

## RELIGION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Religion can perhaps be defined as a code of social justice which is revealed to people from the strongest and best power in the universe; this power is usually called God. Worship of God and discipline in conducting one's life according to God's code together form the strength of the Faith. There are 11 major religions practiced in the world today.

Throughout history there have been conflicts between peoples of different religions. Sometimes these conflicts have been because of differences in religious beliefs; at other times, these conflicts have occurred for other reasons.

In the Middle East, disagreements among peoples have frequently been described by classifying the parties involved according to their religious affiliation or by linking their religious identity to the conflict. This can be a misleading classification because it can give the impression that the parties are in disagreement over religious beliefs and/or that people of one faith have the same opinion on the issues involved.

This classification of protagonists according to their religious affiliation is particularly tempting in the Middle East because the area's population is composed of three major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Peoples of the three faiths live together within most Middle Eastern countries and have done so for centuries (for example, currently 19 predominantly Moslem countries have Jewish populations and nearly all have Christian populations).

Because the three faiths have historically been important in the development of the Middle East, religious groups have often expressed political views on secular issues; it is these political views which have most often been the cause of conflict. For example, the parties to the civil war in Lebanon have often been labeled as Christians and Moslems but the actual conflict in Lebanon is largely over the distribution of political power in the country; it should not be interpreted as a conflict between Islam and Christianity. Similarly, the crisis between Israelis and Palestinians does not mean that Palestinians are against Judaism or that Israelis are against Christianity and Islam—it is a conflict over political rights of self-determination.

This issue of the Newsletter will focus on factual information about Judaism, Christianity and Islam. (The information was taken from the *World Book Encyclopedia* and from publications issued by the religious groups in the U.S.) The information is necessarily brief and can not reflect the full vitality of the role which religion plays in the personal lives of individuals. A more lengthy explanation of Islam is given because presumably Americans are more familiar with Judaism and Christianity than they are with Islam.

From the *Old Testament* (King James version of the *Bible*), Exodus 20:1-5:

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

From the *New Testament* (King James version of the *Bible*), Matthew 22: 36-40:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

From the *Holy Koran*, Sura (Chapter) XLII (as quoted in *The Noble Sanctuary* by Alistair Duncan):

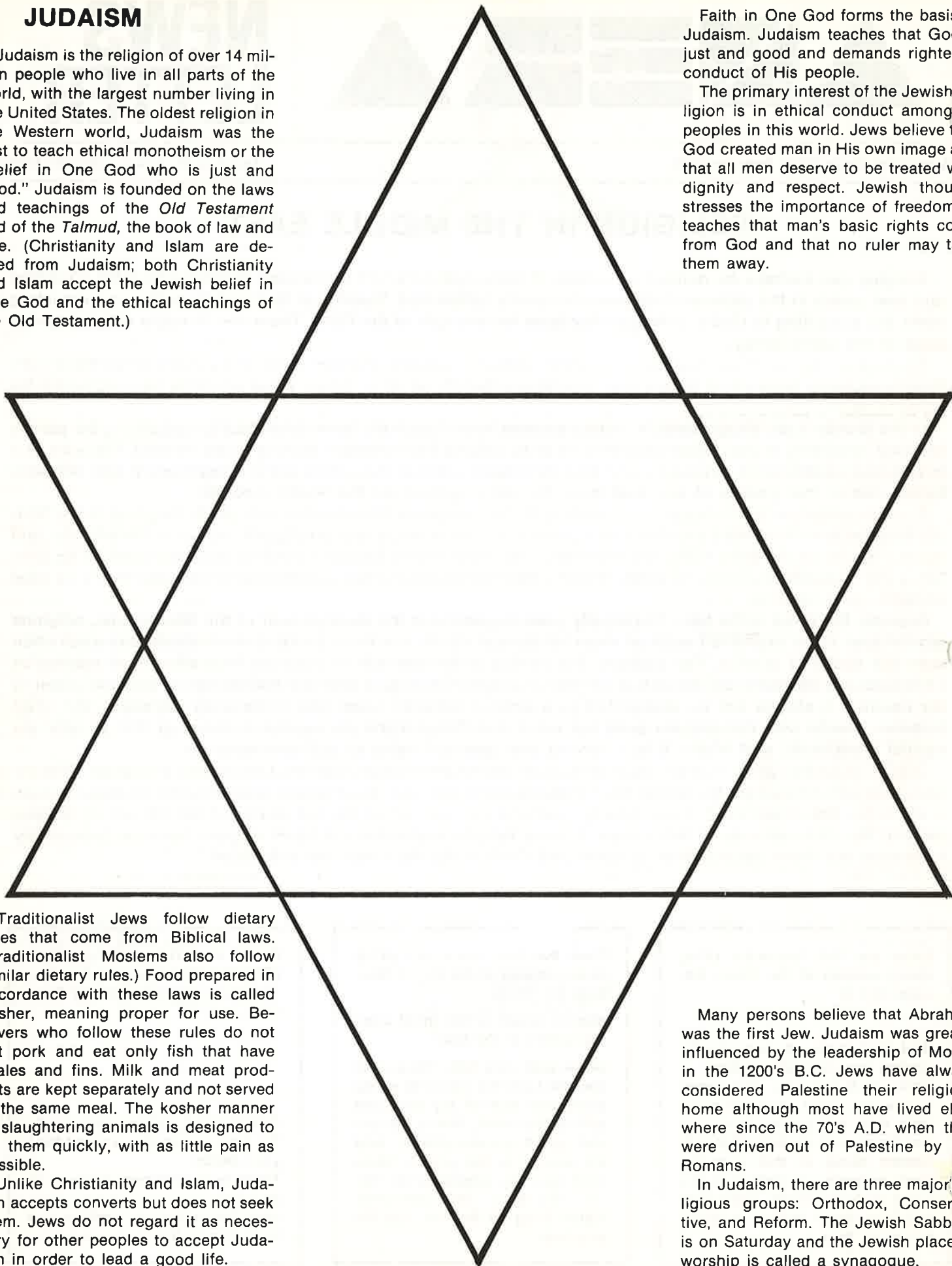
God is our Lord and your Lord. We have our deeds, and you have your deeds; There is no argument between us and you; God shall bring us together, and Unto Him is the homecoming.

