

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?

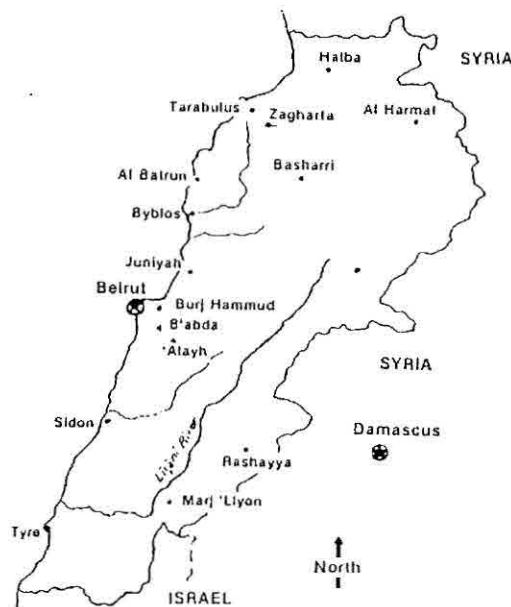
The problem of numbers is always difficult. Following the terrible massacre in the Sabra and Chatilla camps

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."

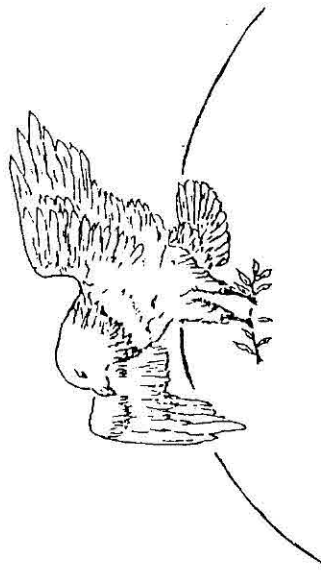
Would that the voices of the Father Labakis of the world prevail and would that we as the Christians of America speak with the same authenticity as Father Labaki in recognizing the need for reconciliation and love.

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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 unidly 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

God, and God's Kingdom is beyond history. But what we can hope for is a society Christian in its norms, Christian in its understanding that man is ordained to serve a transcendent end, fulfilling a purpose beyond society.

Biblical religion understands the world as the creation of God. Who looked out upon His work and called it good. It regards man as a creature who bears a unique relation to this God, being formed in His image—meaning that man possesses free will and the ability to command his own actions. This free being is given dominion over the earth with the admonition to be fruitful and multiply. He is commanded to work in order that he might eat; he is made steward of the earth's resources and held accountable for their economic use. He is to respect the life of his neighbor and not covet his goods; there is wrong because property is right. When such an outlook comes to prevail the groundwork is laid for a free and prosperous commonwealth; the City of Man is not an end in itself, but it is a proving ground for the City of God.

Christian Stewardship

One of its important testing areas concerns the efficient and non-wasteful use of the earth's resources and the proper management of our material possessions. These are the twin facets of Christian stewardship, and poor performance here will have dire consequences. As Jesus put it, "If, then, you have not proved trustworthy with the wealth of this world, who will trust you with the wealth that is real?" (Luke 16:12)

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.

Unruly 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, and the 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 supported medical research; they underwrote community orchestras 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 properly 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, that is, a society whose government has no power to confer economic or other advantage on some at the expense of others, and the economic arrangements of such a people will necessarily be free market or capitalist.

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 supernal 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 tastes 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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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

none provide special oral interpretation. While the question was not specifically asked on the questionnaire, a total of 10 respondents indicated their churches provide special auditory equipment for the hard of hearing.

One large church and one smaller church representative answering the questionnaire indicated that signing is available in Sunday School classes. One larger church utilizes signing during their annual meeting and have staff available who can sign. Two smaller churches indicated they rely on volunteers to provide this service.

None of the churches responding indicated they have raised numerals or braille available to mark meeting doors and none indicated they provided braille song books, Bibles in the sanctuary, nor order of service. One church did indicate a Braille Bible is available in its library.

Fourteen of the respondents indicated that the Bible as well as other inspirational works printed in large type are a part of their outreach services. Ten have tapes of the Bible while 13 have other inspirational works available on tape. Thirty-two respondents indicated the Sunday services at their churches are taped for the homebound or visually impaired.

Mentally or learning disabled can find classes which include slow learners in some of the Congregational Churches, according to seven positive responses received. Four indicated help was available for learning disabled. Seven also indicated they plan programs to include learning disabled and the same number plan crafts for special Sunday School children. Twelve respondents indicated that one-to-one help is available when needed during Sunday School.

The section of the questionnaire dealing with the severely ill drew the largest number of positive responses, with most of the 81 respondents indicating the minister visits and serves communion to ill individuals. Twenty-four indicated they had prayer chain support, nine take up collections to assist monetarily when need exists and 16 respondents indicated help with transportation.

Likewise, nearly all of the respondents (77-81) indicated their minister visits the families of ill persons, 64 indicating communion is provided for them. Forty-four respondents said their churches provide transportation for the family when required and 27 offer volunteers to help in the home.

Transportation for the handicapped was marked by twenty-six respondents, several indicating their churches own vans for this purpose and others indicating such service is provided on a one-to-one basis, coordinated through boards of the church.

All of the respondents indicated there were people in their fellowships who require special services. Fifty said wheelchair-bound persons attend and the same number indicated people who use walkers attend. Elderly people who find stairs difficult are in the majority of the handicapped attending Congregational Churches, according to the questionnaire. Sixty-seven respondents indicated this impairment. Visually handicapped numbered 25, hearing impaired, 42; mentally handicapped, 22; and the category "persons with learning disabilities" was marked by 22 respondents.

While many of the respondents chose not to complete Section 22, "In-church facilities are not provided for handicapped, because" . . . of those who did respond, 18 cited financial cost of remodeling and 12 indicated need did not exist. This portion of the questionnaire drew the most write in responses with comments such as "low need," "hasn't been considered," "we keep growing," "old building," "it's difficult to remodel historical sites" and "planning to move" being some of the written addendums.

