

# 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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## 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 1980'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?

To most of us they are the invisible people who exist somewhere in the far reaches of the world. They have strange names we cannot pronounce and live in places that are unfamiliar. They are the hungry of the world.

On closer inspection of the people, some facts are to be revealed that should dramatically cry out to us as Christian people seeking to serve "even the least of these." You see, the hungry do not just live out there, and they are not in isolation from the rest of humanity. They are mothers and fathers, small children and babies. They are people in Kampuchea and Ethiopia and live in villages in South America where the birth of a stillborn is a joy because the baby can become an angel without living to suffer. Others are the elderly in Boston, children in Los Angeles and Milwaukee. In all, they total anywhere from 100 million to 800 million people, depending upon who is counting. Ultimately, the count doesn't matter when that hungry person is your mother or child. In the U.S. alone, an estimated 21 million have incomes that will not allow them to have adequate diets according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Agriculture is not known for radical pronouncements on hunger.

Why are people hungry? Whose responsibility is it to eliminate hunger? What can you do about it? These seem to be the basic questions of Christians willing to face the issues, people hearing the Word.

In the case of hunger and starvation, the "whys" are related to the solutions, and there are complex and related reasons. People are hungry because of weather, war, economics and politics. In Nigeria the reason has been drought; in South Asia it is because of shifting monsoons and because they are refugees from war; in Eritrea and Somalia, they are hungry because of war. In Haiti, grain-fed beef is freely exported to U.S. fast-food chains by an economic policy that seeks more U.S. dollars than food for its starving children. Haiti needs oil, T.V.'s and automobiles. In Columbia, potential wheat fields grow carnations because it is more profitable. In some developing nations, people starve because of em-

phasis on industrial development and the neglect of agriculture, and sometimes because the world market determines that food shall go to the highest bidder, not to those with the greatest need.

There are several myths about hunger. One is that there isn't enough food to go around. In truth, distribution is the basic problem. Due to the affluence of some nations, excess calories and meat proteins are consumed, robbing the potential for sharing. Many of us consume too much meat for the good of others, while our doctors say we consume

The resources for answering that question are available from many sources. There are general considerations and concrete actions.

What can you do about hunger? The place to begin is at home! Consider your own lifestyle, nutrition and waste. Eat lower on the food chain by eating less meat. Learn as much as you can about the problem of hunger, the "whys" and the "answer" to the problem. Inform others! Know that what you do at home affects the global food supply. Discover the programs that deal with hunger at home. FISH. Meals on

*"FISH, Meals on Wheels, CROP, World Neighbors and Bread for the World... should not just be names to you..."*

too much for our own good. In either case, the fact is the amount of protein provided by one beef cow is far less than the protein that cow consumes in the grain it eats. One half of the world's tuna goes in U.S. cat food cans, and the Comptroller General of the U.S. suggests that 20% of the food Americans buy is lost or wasted every year. Another myth simplistically suggests to the poor that they could feed themselves if they limited their population. Drought, wars and the fact that in 83 countries 3% of the people control 80% of the land, suggest that this just isn't true. In India, people may have ten children because only three will live to adulthood. Those three will be the only social security the parents have.

Whose responsibility? This is a question that should not even have to be asked! Starvation and hunger are the responsibility of everyone. The problem of hunger is not new. Jacob's sons went to Egypt to get corn from Joseph and the Pharaoh's storehouses. From Leviticus to Isaiah and from Matthew to I John, the call is clear. "Leave a portion of your harvest for the poor," "to whom much is given, much is required," and "when I was hungry" are scriptures which confront those who would hear. What is equally important is that most of us are in a position to do something about the problem.

What can we do about hunger?

Wheels, CROP, World Neighbors and Bread for the World, to name a few groups, should not just be names to you — they should be sources of information and action. They should be places of voluntary service and commitment.

As you search out your place in the anti-hunger campaign at home and in the rest of the world, be prepared to pray for the hungry, but also be prepared to share your dollars. Funds for emergency food relief, for agricultural development, for research towards better nutrition are all needed. It is not just an old cliché to say that if you give a family a fish you feed them for one day, but if you teach them how to fish you feed them for the rest of their lives.

To discover the world's priorities in the use of crop land or money should not surprise us, but it should raise questions about the adjustment of them. We know about opium poppies and marijuana and call upon our government to intervene. At the same time, we subsidize tobacco crops and devote three million acres of American land to produce crops for alcoholic beverages. Worldwide, that figure is twenty million acres. What of our money? Worldwide we spend about 400 billion dollars on armaments at the current yearly rate. Arms trade with the third world countries has increased 15% annually during the 1970's.

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## ... Hunger

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Since the days of Micah we have known that to do justice, love, kindness and walk humbly with our God is what is required of us. The Missionary Society of the National Association wants to help you do that by participating in the war against hunger. One way is to work with us in SHARE (Starvation and Hunger Are the Responsibility of Everyone). Look around your neighborhood for ways you can help the people of your community, and contact the Missionary Society for resources, projects and avenues that will lead you in your battle. Perhaps someday, someday soon, a child will live because you have cared enough to share.