# JUDAISM

Judaism is the religion of over 14 million people who live in all parts of the world, with the largest number living in the United States. The oldest religion in the Western world, Judaism was the first to teach ethical monotheism or the "belief in One God who is just and good." Judaism is founded on the laws and teachings of the *Old Testament* and of the *Talmud*, the book of law and lore. (Christianity and Islam are derived from Judaism; both Christianity and Islam accept the Jewish belief in One God and the ethical teachings of the Old Testament.)

Faith in One God forms the basis of Judaism. Judaism teaches that God is just and good and demands righteous conduct of His people.

The primary interest of the Jewish religion is in ethical conduct among peoples in this world. Jews believe that God created man in His own image and that all men deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Jewish thought stresses the importance of freedom. It teaches that man's basic rights come from God and that no ruler may take them away.



Traditionalist Jews follow dietary rules that come from Biblical laws. (Traditionalist Moslems also follow similar dietary rules.) Food prepared in accordance with these laws is called kosher, meaning proper for use. Believers who follow these rules do not eat pork and eat only fish that have scales and fins. Milk and meat products are kept separately and not served at the same meal. The kosher manner of slaughtering animals is designed to kill them quickly, with as little pain as possible.

Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism accepts converts but does not seek them. Jews do not regard it as necessary for other peoples to accept Judaism in order to lead a good life.

Many persons believe that Abraham was the first Jew. Judaism was greatly influenced by the leadership of Moses in the 1200's B.C. Jews have always considered Palestine their religious home although most have lived elsewhere since the 70's A.D. when they were driven out of Palestine by the Romans.

In Judaism, there are three major religious groups: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. The Jewish Sabbath is on Saturday and the Jewish place of worship is called a synagogue.

# CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is the religion founded upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and had its beginnings in Palestine. Christianity has spread throughout the world and is the prevailing religion in the Western Hemisphere. Christians make up the largest religious group in the world, numbering more than one billion followers. The Christian Holy Book is the *Bible*, composed of the Old and New Testaments.

The three great divisions of Christianity today are the Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The weekly Christian holy day is Sunday, when Christians attend worship services in churches.

The Christian Church has long been active in providing relief assistance as well as support for the Palestinians.

