeed; a frost in the heart of many a greedy neoteric. But in the end, that does not make Fr. Groppi right. Throughout the history of the faith, those deemed most dangerous to the church have not been the atheists, but zealots who twist and pervert ancient doctrine and good authority for their own not-quite-Christian ends. Fr. Groppi is such a one. His church is now too weak to deal with him or lead him back into the faith of his fathers. And so, he roams the state like a hydrophobic wolf, spreading his spiritual rabies. □



Melvin Anchell

Revolutions are in vogue. Overthrowing opposition that does not fit ones wishes has become a familiar life style. More than ever before in the history of mankind revolution is the milieu in which we live.

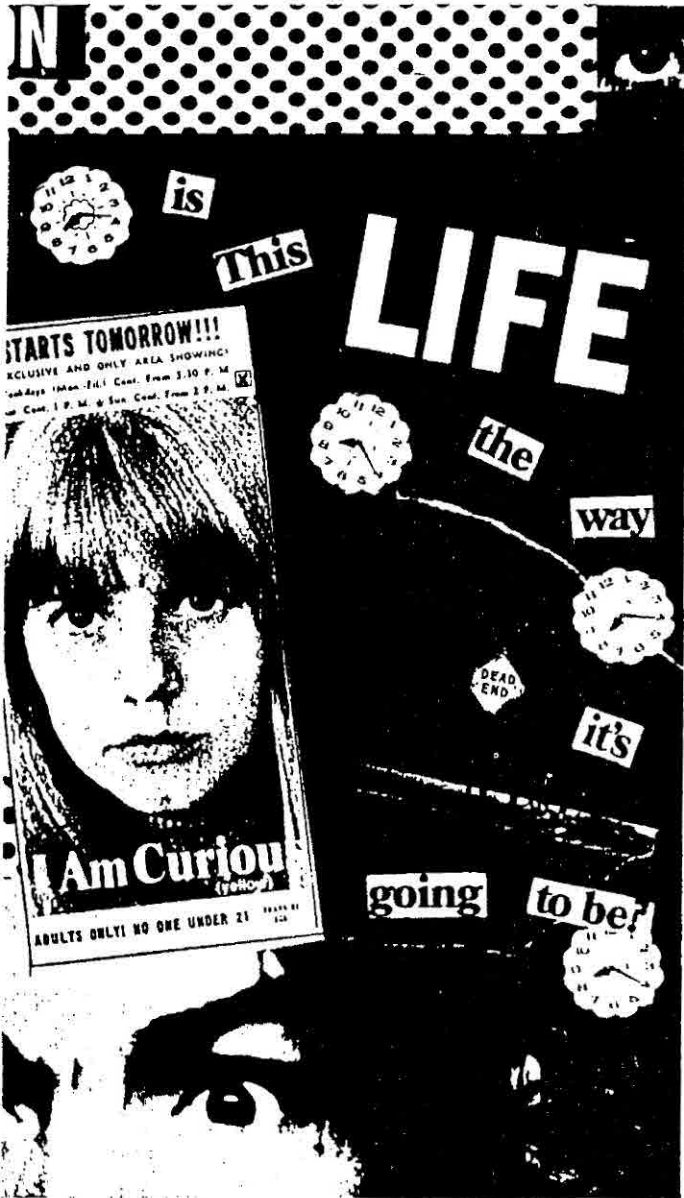
Young people, particularly, are in the forefront of

contemporary revolutions rejecting everything and anything not deferring to their wants. Youthful renegades have been persuaded to believe that to be free their needs must be fulfilled immediately and without interferences and regardless of consequences.

However, a more portentous revolution which is spreading like a pestilence across every strata of life is the revolution of sexual perversion.

Sexual perverts have found, as have youth, that contemporary society is sympathetic with their immaturities, and like a child turned loose in a candy shop,

Melvin Anchell is a physician in Los Angeles, California.
Montage by Fred M. Dole



EVOLUTION

they are overwhelmed and cannot find enough ways to indulge their delights.

Compassionate individuals, wishing to be humane to others and feeling sympathy for less fortunate creatures whose instincts have been distorted, have "gone overboard" in tolerance for perversion that is contaminating normal individuals to an alarming degree. This concession of tolerance is the opening wedge by which perversion achieves its stronghold. Once empathy for the pervert replaces the natural mental barrier of repulsion to perversion, the normal person's inborn reaction

to shun the abnormal crumbles and is vulnerable to the formidable influences of the pervert.