When asked if their churches advertise services to the handicapped, again many chose not to respond. Of those who did, 11 indicated they were advertising but only three indicated they had notified governmental agencies dealing with the handicapped that they had accessible facilities or provided other services for the handicapped.

According to the booklet *Barrier Free Meetings* published by the Office of Opportunities In Science—Project on the Handicapped, American Association for the Advancement of Science, "There appear to be widely held misconceptions about the numbers, nature, and needs of disabled persons. The number and the abilities of disabled people are often underestimated while their needs are overestimated, with the result that they are often excluded from . . . activities."

How can you find out if your church is barrier free or what steps need to be taken to make it accessible? A systematic survey of the premises is advised, keeping in mind the needs and requirements of persons with various handicaps. This can be done by people with some knowledge of those requirements, but perhaps the easiest way to make such an assessment is to invite a handicapped person to do it for you.

A "wheel-through" of your facilities by a person confined to a chair will immediately reveal barriers and restrictions. Likewise a walk-through by a sight-impaired person will point up areas of restriction which may be unsafe for a non-sighted person.

A variety of literature is available on the subject of accessibility. Many books may be found in your public library or can be obtained from your state Health and Social Services Departments, Vocational Rehabilitation offices, Commission on the Aging.

Some helpful literature includes:

Barrier Free Meetings, Martha Ross Redden, Wayne Fortunato-Schwandt, Janet Welsh Brown, (1976) American Association for the Advancement of Science, Washington, DC 20005.

The Problem of Access to Buildings for the Physically Handicapped, Professor Timothy J. Nugent, Dir. Division of Rehabilitation-Education Services, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Ill. (booklet with large bibliography of literature available)

Passenger Assistance Techniques, William H. Henderson, Raymond L. Dabney and David D. Thomas, (1980) Transportation Management Associates, Fort Worth, Texas

ANSI-A117.1-1961, R-1971, "American Standards Specifications for Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible to and Usable by the Handicapped." American National Standards Institute, New York, New York.



Traditional Women's Groups in Crisis

by Sara Fetty

"What do we do now? We've called every eligible woman and more, and no one is willing to be president of the Women's Board!" Sound familiar? The women of Mayflower Congregational Church in Grand Rapids were confronted with this dilemma just five years ago. It is a problem not unique to Michigan nor to Congregationalists. Traditional women's organizations in the church as a whole are going through a crisis period. Many of us who have been active in women's work are asking, "What's gone wrong?"—"What do we do?"

Mayflower Church may be considered a typical larger suburban church. Our members are middle- and upper-middle-class and our membership is over 1000. It was their many hours of work and fund raising endeavors that helped the congregation in its earliest years. Equipment and furnishings from the kitchen to the parlor were lovingly donated by this ambitious, enthusiastic group of women.

While talking with a few of our key women, two of whom were charter members, they recalled the many hours they and their contemporaries spent serving dinners, arranging ice cream socials, bazaars and "second best" sales. "We wanted to be together. We had a real sense of fellowship." One of the younger women lamented, "That's what's lacking, our big loss today is fellowship."

Back twenty years ago, there were twelve active

circles. Each circle met monthly and was responsible for a booth at the annual bazaar. Circles also were expected to serve at monthly dinners and usually had their own special fund raising project. "We never thought about missing a meeting!" exclaimed one of the charter members.

Today, however, getting our women out to serve regular church dinners, make crafts for bazaars, much less attend a monthly circle meeting has almost become an impossibility. There are only six of the twelve circles still active and only two meet monthly. What happened? "Our society is in a state of flux and the roles of women are changing," summed up one of the women. It isn't a new idea. We've been hearing it for years from ERA and women's liberation. There have been many changes.

The majority of women are no longer working solely in the home. Take a poll of your congregation. You'll undoubtedly find, like we did, that many women have part-time, if not full-time, jobs. Volunteerism is suffering. Women have gotten the message that one isn't really appreciated unless she is paid. Spare time is now a luxury.

There are still women who have chosen not to join the ranks of the employed. Many of them are young mothers who are staying home to raise their families. How are they different from their mothers and grandmothers? Our women noted a significant difference in the free time of today's woman. "Back 20-30 years ago, many of us could hire a live-in college girl or maid to care for our children for \$5.00 a week. This often freed us up in the afternoon, when our children were

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napping, to work on church projects and attend meetings." Even if today's mothers could afford to hire a live-in student or maid at present prices, she might have difficulty finding one. Few, if any, women are willing to hire out for such a position today. The name of a daytime baby sitter is hoarded like gold. Therefore, rather than go through the hassle of finding a sitter, most mothers opt to stay home, unless they have a very good reason for making the effort.

Mobility is another big factor in the changing scene. Our church no longer is as inter-related as it was only a few short years ago. In a recent new member class we had people from other parts of Michigan, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Pennsylvania as well as Grand Rapids.

As our women were reminiscing about their earlier years, they recalled belonging to the same circle their mothers attended. In fact, most of these women had gone to grade school and high school together. Their ties and traditions had gone back for two or three generations. Mother taught daughter the ropes including how to prepare and serve large church dinners. Friendship between families formed tight social expectations that taught responsibility as well as commitment. Our transcendent younger generation has experienced few of the traditional bonds our older members enjoyed. It may not be all bad, however. As one of our charter members acknowledged, "Our older members hate to see changes. They like to say, 'We never did it that way before.'"

Determined not to give up after their discouraging dilemma of five years ago, the Women's Board decided they were going to have to look at change. The first thing they did was form a brainstorming committee of women of all ages and interests. They talked about what they saw as their needs. From this session, a questionnaire was drawn up and a telephone survey was conducted which reached all the women of our congregation. The results were tabulated and the Board took a long, hard look at the conclusion.

An encouraging finding was that our women did want to be involved in the work of the church. The significant change was the type and means of involvement. To begin, the original dilemma of finding a president for the Women's Board was met by electing co-presidents to share the responsibilities and time commitment.