The **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.** established the Church World Service which is the relief, rehabilitation, and development agency of the National Council of Churches' Division of Overseas Ministries. Major contributors to the Church World Service include the **Christian Church**, the **Presbyterian Church (South)**, the **Protestant Episcopal Church**, the **Reformed Church in America**, the **United Methodist Church**, and the **United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.**

The Church World Service, in turn, is a chief contributor to the educational and medical relief programs of the **Near East Ecumenical Committee for Palestinian Refugees (NEECPR) of the World Council of Churches.** NEECPR is the major world-wide channel for the ecumenical response to the Palestinians.

ANERA receives contributions each year from a number of local churches throughout the United States. In addition, the following denominations conduct individual programs assisting the Palestinians within the Middle East:

- **Catholic Relief Services**
- **Catholic Near East Welfare Assoc.**
- **Lutheran World Relief**
- **Mennonite Central Committee of the Mennonite Church**
- **Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention**
- **United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)**

Christianity centers on the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Christians believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah or the promised deliverer of the Jews referred to in the *Old Testament*.

Jesus Christ taught the ideal of a Kingdom of God without national or racial boundaries—a Kingdom where God came first and spiritual blessing were shared by all. Christians believe that God's will is the tie that binds together the Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven; those who do the will of God are part of the Kingdom whether they are in this world or the next.

Jesus Christ preached that God's will is active good will: God is love. Christianity stresses love for others and the brotherhood of man, absolute truth, activity, sincerity of deed, courage, and joy.

The first believers in Christ were Jewish by birth and training, and at first they were considered a sect of Judaism. The followers of Christ first received the name Christians at Antioch, Syria, where one of the first Christian communities outside of Palestine developed.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) deserves special mention for its outstanding work among the Palestinian refugees and for its courageous efforts in promoting peace in the Middle East.

The American Friends Service Committee is a non-sectarian corporation which, although independent of the Society of Friends, developed from the philosophy of the Quaker way of living. AFSC began its work with Palestinian refugees in 1948 when it was requested by the United Nations to set up and administer an emergency relief program for refugees in the Gaza Strip. This program continued until May, 1950, when UNRWA took over. AFSC now operates a variety of programs which include the operation of pre-school centers for Palestinian children in Gaza, the publication of the study, *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, and the operation of a legal aid program for Palestinians being evicted from their homes in Jerusalem.



# ISLAM

Islam is one of the world's largest religions, with more than 500 million followers in all parts of the world. The largest Moslem communities exist in the Middle East, Africa, Pakistan, and Indonesia; in Europe, Islam is the principal religion of European Turkey, Albania, and the Bosnia-Herzegovina region of Yugoslavia.

Islam is the faith communicated by God to Mohammed in the A.D. 600's. The word "Islam" means peace and submission and is usually taken to mean peace through submission to God. Moslems (followers of Islam) believe there is One God and that Mohammed was His Prophet. (Those who do not understand Islam have referred to the religion as Mohammedanism and those who follow it as Mohammedans; this is offensive to Moslems as such terms give the incorrect impression that Moslems worship Mohammed.)

The Holy Book of Islam is the *Koran*, which resembles the *Bible* and the *Talmud*. The *Hadith*, which is a collection of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Mohammed, explains and elaborates the teachings of the *Koran*. Palestine (and especially Jerusalem) is important to Moslems as the location of religious sites sacred to Islam.

Islam has two main sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Friday is the weekly holy day of Islam, and the Moslem place of worship is called a mosque.

Islam teaches the absolute unity and power of God (who is called *Allah* in Arabic), the Creator of the whole universe. It also teaches that God is just and merciful and wishes man to repent and purify himself while on earth so that he can return to Paradise after death. Therefore, God sends prophets with sacred books to teach man his duty to God and to his fellowman. Mohammed was the last of the prophets; Jesus, Abraham and the *Old Testament* prophets were his predecessors. (Moslems believe in the *Virgin Birth* of Jesus, but he is referred to in the *Koran* as the "Spirit of God" or the "Son of God," as all people are ultimately the children of God.)

Marriage in Islam is a sacred bond of relationship between man and woman. Islam allows limited polygamy but only subject to certain conditions; each wife must be treated equally. It is highly unusual for a husband to have more than one wife. Both men and women have full right to divorce but only as a last resort. A wife may sue her husband for misuse of her property. Islam does not discriminate on the basis of sex and teaches that men and women are equally important.