Having not reached sexual maturity, and unable to experience *mature* sexual relations the pervert relies on childhood stages of sexual growth to satisfy his sensual urges. Pornography embellishes his immature sexual relationships. From the pulpit of pornography the pervert espouses his perversion.

Through pornography, a gospel of sexual revolt is sweeping across the nation altering the normal sexual life of society. In the sexually mature person, excitations from pornography and from perversity do not fulfill sensual needs. But, since normal behavior and perverted behavior arise from the same universal instincts, indulgency in pornography and in sexual deviations can cause a regression to debased levels of sexual behavior.

The pervert is determined to keep and extend his new found acceptance. He jealously guards against any encroachments on pornography for obscenities epitomizes his greater freedom. Anyone abstaining from his type sensual pleasures, does so, he feels, because of hypocritical social and religious standards.

The pervert interprets the tolerant interest that has been shown him as a mandate to convert society to his ways. If the normal person is squeamish about perversion, the pervert declares the normal individual has sexual hang-ups. Anyone questioning perversity is regarded as an ultraconservative politician, a member of Victorian Establishment, or suffering from Judeo-Christian ethics. Mature sexuality is out. Free love and perversion are in.

While this steady erosion of defenses is taking place, the pornographic media continues its never relenting force feedings, desensitizing the mature person. No one is immune from the ravages of the pornographic bombardment. Pornography may be enjoyed initially as a sensual spice until eventually the person becomes hooked on its addictive qualities. The process by which sexual instincts regress and become stunted is observable by the manifest changes which take place within the individual as a result of obscenities.

The normal individual appears unaware of the contamination to which he is subjected. He finds himself figuratively immersed in an atmosphere of perversion. In private homes, at cocktail parties, in bars, in many forms of social entertainment, he finds the unnatural has become fashionable.

For example, "I am Curious-Yellow" permits the viewing public to assume the role of a peeping tom, while watching the hero and heroine engage in genital and oral sexual relationships. This kind of film, if tolerated by a mature person, promotes a temporary regression to perversion, and if completely accepted causes permanent regression.

Sexual intercourse between mature individuals does not begin and end with carnal sexuality, but develops with an exchange of tenderness and sincere affection. This affectionate part of human sexuality, arising from the earliest love expressions between child and parent, is essential in developing a mature sexuality. Mature

love requires a mental fusion before the physical embrace can become an ecstasy of union. Such a relationship can exist only in an atmosphere of privacy and intimacy emulating the parents' behavior and loyalty to each other. The emergence of compassionate love within the frame of marriage as a basis for sharing sexual intimacies is the ideal expression for complete human sexuality.

Sexual confusion and contamination especially affects present day youth's sexual behavior. The young person on the brink of adulthood and in a precarious situation is more influenced by environmental effects than by early family experiences. The adolescent identifies with others outside the home and tends to reject his former dependencies and their values.

During adolescence the old love ties of childhood, namely with the mother, father and family, are devaluated. He takes the love he gave earlier to family and projects it on to contemporaries in the outside world.

As the adolescent is establishing new ideal love objects and is throwing off the old dependencies on family, today's youths find the ideals of sexual perversion admired by much of the society. When the environment of the community is pornographically oriented, the adolescent identifies with it and assumes its values.

Court and legal decisions handed down in pornography cases tend to further mislead youth. He learns that pornography is protected under the guise of safeguarding "accepted community standards" and "socially redeeming values."

In a recent case in the State of California, the conviction of a topless dancer and a nightclub manager was reversed by the Appellate Court.

The court said in part, "—we cannot assume that jurors in themselves necessarily express or reflect community standards; we must achieve so far as possible the application of an objective, rather than a subjective determination of community standards—"

"To sanction convictions without expert evidence of community standards encourages a jury to condemn as obscene such conduct or material as is personally distasteful or offensive to the particular juror."

If nightclubs served patrons contaminated food and beverages, there are laws that would close them down. But when patrons are served material causing emotional disorders, in essence, a kind of psychological venereal disease, the courts appear unconcerned and hide behind the hollowness of "objective community standards."

The term "socially redeeming" as used by the courts and community leaders has served to blur the issue of perversion still farther.

For example, the stage musical "Hair," presently playing in Los Angeles, is an admixture of socially redeeming lyrics borrowed from Shakespeare combined with voyeuristic and exhibitionistic forms of perversion. The public is gulled into accepting the musical as art because of its miniscule borrowings from Shakespeare. It is as if a playgoer went to an elegant restaurant where he was served tid bits of steak smothered

in horse manure. If the comparison is offensive, how much more so is the type of pornography inflicted on normal individuals by those in power in the entertainment media? The courts' actions uphold the rights of the sexual pervert through the media of pornography at the expense of contaminating those who are not perverted.