Although our women have always been participants in community and school as well as church activities, they expressed a desire to attend fewer meetings. Affluence has allowed for more travel and eating out which often takes the place of the social needs once met by meetings. Responding to that request, most circles now meet quarterly, often for a social gathering. "We still need fellowship," reflected one woman.

Over-scheduling was another reason for the need for fewer meetings. School and community activities are demanding more and more family time. Attending programs, sporting events and chauffeuring often leaves mothers too exhausted to attend a lot of other meetings. Therefore, women are prioritizing their time. Whatever they are involved in must serve some real

purpose. "Let us know when you have a special project that needs doing and we'll be there," responded many of our ladies. Projects such as cleaning sanctuary chandeliers, serving funeral receptions, staffing fund raising events, which were once specific circle projects, now are being done by circle and non-circle members. These women feel they are making a significant contribution and aren't wasting valuable time.

The position of maid isn't the only one that has gone by the wayside. Many women ask, "Why are we always expected to be the ones to prepare and serve church dinners and serve coffee? Let others share that responsibility." Now when our church has weekly Lenten dinners, new member dinners, brunches, and coffee hours, the various church boards as well as the youth and choirs take a turn. This frees women to find other uses for their many talents and energies.

One of the critical changes was the elimination of the annual bazaar. Interest had definitely diminished. With fewer circles and no monthly work meetings, the crafts for the bazaar were not forth-coming. "Now how are we going to raise money?" worried the Board.

Amazingly it was one of our more mature members who came up with a brand new idea. For the past three years our church women have sponsored a Doll House Miniature Show. It has grown by leaps and bounds. This past year it raised \$5,600 for the Board.

The show charges admission to view furnished doll houses and miniature displays which are awarded prizes by the show. Dealers of miniature products are invited to set up booths and the Board also receives a percentage of these sales. A luncheon, special cookbook, miniature workshops and a raffle of a doll house have been special additions over the years.

Unlike the bazaar, which required our women to attend monthly meetings and work on one or two projects, the Miniature Show has provided all church women an opportunity to volunteer in numerous capacities for as many hours as they desire. Evening as well as daytime hours allows working women to be included.

More one-shot type activities are being encouraged by the Board. A special one day Mini Bazaar and tea is being offered by one of our older circles. Anyone who enjoys making crafts and wants to contribute to this project is encouraged to do so. Fellowship lunches and teas at special times of the year are also being sponsored by circles. Special emphasis toward spiritual growth is being fostered by Day-Away Retreats for all ages. (Babysitting is made available by the Board.)

It has been suggested that a successful organization offers equal opportunities for fellowship and service plus having a meaningful purpose. The church certainly offers these three ingredients in a most unique way. What better meaning than to spread the hope of the Christian faith through service to the church in fellowship with women of like mind.

No, Mayflower women haven't solved all their problems, but they feel they are on the right track. An optimistic attitude has developed and changes are taking place. With God's help, they will continue to grow and be a vital agency for God's spirit in the church and community. □



No Two Days Are the Same As Nursing Home Chaplain

by the Rev. James Lowmaster

I serve as chaplain of a large nursing home. This is a task that frequently causes me to wonder if a job description is even possible. There are no two days that are alike. Nevertheless, I am able to plan and to carry out many things. We hold regular services, special classes, and I make planned visits to the rooms. Still, most of my time is spent in reaction to needs.

This home, with an average population of one hundred and seventy-five persons, is a full-service facility. The residents range from those who must be tube fed to those who occupy retirement rooms. Some are unable to leave their rooms, most are in wheel chairs, a few are able to walk. Many are mentally impaired with various problems of aging, many are very alert and seek programs to educate and challenge their minds. All need recognition, love, and acceptance.

The operation of the home is carried out by the management on a departmental basis. Nursing cares for the physical and medical needs of the residents; maintenance cares for the building and grounds, housekeeping cleans the premises and cares for the laundry, social services records and maintains social history and individual needs, the activities department plans and carries out regular and special daily programs, volunteer services secures and directs volunteer activity. From the above, it is apparent that the management has done its

best to provide a balanced environment for the residents.

For a year and a half I served as a volunteer conducting a service of worship every other week. Earlier this year I was asked to join the staff of the home as chaplain. Because of the diversity of activities I have had to fit my programs into the existing structure. In the beginning, this limited my programs to some extent, but I was able to come to know the residents more quickly by attending these existing programs.

I make daily visits to the floors and check in with the nursing stations. There are many residents that I visit on a regular schedule. The residents may make requests that I visit through the nursing staff and this is relayed to me. At times I am paged to come to a room. Admittance and social services request that I call on certain residents, and I am now called as I walk through the halls by various individuals.

This is the basis for one part of my ministry. I find that I am often called upon to talk with and counsel members of the staff of the home. Another major part of my work is with the family members of the residents as they deal with their problems and feelings. This phase has been the one showing the greatest growth as I become more of a familiar fixture.

When not dealing with residents on a one-to-one basis, I have other items on which I am working. Many of the people here have completely lost touch with their home church, and I try to re-establish communication for them. I work with a volunteer to create new lines of contact with the family members so that we may assist them. And we are always working on new ideas to be translated into

The Rev. W. James Lowmaster is Chaplain at Georgian Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

programs to attract residents, families, and the local churches.

As for the organizational status, I am directly responsible to the administrator of the home and work under her supervision. As a matter of practice, however, I make myself responsible to, and answerable to, all department heads. I seek out suggestions from each and try to fulfill the needs that are expressed to me.

Each day I find that I am neither smart enough, nor numerous enough to meet all of the requirements that arise. And so I must reach out for help. The volunteer program and the activities departments have been joyous assets. By working with the director of volunteers, many problems have been quickly solved and many programs have been adopted and aided by the activities department. Were it not for the responsiveness of all of these people, my service could only be minimal.

The proliferation of privately owned, as opposed to church owned, homes will mean a lack of spiritual care for the residents. If, indeed, any assumptions are made by the owners, it would be that the resident's own church would take care of this need. Certainly, this was once my own view. However, except for very rare instances, this is not the case.