# LEBANON

## *A Country of Conflicts*

Rev. James R. Lyons

Lebanon!

For Christians, what exotic dreams come into mind with the very mention of Lebanon? We travel back in time and space, dreaming of the Cedars of Lebanon, the building of the temple in Jerusalem when Hiram, King of Tyre, loaned to King Solomon the expertise of his craftsmen and artisans. We dream of the ancient Phoenicians who opened up the world to the west, sailing from Tyre and Sidon to the far reaches of the Mediterranean. All of this is part of our popular imagination.

With the coming of the Christian period, our imaginations turn to the marching feet of the Romans as they criss-cross the land, moving along the coastline of Lebanon, transversing the Bekaa Valley, establishing Baalbek and exercising their control over the entire region. The romance of the area continues as we think of the Crusaders storming across Europe to "fight for the faith" against "the heretics" and finally meeting their doom at the hands of Saladin. Oh, how our imagination soars!

Once again, marching armies move along coastal plains and meet in the Bekaa Valley. How much do we know of the Lebanon of today? What do we know of its population? Aside from the archaeologists' interest in the ancient ruins and the missionaries' interest in propagating the faith, who has shown much interest in Lebanon or its peoples?

I first visited Lebanon in 1975 when, as a typical tourist, I visited the archaeological sites, enjoyed the Mediterranean view, and heard about the work of our Christian missions in Lebanon. My next visit to Lebanon was in August of 1982.

The Mediterranean view was still beautiful, the ancient ruins were still a part of the landscape, but the whole focus had drastically changed. I was part of a fact-finding mission organized by the Reverend Isaac Rottenberg of the National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel. Funded by private sources, there were 55 of us who travelled to Israel and Lebanon. All Christians, we were drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our concern was to learn about the present-day conditions of Lebanon.

### Fact Finding Mission

We entered Lebanon on Tuesday, August 8, 1982. The fighting was still in progress. The PLO was still in Beirut. Philip Habib was still trying to negotiate a settlement. The first thing that we noticed as we were crossing the border between Israel and Lebanon was the fact that United Nations' cars and trucks were parked on both sides of the border. While United Nations' personnel still

crossed the border freely, vehicles were forbidden to cross because, as we were told, there had been instances of attempts to smuggle arms, ammunition, and explosives across the border into Israel by some U.N. personnel. As we proceeded north, we passed the U.N. headquarters. In that area some soldiers made obscene gestures. (The U.N. is scornfully called the "United Nothing" on both sides of the border.) That was the most overt hostility we encountered that day.

We continued our trip north—passing through Tyre and Sidon—until we reached the hills of Beirut, where we stood overlooking the airport made so familiar by television news coverage. On our return trip, we stopped at Damour and finally had a late (5:00 p.m.!) lunch in Sidon on a stretch of beach which had been previously declared a non-military zone and where citizens of Sidon had gathered to be out of harm's way during the Israeli advance. Following our late lunch, we hurried back toward the border, for there were still incidents of terrorist activities along the highway. Crossing the border, we continued on to Jerusalem for the remainder of the tour.

Though it is difficult to summarize the things seen and heard, I returned to the United States with a number of impressions and some deep anguish.

### *'A Relatively Small Arena'*

**IMPRESSIONS.** Though seemingly insignificant in light of the magnitude of the events we were reviewing, I was struck by how small Lebanon is. Lebanon is a narrow country between 20 and 40 miles wide and a length of only about 125 miles; it has a population of about 3 million people. To Americans accustomed to travelling great distances on super highways, it is a shock to learn that the distance between the Israeli-Lebanese border and Beirut is only about 50 miles. Thus, events, which if they were to take place in America would be scattered over broad areas, were confined in Lebanon to a relatively small arena. It is important for us to recognize that, unlike America, there are no oceans separating warring factions in the Middle East, but merely squiggly lines drawn on the landscape separating countries.

It is not necessary to repeat here all of the reasons that Israel felt it necessary to move into Lebanon in June nor the counter reasons given by Israel's opponents. It is not my purpose to "defend" nor to "criticize" Israel. What I do want to do is to share what I saw and felt during this trip. What is important is to take a hard look at what we were told about this invasion as compared to

what we saw. As we were driving through Sidon, I found myself taking photos of the destruction. One member of our group stood up at the front of our bus and pointed out that we were doing exactly what we criticized the news media for doing: focusing on the destruction. Like you, I had heard that Sidon had received the heaviest damage of any city since World War II. Comparisons were made between the destruction found in Sidon and the conditions of Dresden after the fire-bombing of Hamburg harbor, or of Berlin and Hanover. However, we found that in actual fact less than five percent of the city was damaged. I think it is significant that Peter Jennings of ABC News, situated at the main European desk in London, upon visiting Sidon could express his surprise at how little damage there actually was. If he—in the midst of the reporting scene—could be misled, how much more so those of us who do not have the wide-ranging contacts of the news media.