The courts' interpretations confuse not only youth but community leaders who have ostensibly accepted the new sexual perversion on the grounds of openness and frankness. It convinces them that obscene conduct is encouraged by the courts and invites more flagrant pornographic activity.

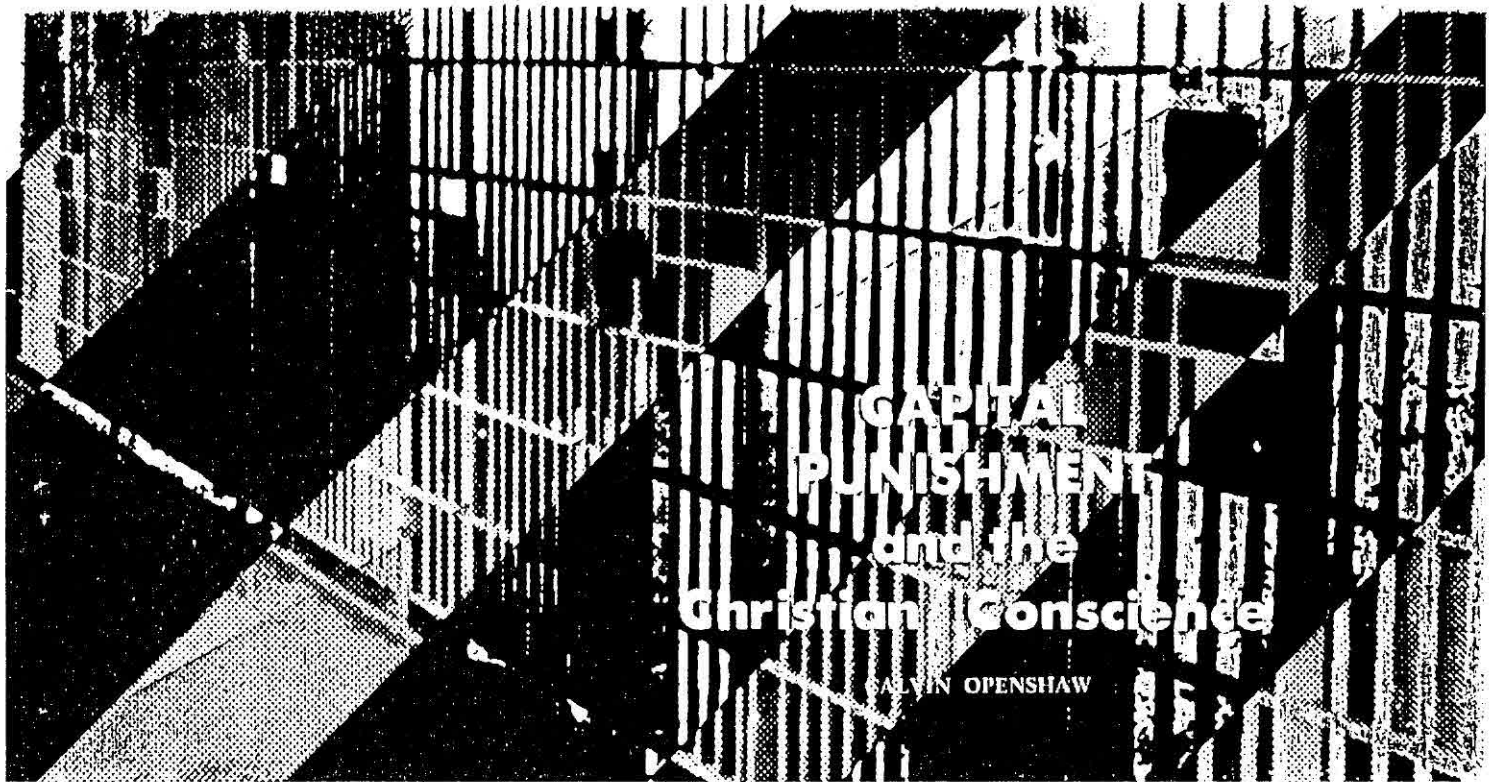
Adolescents are urged to "get with it," and sexual perversion has become more acceptable than ever among sexually educated and pornographically stimulated youths. Venereal disease is at an all time high. Over seven million young people in this country use or have used marijuana. Clinical analysis shows that sexually emancipated youths' rely on fantasy producing drugs to relieve frustrations resulting from sexually distorting behavior.