Why is this not true? First, many residents are brought to the home by their families who desire to have them near their own home; many are from other states, other cities. The resident has been uprooted and placed into a strange community. In most cases, their own church does not even know where they are. Second, they may have been residents of the general metropolitan area, but this may mean that they are twenty to fifty miles away from the home church, and this is beyond the scope of the average congregation. Third, even

such a purpose.

It might be that local churches supporting an intern program might have the student serve a nursing home as an acting chaplain.

These are, however, nebulous dreams of a distant future and the need is already here and is increasing rapidly.

Nursing homes exist in all of our neighborhoods. Unless we have need of their services, we usually ignore them. They are a frightening place for most of us, but this is only because they are in the realm of the unknown.

My hope would be that each church would undertake the obligation to provide spiritual care for one nursing home, that each church would conduct regular services for the home. There are four churches that now do this in our home. Churches, working with the activities staff, could offer musical programs, Bible study, and discussion group leadership. These might

The resident has been uprooted and placed in a strange community.'

Thus far I have sought to give a general understanding of my work as a chaplain, hoping that this will pervade another mind. There is a great sense of appreciation demonstrated by the residents, the staff, and the families. It is indeed a rewarding work, but I have a second reason for this writing, which takes the form of general problems and a call for assistance.

Those who keep national demographic records of our national population advise that by the end of this decade that there will be fifty million Americans over the retirement age. That is to say, one person of every four. This figure makes the nursing home particularly attractive to private industry as a diversified investment. Our name was recently purchased by a private company, and many more will be. There will also be many new homes built. I do not anticipate that such homes owned by major corporations will be insensitive, all that I have seen here indicates that the reverse will be true, they do care and are responsive to needs.

if they were still in the immediate area of their home church, the case load of the average minister so severely limits him that he is unable to meet the specialized needs of members who now find themselves in a totally new environment.

These nursing home residents have generally been active church members during their lifetime. They are now cut off from this rich association by virtue of age and infirmity. The need for the involvement in, and for the ministry of a church is still needed, more now than ever before. Most homes, because of the need to keep costs to a minimum, cannot afford to provide a chaplain. Considering the three points that I have outlined, where will the spiritual support come from?

It might be that, at a future date, funds could be made available to various homes to permit the hiring of a chaplain, either full or part time. This could only occur if our churches were to care sufficiently to designate moneys specifically for

even be done by simply moving a planned event of the church to the nursing home where members could take part together with the residents.

As for those of us who are members of the churches, there is much that we can offer as individuals, and there are loyal and valuable friends waiting to meet us.

There exists real need for those of us who can organize and lead craft programs, a need for musicians, a need for song leaders, movie projectionists, dancers, singers, painters, sculptors, knitting instructors, game leaders, and a myriad of other skills and talents. But for most, the most rewarding is simply to make good friends that we can visit regularly.

We have, right in our own neighborhoods, an opportunity to be a missionary for Christ, and to see immediately a personal reward for our service. This opportunity will grow rapidly in the rest of this decade. How will we respond to this need to carry the Word to people unable to come to us? □

How Can We Minister to the Mentally Ill?

(Author's Note: In working with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, I have found that our members, mostly relatives of severe chronic psychotics like John, have found their churches to be unresponsive to the problems of the families of chronic psychotics. My goal is to educate ministers and laypeople about severe brain diseases like schizophrenia so that they can give the afflicted and their families the guidance and spiritual support they need. Our society has failed in its stewardship to chronic psychotics. This failure is due mainly to fear and ignorance. Even psychology majors are taught very little about schizophrenia, though schizophrenia took up more hospital beds than any other disease before we started dumping these people on the sidewalk.)

by Laurie Endicott Thomas

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in

Laurie Endicott Thomas is a member of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. She lives in Upper Darby, Penn.

prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.—(Matt. 26: 44-45)

The brain, like any other part of the body, sometimes breaks. The man in the picture is John. He has lived on a steam vent on the corner of 20th and Walnut Streets (a prestigious address in Philadelphia) for the past three years. He is suffering from brain damage so severe that it kept him in the hospital for fifteen years. He was released not because he was better, but because the state government wanted to save money by neglecting him. If you took a CAT scan, a cross-sectional X-ray, of his brain, you would almost certainly find that his cerebral cortex has shrunk. Why isn't he in the hospital today? Why isn't he even taking medication? When he was on medication, he was much better. He broke down and cried to a friend of mine that he was afraid that he would relapse and end up on the sidewalk again.

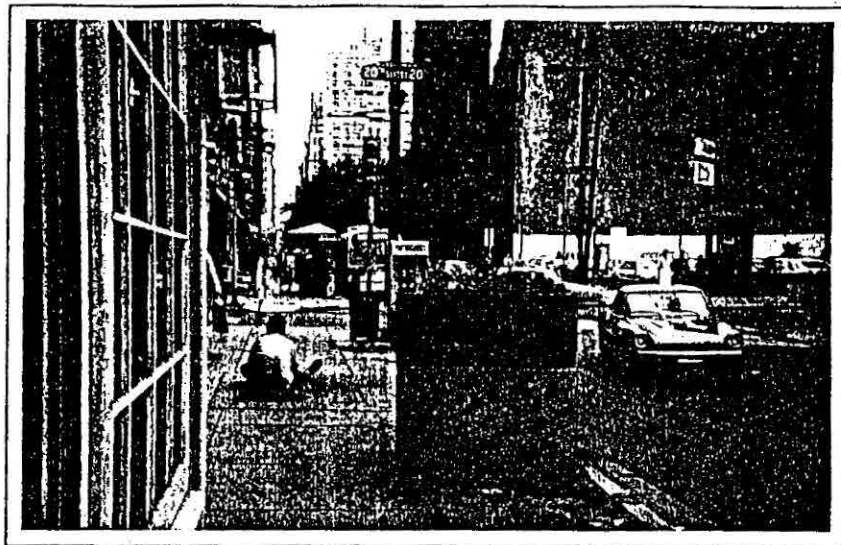
John is a schizophrenic. That doesn't mean that he has split per-

sonality (multiple personality disorder) or that he has "mental problems." He doesn't have "mental problems." His insanity is entirely physical in nature, just like Alzheimer's Disease. Because of defects in his brain chemistry, his thoughts get all mixed up. He has hallucinations, delusions, and often goes into "trances."