### *'Walking the Streets Freely'*

From the front of the bus came the challenge to look beyond the damaged areas. With this challenge, my eyes began to move away from the destruction to the other areas of the city. People were walking the streets freely, shopping in markets filled with fruits and vegetables, sitting in cafe's, enjoying a day at the beach, and going about their everyday business. For nearly two hours, we freely walked the streets of Sidon. As we talked with people on the street, there was a sense of relief that a long nightmare may be coming to an end. For seven years, civil government has been absent: There were no courts, functioning police department, collection of taxes, or maintenance of municipal facilities. The hope was expressed over and over that finally Lebanon would once again have the opportunity of controlling its own destiny. There was a general feeling that *all* foreign troops had to leave, including the Syrian, PLO, and Israeli. The desire for the return to civil authority was expressed recently when a policeman ticketed a car in Beirut for being parked illegally and people stood around and applauded. Imagine living in an area without the protection of government. As one Lebanese man told me, "it was like your old west—we lived under the rule of the gun."

### **False Information**

Having seen the difference between reported destruction in Tyre and Sidon and the actual damage, we looked at another series of reports dealing with casualties and refugees. It is now an embarrassment to the news media to realize how much false information was disseminated during the early weeks of the war. Civilian casualty figures were highly inflated and, in spite of denials from the International Red Cross, that organization was often cited as the source of those figures. In actual fact, the figures came from the Red Crescent, headed by Dr. Charles Arafat, brother of Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO. Refugee numbers in the media ran into the hundreds of thousands, yet, as one American military man said to me in September, "We heard of 600,000 refugees, but we never saw them. In every other war involving refugees, they could be seen moving along the roads away from the fighting. In Lebanon, we saw very little of that." Where were those 600,000 refugees?

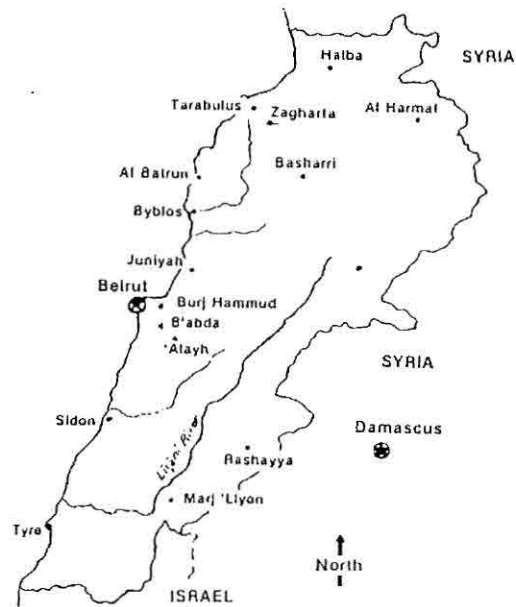
The problem of numbers is always difficult. Following the terrible massacre in the Sabra and Chatilla camps

in Beirut, the impression given for days was that 15 to 18 hundred people were slaughtered. In spite of the fact that the actual count now stands at 328, the news media continue to speak of "the missing hundreds."

### **Poison Leaflets?**

Given the growing reports of the use (or better, abuse) of the news media by the British government during the Falklands crisis where reports were deliberately altered for political purposes and "disinformation" became the order of the day, one must raise serious questions about the ability of news coverage to honestly and factually report events. What are the sources of information? How susceptible to manipulation are they? When a Rome newspaper published a story that the leaflets dropped in Sidon to warn the inhabitants of the approaching battle were made of poisonous paper and intended to kill all of the people of Sidon, one must raise serious questions about current news-gathering methods. This is particularly true when one discovers that the reporter who wrote this incredible story never bothered to check if it were true by even a simple test of the paper, but, having heard the story on the street "somewhere," reported it because "it was a good story."

*All* news coming from the area went through military and/or government censors. On most American television stations, news coming from Lebanon through Israel was clearly marked "Cleared by Israeli Censors." At the same time, news going through the PLO propaganda arm (Wafa) and cleared by them and/or Syrian censors was



passed on to the American public without the tag "Cleared by . . ." Late in the war, all such tags were dropped, but the impression that there was a "factual side" and a "censored side" to the news had been created.

**ANGUISHES.** I left that area with a number of deep concerns that caused me to anguish. Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel, often said that the problems of the area did not revolve around issues of "right" and "wrong," for then they would be easy to solve. Rather, they revolve around issues of "conflicting rights." My anguish grows out of those "conflicting rights."

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I anguish for the Palestinians, whose leadership (the PLO) has led them from one disaster to another. In the eighteen years since it was founded, what has the PLO done for the Palestinians? Prior to the massacre in Beirut, I worried about possible reprisals against the Palestinians. Though figures vary, it has been stated by Lebanese sources that up to 100,000 people have been killed during the fierce fighting during the past seven years of civil war within Lebanon itself. Though it must be acknowledged that the responsibility for this does not rest solely with the PLO, their "state within a state" certainly was a major factor in the instability within Lebanon. I was concerned about the Palestinians (many of whom were Lebanese citizens and in no way responsible for the upheavals) because hatreds and divisions run deep in Lebanon.