The pervert feels a need to maintain his perversion regardless of the consequences to anyone else. He finds it essential to denigrate the normal human sexual needs which are foreign to and threaten his distorted sexual satisfactions. Psychoanalysis reveals that he subconsciously fears any environmental controls over pornography and perversion as attempts to castrate him.

It is the mature individual, who has not regressed and who is determined not to have his sexuality disrupted by perversion, whose sexual life is in greatest jeopardy. It is he who must aid in reversing the trend brought about by the revolution of sexual perversion.

In Sweden today, we have a living example which Western civilization seems determined to follow. Sweden, having removed all statutes controlling pornography and perversions, has more perversion, venereal disease, alcoholism, unwed mothers, delinquency, moral laxity and fewer marriages than ever before in its history. Sweden's suicide rate is the highest of any nation. Sweden is leading the way in the perversion revolution, and the United States and Western countries are following like marmots into the sea.

Led by a hierarchy of self proclaimed sexperts, the tenacles of pornography are making deep encroachments in our society under the guise of sexual emancipation. Under the banner of humanism, many have gone overboard in a reaction to intolerance. Are individuals with normal sexual desires, who are in the majority, inviting their own immolation by obsessively protecting the pervert's rights above their own? The youth of today, as well as the now confused adults, are in reality sickened by perverted, antisocial behavior. They yearn for a return to human values that best fulfill the needs not only of the individual but also of his society. Before an adjustment can be made, however, the gangrenous material filling the minds of our society, as a result of much of the pornographic media, must stop forming. The damage done can, then, begin to heal . . . □



He who broaches the subject of capital punishment in today's polite society may be greeted by scowls of an order reserved in Victorian times for those who dared mention sex perversion, or in the last millenium, for lepers. It is no longer "in" to approve of legal execution for even the most aggravated criminal actions.

Today we have a framework of statutory provisions for capital punishment in force in all states save eleven, a mushrooming capital criminality, yet no instance of a legal execution in America in over two years.

In 1965, English parliament outlawed the hanging penalty for a trial period of five years. America has preferred the apparent sweeping simplicity of a U. S. Supreme Court decision, which in June, 1968, spared a man under death sentence for the murder of a policeman, because the jury had not represented "a cross section of American opinion". That jury, the Court said, did not include anyone who disapproved of capital punishment. Arguing that the Gallup poll showed only 42% of Americans approve of execution, the Court's judicial brief was then complete. This astonishing example of law by Gallup poll has seemingly had the intended effect.

At a time when journalists predict that public execution is a thing of the past, it might seem quarrelsome to resurrect a subject which seems so patently settled. But a re-inspection is in order, for reasons that will become evident.

The history of capital punishment is admittedly un-

To many of our readers this will prove to be a controversial article. We welcome your response and will consider publishing a well written rebuttal. Dr. Openshaw is a Congregationalist and a surgeon who resides in Hutchinson, Kansas.

savory. During times when it was an annoyance and ill-afforded expense to keep prisoners, it was the simplest thing merely to expunge the criminal—even for trivial offenses. In those less enlightened periods, public death orgies were events of highest social consequence, with a circus atmosphere and revelry by all (with the pointed exception of the "honored guests").

Such macabre scenes are hopefully gone forever. But the revulsion to such behavior and to the lesser spectacles attendant on American lynchings, electrocutions and legal hangings, has led many perceptive persons altogether to reject the concept of legal extermination of criminals.

It is this concept we wish to examine. Admittedly archaic, present-day execution methods of hanging, firing squad (in one state, at least), electrocution and gas chamber, with witnesses and press present, are still barbarous events. They need not be so. An intravenous dose of morphine could accomplish the same result quietly and calmly. The question then at issue is "Should the government hold the power of life and death as a means of punishment?"

That persons who are so inclined can end the lives of others by violent action is obvious. Such events have transpired regularly since the days of Cain. Today, murders by illegal violence are counted by the score every hour of every day. So individual men have not accepted the same restraints imposed by the Supreme Court on the law enforcement structure.

The admittedly imperfect agency charged with maintenance of law and order—the *prevention* of murderous events—is government. Despite the fact that some will cringe at the description, government must be correctly defined as "the legal agency of violence." Since man,

having capacities for evil, is capable of exerting force and violence for his own ends and to the destruction of the human rights of others, there must be a *legal* counteracting agency of force—and it is called “government”.