Moslems pray five times daily: at dawn, at noon, in the afternoon, at nightfall, and in the evening. A crier or *muezzin* announces prayer time from the *minaret* or tower of the mosque.

The *Koran* stresses the virtues of faith in God and man, patience, kindness, honesty, impartial justice for members of all faiths and social classes, industry, honor, courage, and generosity. Since Islam is built upon Judaism and Christianity and the three faiths have their roots in the Middle East, Moslems regard Christians and Jews as their cousins.

The *Koran* forbids the representation of human and animal figures, so orthodox Islamic art rarely pictures living beings. The *Koran* also denounces usury, games of chance, and the consumption of pork and alcohol. Islam teaches that there is no compulsion for war in religion and permits war only in defense against aggression.

**Breira** is "a project of concern in Diaspora-Israel relations"; it is "a non-profit organization seeking to promote an alternative voice in the American Jewish community". Breira publishes *interChange*, a monthly review of issues facing Israel and the Diaspora. A subscription to *interChange* is \$10 per year; membership in Breira (which includes receiving *interChange*) is \$15. Sample copies of *interChange* and inquiries should be directed to: Breira, Suite 3D, 299 Riverside Drive, New York, New York 10025.

**Islamic Items** is a newsletter published the first four Fridays of each month. *Islamic Items* is "an independent Newsletter on modern Islamic thought" and covers a wide range of both political and religious issues. Subscriptions to the Newsletter are \$25 per year and sample copies may be obtained by writing: *Islamic Items*, P.O. Box 521, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406.

**Search for Justice and Equality in Palestine** is an organization which "believes that justice for Palestinian Arabs and security for Israeli Jews are interdependent and not mutually exclusive". Search regularly distributes articles, some of which concern the political beliefs of American Jewish and Christian religious leaders. There is no subscription price to receive information from Search but contributions are requested. To receive information, contact: Search, P.O. Box 53, Waverly, Massachusetts 02179.

**WAR IN LEBANON**

Since independence in 1946, the country of Lebanon has been struggling to maintain a balance among the social, economic and political interests of its people. The situation is complicated by the fact that the Lebanese people represent many branches of both Christianity and Islam with a Jewish minority as well.

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic and has reflected its diverse constituencies through a unique formula of confessional representation. A Maronite Christian always serves as President and a Sunni Moslem as Prime Minister. Members of Parliament are elected by universal suffrage based on a system of proportional representation for the religious groups, as follows: Maronite Christians, 30 seats; Sunni Moslems, 20 seats; Shi'ite Moslems, 19 seats; Greek Orthodox Christians, 11 seats; Greek Catholic Christians, 6 seats; Druze (a religion historically related to Islam), 6 seats; Armenian Orthodox Christians, 4 seats; Armenian Catholic Christians, 1 seat; Protestant Christians, 1 seat; Jews and others, 1 seat.

For purposes of political stability, the Lebanese have traditionally acknowledged a Christian majority in Lebanon; Christian political parties have, therefore, held most of the country's political power. Although a census has not been taken for many years, most Lebanese now consider the population to be almost evenly divided between Moslems and Christians. Consequently, Moslem political parties feel

that their power should be increased. The fighting which has raged in Lebanon is mainly between extremist factions on both sides.

(The presence of approximately 350,000 Palestinians, who form roughly 15% of the people in Lebanon, creates added pressures on the social, economic and political systems of the country. Israeli attacks on Palestinian refugee camps and Lebanese villages in southern Lebanon have increased that pressure.)

Caught in the middle of the conflict are the vast majority of the Lebanese and Palestinians—people who want issues of political power settled peacefully. The real burden of the war—economically, socially, politically—will be borne by these people who have taken no part in the fighting but have had their personal lives altered drastically. Current estimates are that more than 9,000 people have been killed and some five times that number wounded. Over 160,000 people have been displaced from their homes. Property damage runs into the billions of dollars.

There was little constructive that could be done while the shooting continued, but as this Newsletter goes to press, a new ceasefire seems to hold more promise of achieving a real break in the fighting. The task of reconstruction and rehabilitation will take many months. People of good will everywhere can now be of help to the people of Lebanon in their efforts to begin national life again.