### *'A Frog And A Scorpion'*

There is a story told in the Middle East about a frog and a scorpion sitting on a riverbank. The scorpion says to the frog, "I want to get to the other side of the river. Why don't you carry me across on your back?" The frog replies, "No! If I do, you will sting me and I will die." The scorpion answers, "Why would I sting you? Surely then I too would drown and die." Since this made sense to the frog, he began to swim across the river with the scorpion on his back. In the middle of the stream, the scorpion stung the frog. As the frog began to die, knowing that the scorpion would drown and also die, he gasped, "Why did you do it?" to which the scorpion replied, "Because this is the Middle East."

This grim humor is unintelligible to most Americans. We wish to take our thought patterns and apply them to others, so the story doesn't make sense. However, we will never understand the Middle East until we understand that grim story, for the history of Lebanon in recent years is the history of the frog and the scorpion: When a group is attacked, even though that group knows that by retaliating against the attackers it will in turn be retaliated against, retaliations go on. Thus, the frog is stung and dies, but the scorpion then becomes a new frog to be similarly stung and die, and the new scorpion becomes yet another frog, etc. It does not make sense, but "It is the Middle East."

Thus, the retaliations against the Palestinians in Beirut become a part of that continuing cycle. Some reports link the massacre with the Christians of Damour, who were attacked by the PLO in 1976. How to break that cycle becomes our prime consideration.

### **203 Private Armies**

I agonize for the Lebanese people. With a population made up of Maronite Christians as well as other Christian groups, including Presbyterians and Orthodox factions, with a mixed Muslim population composed of Shiite and Sunni Muslims, with over 203 private armies in this small country, with years of destruction and death, and with the economic force of the country severely damaged, I anguish for these people as they seek to reestablish their land. The difficulties of forming a strong central government have been highlighted by the September assassination of the President-elect, and the continuing inability of the Lebanese army to disarm war-

ring factions and, therefore, to establish control. I believe it's possible for harmony and peace to come to Lebanon, but it will require *great* efforts.

I anguish for the Israelis. While in Israel, I found almost unanimous accord on the need to drive the PLO away from the borders of Israel; many Israelis were deeply concerned about the war and its toll on the Lebanese as well as its toll on the people of Israel. I think it is significant that, while the massacre in Beirut was apparently done by "Christian" forces, there has been no protest in the Christian world about this horrible event, but in Israel there has been deep concern expressed even though no one has accused the Israelis of doing the actual killing. Where is the moral indignation among the Christians of the world? Why have we been willing to point fingers at others, but not willing to search our own souls?

### **Anti-Semitism**

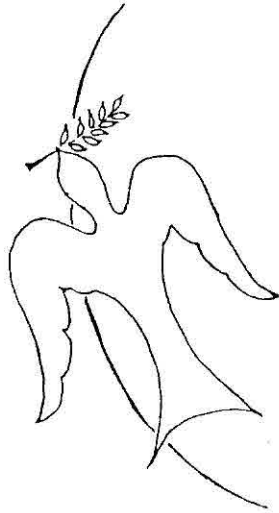
I anguish for the members of the Jewish community who are suffering under overt attacks of anti-Semitism. The inability to separate a disagreement about Israeli policy from an attack on all Jews everywhere is endemic today. When a Roman Catholic priest reports hearing, "Look at what those Christ killers are doing in Lebanon," we are dealing with deep-rooted anti-Semitism and not political comment. I firmly believe that our inability to speak with any authenticity to the Israelis grows from our inability to separate our theological anti-Semitism from our evaluation of political events. When all Jews everywhere are held accountable, we have failed miserably; when Jews in my community receive death threats, when synagogues are desecrated, and when Jewish institutions are fire-bombed, we are dealing with hatred that goes far beyond the politics of the Middle East. Granted, not all criticism of Israel stems from anti-Semitism, but enough does to force us to be deeply aware of our feelings.

### *'Conveyors of God's Love'*

I anguish for those of us who are Christians who are seeking to remove the anti-Semitism found in our tradition, who are willing to face the difficult issues, and who know that we need to be the conveyors of God's love and reconciliation in an area torn with strife and hatred. It is not easy, but even within Lebanon there are true Christian voices that speak out. The Maronite priest of Damour, Father Labaki, has written of the destruction of that town and of the hatred engendered there. However, in spite of that hatred, he could write, "If we are really Christians, we should forgive those who want to kill us, because killing is wrong. I know that humanly speaking this is sometimes impossible. But we must love each other if Lebanon is to survive."

Would that the voices of the Father Labakis of the world prevail and would that we as the Christians of America speak with the same authenticity as Father Labaki in recognizing the need for reconciliation and love.

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# RELIGION'S STAKE in a FREE ECONOMY

Rev. Edmund A. Opitz

A person's real religion is his set of bedrock convictions about the universe, the purpose of human life, and the meaning of it all. This is the set of premises within which he does his thinking and on which he habitually acts, individually and corporately. Everyone tends to act out his beliefs, and genuine religion, therefore, will eventually find embodiment in corresponding social forms. The institutions, conventions, laws, and morals of a people reflect the ultimate values they hold in common, and so there is a natural interplay between religion, politics, and economics.