The matter of scriptural prohibition has been based in the sixth commandment, usually stated “Thou shalt not kill.” Literalists urge that this means killing in any form, and that capital punishment thus violates a cornerstone of the Decalogue. Scholars of the original Greek versions of the Bible have pointed out that the word usually translated as “kill” is written as “phoneus”, which means to “kill *illegally*”. In short, the sixth commandment is best interpreted—as some have done—“Thou shalt do no murder.” Such an interpretation is far more in keeping with other scripture, such as Genesis 9:6, which commands “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God, made he man.”

Many persons who believe capital punishment is just balk at its acceptance because they picture themselves being required to carry out the execution. “I could not do it,” they say, “so I should not ask another person to pull the switch.”

Squeamishness should never be the basis of principle. No one would enjoy the job. Fortunately, we have public servants who are willing to do nasty and unpleasant tasks to maintain a stable society. Few would wish to walk police beats in some Ghetto areas, but fortunately we have those who will do so. Coroners and pathologists carry out many needed but forbidding tasks that most would not have the “stomach” for. And there are those who will manage the distasteful duties of executions, when necessary.

One major source of confusion in deciding the moral propriety of capital punishment comes from the intermixture of the objectives of penology. These main objectives are three: the discharge of justice, the deterrence of further crime and the rehabilitation of the criminal. The utopian ideal would accomplish all three in a humane and civilized fashion. Mankind has searched fruitlessly for centuries for that ideal. Ideal justice seems only within the ken of God. Deterrence and rehabilitation have frustrated men and societies ever since the days of Eden.

Grisly penalties, such as amputation of a hand for theft, were carried out with the main objective of deterrence. After two such sentences, the guilty one was perhaps rehabilitated from such a life and was surely physically deterred from further thievery. But it became obvious that the severity of the penalty was not much of a deterrent to other dedicated thieves, and thievery continued.

Abolitionists urge that murder is not prevented or deterred by the spectre of execution. Such a claim is difficult of proof or disproof. They plead that prospects of rehabilitation are ended by the performance of a capital sentence, and surely, this point has no rebuttal. But since the ultimate objectives of penology all seem well beyond realization, it is desirable that we establish the priorities of the three objectives and avoid confusing one with another.

The overweening prime objective of penology *must*

be justice. In an orderly society, man must expect to receive his just deserts—reward for merit, penalty for failure. The penalty or reward should be appropriate. These two tenets form the indissoluble basis for legitimate justice. This does not mean, as some silly arguments hold, that justice demands an identical, literal “eye for an eye, or tooth for a tooth.” But the fact that an executed murderer cannot be rehabilitated should not bear on what constitutes justice. Once justice is served, other legitimate aims of penology may be considered—not before.

And particularly, until the time when our crime rates and recidivism trends indicate that efforts at deterrence and rehabilitation are bearing significant fruit, let us not allow our desires to accomplish those ends warp the concepts of what constitutes justice—the primary consideration of penology.

When that violence is of a deterrent nature, it is legitimate, moral and proper. Properly expressed, such potential power permits individual men to perform their maximum peaceful, creative works, free of the predatory actions of others. That this function of citizen protection was always the proper primary function of government, has been almost lost sight of in our mushrooming bureaucracy.

If the legal agency of violence is not armed with the specific power to take life where necessary—and especially if the power to take life is specifically *denied* in the enforcement of civil law—then *all* law enforcement will eventually break down in the face of a growing army of criminals who are willing indiscriminately to sacrifice lives of others to gain their own evil ends.

Few would argue against the need for a showdown and elimination of the “Bonnie and Clyde” type killers of the twenties, who killed on whim and with broadcast abandon. Their blood baths had to be stopped, and no Christian conscience should balk at the methods used. Why then should justice be said to differ if the death penalty is assessed to such persons after their live capture?

Sentiment for abolition of the death penalty started in Michigan when that state revoked the death penalty in 1846. Many states followed suit, but the crime waves that followed the Volstead Act caused several states to restore the capital provisions. It is plausible that present criminal trends might bring legislatures and Congress back to the point where teeth are restored to capital punishment laws. An alternative could well be the return of “vigilante justice”. Mob rule arises and the mob takes the law into its hands where none of sufficient force is available through the courts. If no *appropriate* penalties are assessed for heinous crimes, justice-seeking citizens will look for means of providing them.

Historically, such methods are woefully erratic and subject to greivous excesses. Vigilante justice was an important transitory page of American history. Sparsely populated prairie cultures often depended on six-gun law until the birth pangs of statehood permitted a sounder legal framework. But the rekindling of vigilante power in our large metropolitan Ghetto areas—already tinderboxes of violence—could well be the first irretraceable step toward a vast civil war. □