We don't know much about what caused John's illness, but we have been able to rule many things out. First, it was not caused by "bad parents." It was not caused by "stress." You can be sure, however, that his illness caused a great deal of stress, especially for his parents and brothers and sisters. The disease is not caused by any moral failings of the victim. Moral failings don't cause leukemia either.

Most schizophrenics fall sick when they are between fifteen and twenty-five years old. For many, it is a life sentence of unrelenting madness. Only one-third recover with no residual symptoms. One out of one hundred Americans will have schizophrenia at some time during his or her life.

John needs medication, supervi-



Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.—Matt. 26: 44-45

sion, and a place to stay. We cannot provide these things to him "against his will." The procedures laws in Pennsylvania and most other states preclude that. They were written by people who meant well, but did not realize that John and thousands like him would end up on the street. The people who pushed for these laws believe that there is no such thing as "mental illness." They wanted people who march to a different drummer to be safe from oppression from the government. The fact is, John is not really "mentally ill." There is plenty of evidence that he has brain damage. If John's diagnosis was mental retardation, instead of schizophrenia, he would be in an institution today.

When John is on medication, he does not want to live on the sidewalk. The medication helps correct the chemical imbalance in his brain. Of course, since it is strong medicine, it does have side effects like embarrassing facial twitches. These side effects are very mild compared to the side effects of not taking the medicine. Many "street people" like John have to have part of their feet amputated from frostbite. Perhaps that will happen to John this winter. Stanley, who lived near 36th and Walnut in Philadelphia, died of

exposure.

Why can't we give John medicine? Unless we can talk him into taking the medicine regularly of his own volition, we cannot make him take it. The ACLU defends the right of an insane person to refuse to take anti-psychotic medicine. As a result, John and thousands of others like him, were handed a bottle of pills upon "deinstitutionalization." When they failed to take the medication properly, they slipped back into insanity. Many normal people find it difficult to take medication responsibly. For people like John, it is nearly impossible. John doesn't have the judgment to take his medication by himself. Schizophrenics are often paranoid, and may be convinced that people are trying to poison them.

John needs supervision. Community Mental Health Centers were supposed to take care of people like John when they left the hospital, but too often they spend most of their resources treating the "worried well." They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. (Matt. 9:12)

John was supposed to be able to stay in a halfway house. Halfway house funding has been cut drastically. But even if space is available, there is no way we can

make John stay there. Because of his paranoia, he refuses to stay in a halfway house.

People like John are hard to love. They are smelly and filthy. They usually have lice. Even if you can clean them up, their bizarre behavior frightens and offends people. Occasionally, they can even become violent. They are truly the people that Christ spoke of when he talked of the least of our brethren. How can we minister to them?

First, we must learn all we can about what afflicts these people and how to help them. An excellent source is *Surviving Schizophrenia: A Family Manual* by E. Fuller Torrey, M.D. Dr. Torrey's sister is a chronic schizophrenic. He has donated the royalties from the book to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Are there people like John in your city? What have you done to help them? With a mental health alliance, try to have them put in a hospital or other care facility. If they are not responding to medication, insist that other medications be tried. Follow the progress of individuals as they leave the hospital and try to live in a halfway house or at home. Remember the Good Samaritan. Go thou and do likewise. □

Suicide is a recognizable illness

by George Nichols, M.D.

My son Bill killed himself last summer. A year later we still miss him, and the sorrow is slow to disappear.

We hear a lot in the news about the tragedy of suicide, but not nearly enough about prevention. As a doctor and as a father, I am very concerned that the topic of suicide should be presented properly, because I think we now know enough to look at suicide with more understanding, and this can save some of these precious lives.

Most suicides are due to an underlying depression. Depression is an illness, and it is very common. It affects about 10-15% of all men, and 20-30% of all women at some time during their lives. It hurts families and careers; it destroys people. Yet, surprisingly and sadly, most people fail to recognize it either in themselves or in their loved ones. What makes this especially tragic is that depression is so curable.

Many who suffer don't come to the doctor for an official diagnosis. They look quite normal, and they walk about in public, among friends and family, displaying the classic signs of depression, but usually they meet no one who understands what the signs mean. Their illness remains unrecognized. Many recover, but some of these folks die. Families and friends could save them if only they could suspect the disorder.

Since we have no reliable tests for depression, we depend on symptoms and signs. Any symptom, by itself, may be normal; and almost all of us have "the blues" now and then; but when these symptoms occur in combination and when they persist, real depression may be indicated.

Everyone should learn these dozen signs of depressive illness:

1. Recurrent thoughts of death and suicide
2. Mood is sad and unhappy; but sometimes irritable and anxious, and some deny mood change
3. Feelings of hopelessness of being worthless and of self-reproach
4. Crying or inability to cry
5. Withdrawn
6. Loss of interest and of pleasure in things
7. Neglect of personal appearance and of self-care
8. Trouble thinking and concentrating
9. Difficulty with sleep: may have trouble falling asleep, but often awakening too early, or sleeping too much
10. Change in appetite or weight
11. Physically: slow and tired, or may be agitated and restless
12. Complaints of physical ill health: e.g. fast heart beat, headache, constipation, chronic pain (Symptoms like these are common but misleading, and disguise the underlying sadness; they probably mean that the person is worried about himself and is asking for help in approved [nonemotional] words.)

Some depressed people, especially youth, may not appear sad and hopeless outwardly, but instead may act rebellious, become involved with alcohol or other drugs, may fail subjects in school, or stop going altogether.

Occasionally, your first suspicion that someone is seriously depressed occurs when you feel a little gloomy yourself after talking with him. (It rubs off.) It is always possible to ask a person directly how he feels—probably more directly than you realize.