## An Ordered Soul

It is axiomatic that external disorder and social strife is a reflection of disorder in the mind and soul—in faulty thinking and unsteady values. For it is in the nature of the human condition that man forever seeks a harmony within himself, that is, an ordered soul; whose outer reflection is a just and ordered society. The inner and spiritual liberty proclaimed in the Gospels seeks to realize itself and find proper expression in outer and social freedom. Christianity penetrates society and creates the appropriate political and economic structures by means of Christian persons doing their duty in the stations to which it has pleased God to call them. The earth will never witness a fully realized Christian society, for this would mean the Kingdom of

Economics has been rightly called the science of scarcity. If the planet provided such abundance that all things were free for the taking, there would be no need to economize and hence no need for a science of scarcity. But as a matter of fact we live in a world which has built-in shortages of virtually everything human beings want and need; whatever you want, you will have to give up something else in order to get it. The human situation on this earth is an unbalanced equation, on the one side of this equation is a creature whose wants, needs and demands are virtually limitless; but who finds himself on a planet where the means of satisfying these urges are in short supply. Unlimited wants on the one side; limited means for satisfying them on the other. Organize and reorganize society from now until doomsday, we will still be trying to cope with scarcity. There is no social gadgetry, no political gimmickry, that will enable us to circumvent this fundamental fact about human life on this planet—things are scarce, and however hard we work some human wants will forever be unfulfilled.

## Shortages Are Real

The general principle is: Human needs, wants, and demands always outrun the means available for satisfying them. This is a fact of our human situation as such; shortages are real, and we need to discipline our emotions into line with reality. Frustration is built into the social order; human fulfillment is to be found only in another dimension.

Untrue emotions are easily exploited by demagogues who tell us that mankind might move into a

utopia of abundance, except that wicked men bar the way and keep us poor. The coordinator of the National Council of Churches' Anti-Poverty Task Force, for example, makes the assertion that "poverty would not continue to exist if those in power did not feel it was good for them." This insulting accusation is silly on the face of it. We live in a commercial and manufacturing culture, and mass production is the rule. Mass production cannot continue unless there is mass consumption, and the masses of men cannot consume the output of our factories unless they possess purchasing power. To suggest that those who have goods and services to sell have an interest in keeping their customers too poor to buy is nonsense! In a free economy, everyone has a stake in the economic well-being of every other person.

## Masses Fare Better

When we survey the world we live in, the first thing we notice is that the masses of people in countries whose economy is relatively free fare better than the masses in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. They are more productive, in the first place, so States—the archetypal capitalist country—has supplied hundreds of billions of dollars of foreign aid to nations around the globe. Despite this incredible largess the average American enjoys an affluent society, and the prosperity generated by our relatively free economy is widely shared by the masses. Nor is this incredible abundance dissipated into various forms of personal indulgence; Americans generously contri-

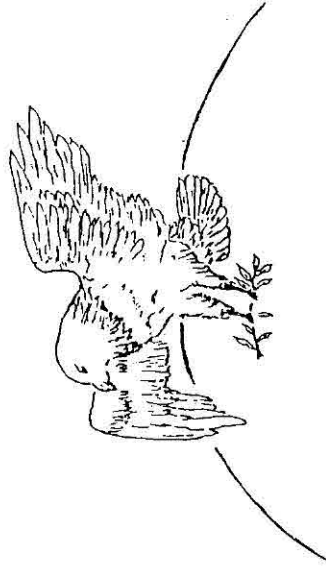
buted more than fifty six billions of dollars to philanthropy last year, plus twice that amount in in-kind services. They gave to schools and colleges, to their churches and hospitals; they underwrote medical research, they and art festivals, and they poured millions of dollars into causes in which they believed.

## Barter and Trade

There are probably no people so primitive that they do not engage in barter and trade, at least with fellow tribesmen and likely with members of neighboring tribes. Voluntary exchanges of goods and services for goods and services occur in every society, as individuals seek to better their circumstances by trading the fruits of their specialization. These multiple uncoerced transactions, in which each participant gives up what he values less for what he values more, constitute the market. Each individual participant is motivated by the natural human urge to improve his well being with an economy of effort.

## The Market Institutionalized

The free market economy (or "capitalism") is the market institutionalized, that is, set within the proper moral and legal framework. And this means a property limited government. When a government is structured along the lines of the Declaration of Independence, so as to protect each individual's private domain and offer him maximum scope to pursue his personal goals, the people enjoy political freedom. The people of a free society worship



according to choice, speak their minds, and do not censor the press. When they are engaged in the pursuit of their bread and butter—involving business, industry, and trade—they comprise the free economy. When you have the free society in the first place you get the free economy in the second.

The free market economy, or capitalism, is the natural counterpart of a society of free people; given a society of free people, there is no power to whose government has no advantage on some at the expense of others, and the economic arrangements of such a people will necessarily be free market or capitalistic.