**ANERA EMERGENCY RELIEF**

ANERA responded to the crisis in Lebanon when a break in the fighting permitted planes to land in November, 1975. ANERA's AMER division shipped \$19,000 (U.S. wholesale price) worth of drugs, medical and surgical supplies to the Lebanese Ministry of Health through the good offices of the Lebanese Consul-General in New York. An additional emergency grant of \$1,000 from the New York Chapter of the Arab-American Association of University Graduates (AAUG) was used to purchase ampicillin, an antibiotic needed to treat the wounded in Lebanon.

Officially, the Lebanese Ministry of Health has issued a list of needed medical supplies which calls for ampicillin and other antibiotics, gauzes, and cotton wool. Unofficially, everything is desperately needed, even thread to sew wounds.

ANERA-assisted projects in Lebanon have been virtually unreachable during the past few months so information is sketchy on their status. ANERA hopes to provide emergency assistance to help insure the continued operation of these projects. ANERA-assisted programs in Lebanon include medical, educational, and community development projects among the Palestinian refugees and people of southern Lebanon.

**I would like to help the people of Lebanon. Enclosed is my donation for emergency medical relief and other programs in Lebanon:**

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10 \_\_\_\_\_ \$15 \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, \_\_\_\_\_ STATE, \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Checks should be made payable to ANERA and returned to the ANERA office, Room 900, 733 15th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005. Contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for caring.

Beginning with this issue the ANERA Newsletter will be published quarterly instead of bi-monthly. This action is taken in an attempt to further reduce ANERA's over-all administrative expenses.



#### NEW BOARD MEMBER

Mr. J. Richard Butler was recently elected as a Member of ANERA's Board of Directors. Mr. Butler serves as Director for Middle East and Europe in the Division of Overseas Ministries (DOM) of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., located in New York City. Through Church World Service (the relief, rehabilitation and development agency of DOM), Mr. Butler assists in administering church-sponsored programs for refugees and other victims of disaster in the Middle East and Europe.

Prior to his present position, Mr. Butler served for three years in the Division of World Service, United Church Board for World Ministries. He also served for 10 years as Executive Secretary of the Near East Council of Churches' Division of Refugee Work. During this time he was resident in Jerusalem, Jordan, leaving in June, 1967, as a result of the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem.

A native of Akron, Ohio, Mr. Butler received college and university degrees from Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, and the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C. He is married to the former Barbara Henshaw of Detroit, Michigan. The Butlers have three children: Mark, Ann, and Martha.

(Several other members of the ANERA Board of Directors are also prominent religious leaders: the Reverend Dr. Edward L. R. Elson, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate; Msgr. John G. Nolan, President of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine and National Secretary, Catholic Near East Welfare Association; and the Very Reverend Francis B. Sayre, Jr., Dean of the Washington Cathedral.)

#### RELIGIOUS LEADERS SPEAK ON PALESTINIANS

• In his 1975 Christmas address, Pope Paul VI made a strong appeal to the Israeli people for recognition of the political rights of the Palestinians. In part, Pope Paul VI said: "Even if we are well aware of the tragedies not so long ago that have compelled the Jewish people to seek a secure and protected garrison in a sovereign and independent state of their own—and because we are properly aware of this—we would like to invite the children of this people to recognize the rights and legitimate aspirations of another people which also has suffered for a long time—the people of Palestine."

• Over 240 American Jewish and Christian religious leaders called on Israel to allow Palestinian Arab Christians and Moslems to return to their homeland in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The statement was circulated by Search for Justice and Equality in Palestine and said:

"This month (December, 1975) marks the 27th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which states in Article 13(2): 'Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.'

"The right to leave is continually invoked by Israel and her American friends on behalf of Soviet Jews. We affirm the right of any Soviet citizen to leave the Soviet Union. Yet Israel's denial of the right of displaced Palestinian Christians and Moslems to return to their homeland—a right upheld by repeated American-supported United Nations resolutions—represents a selective application of the Universal Declaration which precludes justice for the Palestinian People and thereby the very peaceful settlement sought by Israel.

"Therefore: We urge Israel to honor the human rights of the Palestinians and to abide by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. We ask Israel's friends in America to join us in seeking the application of Article 13 of the Universal Declaration to all peoples."

(Copies of the statement and names of the signatories may be obtained by writing Search at the address given on page 5 in this issue of the Newsletter.)



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