For someone who is depressed, life's problems are

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*"Understanding suicide may be difficult,
but preventing suicide is not a com-
plicated social problem."*

especially difficult, so that depression can easily mimic a normal reaction to trouble. Even a pastor may not always realize that he is dealing with a risky depressive illness if one of his flock asks for help with a personal problem.

Suicide becomes even more of a threat with these danger signs:

1. Increasing distance and withdrawal from family and friends
2. Absence of hope
3. Hearing voices and other disordered thinking
4. Talking of suicide
5. Giving away prized possessions—e.g., trophies, hi fi and sports equipment, baseball cards; "I won't be needing these any more."
6. Putting affairs in order—e.g., returning long-borrowed items; final contact (unspoken good-byes) with important friends and relatives.
7. Sudden improvement (no longer painfully undecided)

Having counselors, ministers, crisis centers, social programs and people willing to talk with us when we are troubled are wonderful resources for many things, but not for depressive illness. It's not enough. We can't stop there.

Serious depression is not primarily a social or a counseling problem. It is an illness whose sadness has grown beyond words and beyond self-control.

If you suspect depression, or if you are concerned that someone is suicidal, don't decide to watch and wait. We can't leave the treatment up to the one who is depressed, because he is not himself. His thinking and judgment are impaired. This is not the time for sympathizing, or just listening or trying to restore hope. And don't just lecture and tell him to shape up; he's not able. Delaying treatment is risky. He does need your help.

So step right in and take him to his doctor, or to a psychiatrist, who can verify your amateur diagnosis, and who can describe the antidepressant medicines which are so often needed along with psychotherapy. The outlook, then, improves.

We believe that faith and prayer strengthen people in making good decisions. But, as I have said, a person with a depressive illness has lost his ability to think and to judge normally. His poor brain is sick. We cannot blame him for making the wrong decision when he is depressed any more than we would blame him for faulty thinking if he were sick with schizophrenia. Fortunately, depressive illness usually responds well to medical treatment.

Understanding suicide may be difficult, but preventing suicide is *not* a complicated social problem. Prevention depends mainly on recognizing the depressive illness which usually comes first. Spotting depression is not only for teachers and counselors. It's time now that *all* of us learned how.

Public recognition of depression is almost nonexistent at present. Society has not failed these people. We just haven't seen them clearly before. Shame and stigma have held us back. We publicize the signs of cancer, and we even teach the public CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). Why not a simple uncomplicated program to show *everyone*—how to recognize depression? I think your own doctor might be willing to help.

I am one doctor who has learned from personal experience. That's why I have written this for you. ■

If you, also, have suffered a tragic loss through suicide, Dr. Nichols recommends the booklet, "Your Child Has Died." Write: Adina Wroblewski, 5124 Grove St., Minneapolis, MN 55436.

Ollie North

To buy into the concept of North as new American folk hero is to open our doors to a new form of lawlessness.

by Dr. Robin R. Meyers

If Oliver North is ever elected president, or becomes a senator, I feel the need to put something in print that can be recovered for the sake of proving to my children that their father was never part of the Ollie North Fan Club. Because however dazzling his performance, however charming his demeanor, however "riveting" his testimony, the questions that remain are about the drift of the country, its willingness to accept the unacceptable, and its disregard for the separation of powers in a Constitution whose 200th birthday we celebrate and whose wisdom we call our own.

One cannot resent Col. North's passion for his cause; as an American he is entitled to it. But one can tremble at the prospect that any true believer is exempt from the checks and balances which our founding fathers knew would save us from fascism. Frequently during North's testimony, he called upon lawmakers to pull back restraints on foreign policy so that future presidents and their inner circles could act alone in dealing with hostage takers. Does this make sense?

North is asking us to make it easier in the future to do what the Reagan administration did, namely, take whatever steps are necessary to bring the hostages home. Col. North called for a reform of the Hostage Act, admitting that it is an archaic piece of legislation, so that future leaders could act swiftly and in secret. These actions might include, as we now know, selling arms to the foremost terrorist nation on earth (while diverting public attention by dropping bombs on the "Mad Dog of the Mid-

dle East"), and then claiming that we were opening channels to non-existent moderate elements in that country. This, despite the fact that the law forbids it and that at the same moment we were shipping missiles to Iran, we were asking our allies not to do so, in order that the war between Iran and Iraq might end.

Imagine now that you are a hostage-taker. What better news could you possibly get than that America would *diminish* its restraints, remove its system of checks and balances, squelch the free and open debating of issues for which it is renowned, and permit an inner circle of politically motivated men to deal with you in secret? Indeed, this might permit a popular president to swear to his electorate that he will never give in to terrorists, and then secretly give terrorists exactly what they want! North is correct in calling it a dangerous world. But would this make it any safer?

The phrase which keeps recurring these days is "the ends justify the means." This is, in essence, North's entire case in a nutshell. But are we, as a nation, ready to live by that creed? Is it not the creed of totalitarianism? True believers are always ready to sidestep the foolish restraints of non-true-believers in order to accomplish their mission. Hitler was a true-believer. So was Stalin. And anyone who thinks North's "born-again" faith will keep him in line need only listen to Jimmy Swaggart preach, or recall the atrocities that history teaches are on the dark side of self-righteousness.

When Senator Mitchell from Maine tried eloquently to say that one can be against Contra aid and still love God and

country, it sounded like the voice of one "crying in the wilderness." Not because this isn't true, but because this isn't the mood of America. Reagan has carefully fashioned a rhetorical vision that encourages simplistic thinking and swift, cinematic solutions to complex problems. It only makes sense that Oliver North should hatch in that nest and that television should give them both their wings. Twice we have elected style over substance—why then should we not love charisma over the Constitution?

To put it more vividly, imagine that instead of Col. North on the stand, it was a shaggy, bespectacled professor of political science from Berkeley. Let us say that the professor had become convinced that Marxism was the only answer in Central America. He had studied the effect of the American presence, which is the dominant presence since the days of the Spaniards, and concluded that wealthy land-owners, corporations, and military dictators have created their own kind of totalitarianism—keeping the masses poor, killing labor union leaders, and seeking military solutions to what are often political and economic problems.