## Voluntary Interaction

The market economy means voluntary interaction between individuals and groups, with rewards being parceled out to each participant according to the value a man's peers attach to his offering of goods and services. This assessment is made by consumers, whose fallibility is notorious; it is not made by Olympians possessing supernatural wisdom. Rock groups get rich because a great many people appreciate their performances and are willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of being audaciously assaulted. A gifted organizer with years of study behind him barely gets by, financially, because such appeals only to a select few. So be it; the pattern of action of the masses in a free society will not conform to the tastes of us philosopher-kings. But if our taxes were to be forced upon them the people would not be free. And at the conclusion of a contest to gain the

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*Continued from page 5*

power to force conformity on the masses the victor doing the forcing will not be a philosopher-king like us; he will be a tyrant! Even if it occasionally happens that we do get a philosopher-king like Marcus Aurelius in one generation we risk being stuck with a Commodus in the next. And that risk is too great to take, if our goal is a nation of free people.

#### **One Law for All**

Freedom in society means a government of laws and not of men. The Rule of Law—one law for all men alike because all men are one in their essential humanness—means equal justice and liberty for all. It means Adam Smith's "liberal plan of liberty, equality, and justice." Governmental action in a free society is limited by a written constitution, and certain items of the traditional moral code—don't murder, don't steal, don't defame, don't defraud, keep your word, fulfill your contracts—are implemented by the legal system. The limiting of government opens the way for freedom in religion, freedom of the press, and free speech. And there is a fourth freedom: the free economy. In the private property of a free society, individual liberty, expressing itself as consumer sovereignty, regulates the economy and eliminates the need for bureaucratic controls.

#### **Freedom Costs**

Freedom costs, and in our religious life we have learned by hard experience to pay the price of freedom; we have learned to tolerate forms of worship we find distasteful, for we know that an official church backed by a state enforced creed kills the spirit. We support freedom of the press even though this allows tons of garbage to be published daily. The press in private hands may disappoint us, but the press in the hands of a Ministry of Information would be intolerable. Similarly with freedom of economic enterprise. The result of popular choices in the marketplace—reflecting as it does the character and taste of the buying public—leaves much to be desired. But we take this in stride, knowing that this is part of what economic freedom means. The situation would be worsened if this public is enfeoffed to the bureaucracy. Teach them, then, for this public is the backbone of the free and prosperous commonwealth.



*Biblical Mt. of Transfiguration (Photo by HDG)*

# Our Images of God

By Rev. Ralph DiBiasio-Snyder  
Rev. Carol DiBiasio-Snyder

*(Editor's note: Ordinarily the Perspectives department of our magazine consists of two divergent "view-point" articles from within our fellowship. While this article does not follow our standard format, it nevertheless does discuss divergent views of the concept of God, and fulfills the hopeful intent of all articles appearing on these pages—that of inspiring us as individuals to pray, study, discuss and clarify our own perspectives as we seek to expand and strengthen our own beliefs.)*

*God created humans in the image of himself,  
. . . male and female he created them.  
Genesis 1:27*

*You were unmindful of the rock that begot you,  
and you forgot the God who gave you birth.  
Deut. 32:18*

*Think of the love that the Father has lavished  
on us, by letting us be called God's children!  
I John 3:1*

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem: How often I have longed  
to gather your children, as a hen gathers her  
chicks under her wings! Luke 13:34*

*Our Father, Who Art in Heaven . . .  
Matthew 6:9*

Our Judeo-Christian tradition proclaims the existence of a God . . .

*Who created the heavens and spread them out,  
Who gave shape to the earth . . .  
Who gave breath to its people  
And life to the creatures that move in it.  
Isaiah 42:5*

The Christian faith further affirms that this vast creator God was more fully made known in the person of Christ, in whom ". . . all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Col. 1:19 Christians of every tradition—from the most "conservative" to the most "liberal"—agree that we cannot comprehend intellectually, still less define verbally, the nature and character of the God we worship. We all see God differently, both as groups and as individuals in those groups. To compound the problem, our own ideas of God change as we ourselves change. Indeed our concept of God must grow, unless we are prepared to say that what we already know of God is all there is to know! Continuing to expand our understanding of, and experience with, the God of scrip-

ture is essential to the Christian life. One of the joys of our faith is seeing "more light break forth from God's word," adding to our knowledge of the one who gives us eternal life.

The Biblical writers knew their task to be a difficult one: describing in mere words the actions and nature of the infinite God. And so by the inspiration of God they filled the pages of scripture with a myriad of images—word pictures—of God. Any single image is necessarily limited (and can be misleading if taken farther than intended), so the Biblical writers wisely have provided many images. All language is symbolic, and often fails to adequately bear the load of communication even in mundane matters. How much more does it strain under the burden of describing God and God's relation to us? This is not to imply that our language is useless in religious matters. We can, as believers have for centuries, speak meaningfully and truthfully about our faith, growing into mature disciples. But part of that growth is being aware of the limitations of language, and thus enabled to consciously overcome those limitations.

The recent publication of "an inclusive language lectionary" has raised to popular light discussions on thinking about God as "male" or "female." What appears to be a new question has been raised in the past—as early as the third century by Christian writers—and merits serious consideration. In this article we will explore Biblical images of God, including God as a Father, as well as a less familiar one, where God is likened to a mother. We will also look to the character of Jesus as the fullest revelation of God. The goal is simply to expand our concept of God, that we might more fully worship ". . . in spirit and in truth."

In the New Testament, especially in the teachings of Jesus, the prevailing image is that of God "The Father." While that concept was not original with Jesus (Isaiah 63:15,16 for example) the manner and extent to which He used it was unique. He referred often to His "Father," and taught His followers to likewise consider God to be their "heavenly Father." Christians for centuries have prayed daily, "Our Father . . .," and indeed for many the essence of the Christian faith is summed up in the phrase, "The Fatherhood of God."

The phrase "God Our Father" surely has brought comfort and encouragement to many of us! It says that God longs to relate to us as the ideal human father would relate to his child: in patient, tender love, giving security and stability, direction and unqualified support. It is meant to be an image of warmth and security. God, Jesus is telling us, is not an enemy who takes joy in our wayward mistakes! No, God is our loving Father, eager to enfold us in arms of love and forgiveness! This

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"Father" image is the major concept by which many of us have come to know God. But like any image, it too has its limitations. Let us note two things:

1. Our understanding of God as "Father" is dependent on our culture. "Fathers" play different roles, and are allowed varying traits from culture to culture. If, to cite one example, fathers are not allowed to show emotion, a person growing up in that culture will find it more difficult to conceive of a heavenly Father who can show emotion.

2. Our concept of "father" is also shaped by our experience with our own earthly father. For many, our fathers did embody to a marked degree the major traits of God listed above. But what of those who suffered under a tyrannical, uncaring or abusive father? We dare not limit our view of God to "Father" because in doing so we risk (in the worst case) communicating terrible falsehood, and even under the best circumstances will communicate only a part of God's character, namely, God's "fatherliness."

Christian theology has never taught that God is a biological male. So if God is not a "male," and if "God the Father," while giving important knowledge about God is not a complete image of God, where else can we go for more insight into the fullness of God?

The most obvious place to begin is the person of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus said that in seeing Him you have seen God, what can we say about God? We feel that one of the most astounding things about Jesus is how very different He was from our concepts of what it means to be "masculine," especially for someone assuming the Messianic role that Jesus did. Jesus either sets aside the prevalent opinions about the status of women or displayed what would usually be called "feminine" virtues: nurturing, caring, tender patience, choosing a path of peace rather than war. Jesus weeping at the news of death of His dearest friend, Lazarus, and again weeping over His beloved Jerusalem: these are scenes that show His deep compassion that dares to be shown in tears. And note, too, that He uses a "feminine" image of God when He says,

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem: How often I have longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings! (Luke 13:34)*

In Jesus we see both the "feminine" and the "masculine" aspects of humanity, perfectly blended into one. The incarnate son, embodying the fullness of God in Himself, unites what we have sought to distinguish and separate.

If God is not "male," then, is God "masculine?" Absolutely! If God is not "female" either, is God "feminine?" Certainly! We know what God is like because we see the completeness of His character in Jesus.

There are other rich sources of imagery which communicate the character of God in a variety of "feminine" pictures in scripture. While God is said to be a husband to Israel, God is also seen as Mother to Israel. Moses attributes the birthing of Israel to God as he complains about God's wayward children: "Was it I who conceived all this people, was it I who gave birth (to them) . . .?" (Numbers 11:12) again in Isaiah 49:15 Yahweh speaks of his tender love for the nation:

*Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to have compassion on the son of her womb? Yet even if these do forget, I will never forget you."*

The Hebrew word translated "compassion" in this verse is rooted in the Hebrew "racham," meaning "womb." Virginia R. Mollenkott notes:

*Although this passage does not use direct simile or even metaphor, an analogy is established. God's love is like a woman's love for her suckling child—but with this difference: that even though occasionally a few human mothers may fail their children, God will not ever forget her little ones. (p. 20)*

Another passage, Hosea 11:3 & 4, describes God as a parent, lovingly and gently rearing a young child: "I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms . . . I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek, stooping down to him, I gave him food." The actions described here sound like the role most often taken by a mother, although the text does not make a specific distinction. Whether or not the text associates a male or female pronoun with God here, it is clear that God is displaying the "feminine" attributes of care and tenderness, concerned with the nurture of the young and weak.

What is God like? God is the best of both fatherhood and motherhood. J. I. Packer, writing about the concept of "God the Father," describes God as ". . . our perfect parent: faithful in love and care, generous and thoughtful, interested in all we do, respecting our individuality, skillful in training us, wise in guidance, always available, helping us to find ourselves in maturity, integrity, uprightness . . ." such words surely include both "fatherhood" and "motherhood," and are terms that we would use to describe the God we serve.