Imagine now that Prof. Shaggy had organized a secret network of similar Marxist true-believers who raised funds by traveling around the country with a potent slide show of their own, denouncing imperialism, and that using profits from the sale of weapons illegally to Cuba, the professor had channeled millions to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. To accomplish this he operated out of the White

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Dr. Robin R. Meyers is senior minister of Mayflower Community Church, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Ollie North

The actions of North represent those of a man who has been in the trenches and knows the real story.

by the Rev. E. Gerry Hoard

In the weeks before the appearance of Lt. Col. Oliver North at the Congressional Committee on the Iran-Contra scandal, two things had become quite obvious to the average American. The first was that the aforementioned average American had become terminally bored with the hearings. The second was that the Committee was going to have Ollie North for lunch.

In its issue published the week prior to Lt. Col. North's appearance, *Newsweek* magazine prefaced its coverage by stating, "No matter what Oliver North intends, his testimony this week can only hurt Ronald Reagan."

The next issue led off its prime story with this sentence: "Lt. Col. Oliver North charged up Capitol Hill last week as the Rambo of Diplomacy, a runaway swashbuckler who had run his own private foreign policy from the White House basement. But he captured the hill as Ollie: a new national folk hero who somehow embodied Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, and John Wayne in one benedaled uniform."

Newsweek in no way stood alone in its interpretation, both before and after, of what was happening on Capitol Hill.

What is the most important aspect of the North phenomenon is not the fact that it happened, but what exactly occurred in those six days to alter the thinking of so many people. What has emerged as the most intriguing question to grow out of the hearings thus far remains how the man who was quite universally condemned by the media and his congressional inquisitors in one short week became the man whose face now graces the "Ollie to the White House" buttons, of

which my corner shopkeeper assures me he has sold four large buckets in the past two days.

I learned long ago that if one is to begin to understand how the public is thinking, that the best way to ascertain that knowledge is to ask as many of them as is possible. In that tradition, therefore, I spent several weeks doing just that. I was fortunate that I was to be in three of California's major cities during that time and able to spend a great deal of time discussing the "North phenomenon" with many people. It was the constant topic of discussion. It is out of these multitudinous conversations that I have gathered the several suggestions I now posit as possible explanations for what *People* magazine, in its populist manner, refers to as "Oliemanía."

We cannot undervalue the fact that Lt. Col. Oliver North's physical nature to some extent influenced those who viewed the hearings on television. Before a panel of Congressmen and lawyers characterized best by their various stages of balding heads, rumpled suits, and somnolent attitudes appeared this recruiting poster Marine, replete with proper military haircut, ramrod posture, shining leather and brass, and enough medals and ribbons testifying to his heroism and journeys in harm's way to cause him to list slightly to the left.

What followed was what one university professor of advanced speech techniques has called, "One of the most significant spontaneous performances of the past half-century." And it was a performance to treasure. Many who had been almost violently opposed to what Col. North had done found themselves victims of his personality. An

actor friend who understands the power of charisma told me, "I hate myself for believing him." The eyes, deep set and penetrating, are yet capable of expressing sadness or humor. On one occasion he actually followed a telling point of testimony by winking at one of the senators. And, of course, the hands are almost too eloquent for a man of action.

But all of these things would have been of little value to the image of Col. North if the committee had succeeded in its desire to lay his life, his beliefs, and his actions open to ridicule before its constituency. For the first several days they did not fail for lack of trying.

And then a strange thing began to occur. The entire tone of the questioning was subtly altered. As it became increasingly more evident that the senators, representatives, and counsels were going to be unable to run roughshod over this single Marine officer, a more conciliatory atmosphere began to permeate the committee chambers. One would like to think that, as in the great Frank Capra movies of our collective youth, a life-changing alteration had begun to take place in the values of the Congressional panel. But a more modern cynicism intrudes on such thinking. We have watched politics in America too long for such simplistic musings. What happened to the committee can be summed up in one sentence: They saw the handwriting on the wall. An outpouring of public support for a single man, unparalleled in recent years, was manifesting itself further with every delivery of mail and telegrams. The underdog was gathering allies, and these allies were the folks that fill the ballot boxes. Nothing can change a politician's mind faster than erosion of his constituency.

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The Rev. E. Gerry Hoard is pastor of Pilgrim Congregational Church, San Jose, Calif.

Women in the Church

by Lewis M. Hopfe, Ph.D.

As Paul was writing his letter to the Roman church, he probably had no sense of writing scripture. He was simply writing words of comfort, instruction, and advice to friends in a distant city just as a modern letter writer might do. At the conclusion of the letter, he mentions the names of many persons he knew in Rome. He speaks of Phoebe, a deacon of the church. He greets Priscilla and Aquila, who served many years with him in other cities. In all, Paul lists more than 20 persons in his greetings. In examining these names we find that approximately one-third of the leading members of the Roman church known to Paul are women.

What was the early church like in its structure? We do not really know. From our reading of Paul's letters and the book of Acts it appears that early Christianity was an amorphous body. Here and there in great cities of the Roman empire there were groups of followers of Christ. In the earliest days of the church most of these people were Jewish. They worshipped in synagogues and used the

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Old Testament as a Bible. Apparently their officers were similar to those of a synagogue. We read of deacons, elders, bishops, evangelists, etc. Deacons were probably those in the Christian community who served the common meal and attended to the charitable work of the church. However, the title "deacon" was sometimes used by Paul to apply to his own ministry and to that of others. Elders were the older and wiser members of the group. Bishops were probably the leaders or shepherds of local congregations. By and large these offices carried little power and no money. People served in these roles because it was work that had to be done.

In Romans 16 some of the women who are saluted seemed to hold positions of leadership in the church. Phoebe, the first person to be greeted is called "deacon." Was she simply a "deaconess" as some of our translations say, a woman who helped to serve meals and do charitable work, or was she a deacon in the sense of being a chosen and commissioned leader like Paul? The *New*



(Drawing by
Margaret Hendricks.)