God as Father, God as Mother . . . even the combination of those two rich images does not exhaust the nature of God. The Bible gives us many more images in its attempt to tell us about the infinite God that longs to be known by God's creation! Creator, redeemer, sustainer; friend, shepherd; bread of life, light, vine, doorway to life, living water. All these terms allow us to know a little more about the God we worship. None is complete in itself, and any one taken to extremes can be misleading. But by combining them all we are able to begin to know God as God really is, even (perhaps especially) when that means thinking in images that may sound new to us, such as God our "Mother." Because God is both our "Father" and also our "Mother" we need to keep those images in balance. Mollenkott writes,

*It is all too easy to divert ourselves away from worshipping God to worshipping one particular image of God: And that is idolotry. The best way to heal ourselves of the idolotry we have fallen into (that is, using exclusively male images of God) is to utilize the full range of Biblical imagery for God. (p. 116)*

We have hardly begun to know the vastness of our creator who embodies the tender care, the infinite mercy, deepest compassion, the unshakable stability, the unflinching courage, and the infinite beauty that we, as children of that God, long to know! Let us have courage to experience all the fullness of the Biblical witness to the One who alone is worthy of our worship and service!

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# Our Churches and the Handicapped

By Mary K. Woolsey

"And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them." (Matt. 21:14)

"Today I am issuing a regulation, pursuant to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, that will open a new world of equal opportunity for more than 35 million handicapped Americans—the blind, the deaf, persons confined to wheelchairs, the mentally ill or retarded, and those with other handicaps." (Statement by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare on April 28, 1977.)

For years, despite the example of Jesus Christ centuries before, persons with handicaps were hidden from view as if their existence was an embarrassment. That meant that 10% (a conservative estimate of the number of handicapped persons in the United States in 1984) of our population were institutionalized or kept at home, dismissed and forgotten.

It was not until the Civil Rights movement of the '60s when attention was focused on several minorities, that those who suffered a handicap began to receive attention.

As the number of handicapped individuals was increased by returning Viet Nam veterans, they and other handicapped individuals began to refuse to fit in the dismal slot society decreed for them. The quiet, forgotten minority began to speak out. They refused to attend special schools or sit at home in their wheelchairs. Those with hearing difficulties asked us to learn their language, the wheelchair-bound asked us to build ramps and elevators for them, those with speech difficulties asked us to be patient in listening, the blind asked for physical guideposts so they could use their other senses, the retarded insisted we allow them to explore their potential to the fullest extent.

Still, society was slow to respond and, the Federal Government stepped in and passed a law, Section 504, which prohibited those receiving federal money from discriminating solely on basis of handicap. Several regulations were added to Section 504 over the years, the final one issued in April, 1977 for all recipients of HEW funds, enforcing compliance and defining "handicapped" individuals so there would be no loopholes.

Governmental agencies, schools and business who enjoyed government contracts grumbled and then scrambled to remove barriers before the deadline so their funds wouldn't be cut off.

Jesus Christ did not pass legislation, nor threaten to cut off support. He led by example, exhorted in his teachings and left the matter up to our Christian conscience.

Wondering if our churches had done any better, in

regard to removing barriers, than the government and commercial establishment, we asked persons attending the 1984 National Association annual meeting to answer a questionnaire. It was not a scientific poll and everyone in attendance was invited to participate, resulting more than one answer from one church in some instances. It did reveal some interesting facts, however.

Of 35 responses from churches with under 300 members, 15 indicated that wheelchair-bound had access to their church by way of ramps; 11 indicated the church was all on ground level and three said it was partially on ground level. One church indicated an elevator was installed in the church. Of course, getting into the church building is only part of the battle. Twenty-six revealed mobility-impaired persons had access to their Sanctuary, 19 to Sunday School rooms and the church kitchen, and 21 indicated these persons had access to their Fellowship Halls.

There were 48 total responses from churches with over 300 members and 35 indicated mobility-impaired persons had access to their Sanctuary, 30 to Sunday School rooms, 28 to the kitchen, 31 to Fellowship Hall and three left this section of the questionnaire blank. Others took time to note that their pastor's study, library and chapel were also accessible.

Twenty-four of the larger churches have ramps available, 7 say there are elevators with lowered controls in their churches, 10 indicated the church is all on ground level and 7 indicated their church is partially on ground level, allowing easy movement from room to room.

One of the important barriers which keep people away from an otherwise accessible meeting is lack of appropriate restroom facilities. Of the total 81 responses to our questionnaire, 51 respondents indicated mobility-impaired persons have access to restrooms in their churches. However, when faced with the minimum dimensions for a restroom stall adequate to accommodate a wheelchair or walker, only 29 said this was available. Sixteen indicated they had lowered towel receptacles and 25 said pull bars are available in their church's restrooms.

Thirty-four of the total respondents indicated they have handicapped parking reserved at their church.

While it is true that visually handicapped and hearing impaired are not as restricted by their physical surroundings as the mobility impaired, they do have specific needs in order to function naturally in a sighted and hearing world.

The questionnaire indicated that two of the larger churches and one of the smaller have manual signing available for the hearing impaired during services and