English Bible thus refers to Phoebe as one who "holds office" in the church. The only clue to this mystery is found in verse two where Paul speaks of Phoebe as *prostatis* which means "Leader," "protector," or "patron." In the Hellenistic societies *prostatis* referred to people of wealth and authority.

Readers of Acts and Paul's other epistles know Priscilla was a teacher who instructed the brilliant young Apollos in the truth of Christianity. We also know of the church which met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. This husband and wife are obviously leaders in the Roman church.

What of the other women mentioned by Paul in his greetings to Rome? Is it possible that Mary and Junia and the other named and unnamed women in this list were also people of authority and leadership in the early Roman church? It seems possible that throughout the church, women shared equally with men in the leadership of Christianity.

Apparently the early church reached out to many of the downtrodden classes in Roman society. Romans and Jews offered many fine things for the women in their society. Both were far more generous to women than many other societies. However, in no sense of the word were women in either society equal to men. A *minyan*, that basic

group necessary for a synagogue, consisted of 10 adult Jewish males. Women did not count when it came to worship. However, Christianity reached out to women and slaves and made them brothers and sisters in Christ. Both groups were given the opportunity for leadership in the early church.

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By accepting women and slaves the Christian church made a significant social statement for its time. It said that the ground of the church was level and there was no room for class distinctions. It really said that discrimination against women and slaves was a sin.

It is interesting how religions have the power to change social structure. When the Buddha was born in India in the sixth century B.C. a caste system had developed. Society was broken into four or more classes. If you were at the top of the caste system, a Brahmin, it was believed that you were better than others, deserved more privileges, and were closer to salvation. Women were at the bottom of the heap. A woman, even a high born woman, could only hope to be born as a man in the next life. The Buddha was not a blazing social reformer. He led no marches and fought no revolutions against the social ills of his time. He never even wrote a book against the caste system or the oppression of women, but he undercut them tremendously. The Buddha, simply and quietly, admitted people of all castes and genders to his new religion. He said to women and people of low caste: "Come join me in my quest for salvation." When people joined him they found that caste and gender really meant little. They found an equality in their faith. By simple action, the Buddha spoke eloquently about an ideal society. Early Christianity did the same. People who would not normally speak to one another on the street now called each other "brother" and "sister" in Christ. Early Christianity undercut slavery and the oppression of women by allowing both to join.

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Paul and the other early Christians may not have known it, but their policies of allowing women to join with them in the faith probably

saved Christianity from extinction. In the first century world there were many new religions like Christianity. The old Roman and Greek religions had lost their power. Therefore new religions sprang up everywhere. Judaism was popular and many people converted to it. The so-called mystery religions attracted converts. Mithraism was one of those religions and was extremely popular in the days of early Christianity. It had a baptism, a communion meal, encouraged people to be moral, and promised them life after death. Today more than 450 locations of the worship of Mithras have been found in the Roman world. Many scholars believe that at one time there were far more worshippers of Mithras than of Christ. But as far as we know, Mithraism limited its membership to men. Women were barred from its secrets. Women interested in new religions had to look to Christianity. Christianity survived and Mithraism perished. Christianity's admission of women had something to do with that.

In the early fourth century Constantine was the new emperor of Rome. While he was not a Christian, he was deeply influenced by his mother, Helen, and his wife who were. When Constantine came to the throne he put a stop to the terrible persecution of Christians and made them a legitimate religion. Undoubtedly Christian women participated in that decision.

Again and again throughout history, Christianity has been kept alive by women. Whether it has been teaching Sunday school classes, and thus sustaining Christian education or forming missionary societies, and thus keeping that enterprise going, time and again women have helped the church to survive.

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Somewhere in time the church lost its principle of equality between the sexes. Perhaps as early as the second century the major offices of deacon, elder, and bishop began to go only to men. Later the church leaders began to rule that since Christ and his disciples were men, only males could be priests. While it is true that the Bible has chosen to describe God in terms using the masculine pronouns and calling God "father," everyone knows that God can have no gender. The Bible also describes God in female terms as a loving mother to

the nation of Israel. The church chose to overlook those descriptions and to couch all our God language in terms of "father" and "son." We don't give gender to the Holy Spirit as far as I know and we do occasionally refer to the church as "she," but for the most part in its history the Christian Church has by language and law, shut women out of its leadership.

We Congregationalists often think of ourselves as progressive in these matters. We remind ourselves that we founded colleges for women and were among the first to ordain women. But our record has not always been so good. In 1634 Anne Hutchinson, her husband and children moved from England to Boston. They were members of the church led by John Cotton. Anne was the daughter of an English clergyman and was well versed in theological matters. She was convinced that the religion taught by the Separatists in New England was a harsh covenant of works. She believed that she had the spirit of prophecy and possessed an inner light. On this basis she taught a covenant of grace. Anne began to gather women in her home twice each week to discuss the sermons. Her proud, independent spirit soon evoked the anger of Boston's church leaders. The first church council called in New England took place in August 1637. One of the issues for discussion was Mrs. Hutchinson. After much debate the council declared that: "Meetings of women for discussion of doctrine are not expedient." Was she censured for her theology or because she was a woman who was trying to take leadership in the

church? In 1638 Anne Hutchinson and her family moved to Rhode Island. After the death of her husband she moved on to New York. She and most of her children were murdered by Indians in 1643. Both Congregationalists and nearly all other Christians have been guilty of forgetting the early stance of the church on equality between the sexes.

We stand at an interesting point in time. Today more than one half of the students in theological studies are women. The demographic impact of this fact will make itself known to us within the next few years. Well-trained women will be available to lead our churches in numbers never dreamed before. Some will grumble about the new church leadership; some may resist the changes which are coming. It would be better for all to see this as an opportunity to recapture what has been lost. We can recover that early Christian principle which meant so much in the past. We can lay aside our class consciousness and our class churches. We can open our doors and our arms to people of all backgrounds and genders and work for God's kingdom. We can hear again Paul's words:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

— Galatians 3:28

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