

# Introduction

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“TO A HUNGRY PERSON,” NOTED Mahatma Gandhi, “God can appear only as a piece of bread.” Thus “feeding the hungry” always has been at the heart of Christian faith and ethics, as well as every other major religious and ethical system.

This book was written primarily to help motivate laity and clergy in local congregations to become partners in God’s mission and ministry of combating global hunger. It begins with the assumption that, regardless of theological or political persuasion, persons agree on the religious priority of helping those who lack the basic necessities of food to sustain life. Disagreements inevitably arise regarding approaches or strategies for fulfilling this spiritual and moral obligation, but the imperative of combating human hunger is beyond dispute.

## **A Need for New Attention to an Old Issue**

However, new attention needs to be directed by persons of faith to the issues of world hunger. The escalating increase of hungry people and food insecurity in both the United States and throughout the world, demonstrates the glaring gap between Christian ideals and actual reality. Nearly 850 million people—1/6 of the population of the Two Thirds World—live malnourished lives.

Especially impacted are the 300 million hungry children in the world. In the impoverished nations of the world one in ten children

die before their fifth birthday. Malnutrition contributes to the high death rate as children die from preventable diseases such as diarrhea, acute respiratory infections, malaria, and tuberculosis. Senator George McGovern estimates that as little as nineteen cents a day could provide children in developing countries a hot school lunch.<sup>1</sup> Bread for the World reports that more than 34 million U.S. citizens—over 13 million children—live in homes without enough to eat. Volunteer food banks and local charities are stretched beyond their resources in an effort to reach out in assistance.

This book, designed for individual reading and congregational study, highlights new trends and opportunities, offering a challenge to persons of faith to become actively engaged spiritually and politically in combating world hunger. As an essay in practical theology, it provides basic information about the hunger crisis in the world and advocates hopeful approaches for addressing it. It does not attempt a comprehensive portrait of the causes and consequences of hunger in today's world. Neither does it pretend to introduce or resolve all of the controversies that surround issues related to world agriculture, environment, globalization, and free trade. Its intent is to serve as a stimulus or catalyst for involving persons of faith in exploring and debating these issues.

### Global AIDS And International Terrorism

Among the new trends impacting the issue are global AIDS and international terrorism. Clearly the global AIDS pandemic has intensified world

hunger. Recent reports from the U.N. Development program note that “Africa is getting poorer and hungrier” due to high rates of HIV infection.<sup>2</sup>

Sub-Saharan Africa is facing the worst hunger crisis in two decades, as farmers are dying, or are too ill to plant their food. One-third of the entire population is chronically malnourished. Without a good diet and a sustainable food supply, hopes to provide them powerful anti-retroviral medicines will be in vain, as people cannot

take medicine on empty stomachs. As I noted in my book on *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis*, “Hunger and disease create a vicious circle. In many places there is no one left to till the soil and grow the crops because disease and death stalk the land.”<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, world peace is threatened by global hunger. Senator Robert J. Dole has noted, “Widespread hunger is one of the contributing factors that leads to discontent and creates an environment that is conducive to terrorism.”<sup>4</sup> June Kim, Executive Secretary of the United Methodist Committee On Relief’s world hunger and poverty program has stressed that addressing basic needs of food and health care around the world would help reduce problems such as terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

McGovern and Dole are particularly concerned about feeding children through school lunch programs and thereby contributing to the enhancement of their education. The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program launched by President Bill Clinton in 2000, and later funded by Congress, seeks to address not only short-term hunger, but also some of the societal ills that allow it to endure. An estimated 120 million school-age children are not enrolled in school, often due to hunger or malnutrition. The majority of these children are girls. Women and female children are disproportionately impacted by hunger. The education and empowerment of women in the Two Thirds World would be an underlying theme of the book. As noted in a New York Times article about the McGovern-Dole global food initiative, “If you feed children, they come to school and stay in school, and they learn better.”<sup>6</sup>

### The Politics of Hunger

A goal set in 1996 by world leaders at the U.N. World Food Summit was aimed at cutting hunger in half globally by 2015 and in the United States by 2010. Currently this appears to have little likelihood of reality. Instead the number of hungry people in the world is rising

at a rate of about 5 million per year. However, if people and governments make a commitment of “ending hunger now,” then this goal can be reached and surpassed. The primary title of the book, “Ending Hunger Now” is not meant to be utopian but rather reflects the need for decision and commitment that will eventually make hunger history.

David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, notes “Far too many children go to bed hungry each night, be they in Malawi or Milwaukee. The problem is not a lack of food. Hunger is a political problem, and people need to demand change from their elected officials.”<sup>7</sup>

The authors agree with this assessment. McGovern articulates a vision of a world without malnutrition when he writes, “Hunger has plagued the world for thousands of years. But ending it is a greater moral imperative now than ever before, because for the first time humanity has the instruments in hand to defeat this cruel enemy at a very reasonable cost.”<sup>8</sup>

Fundamental to this book is an appeal to the biblical, theological, and ethical foundations that motivate Christians and other persons of faith to respond to human need. Theologian Craig L. Nessan has noted that Holy Scripture is “very clear about God’s own compassion and concern for the hungry of this world.” Speaking to a Lutheran conference, he challenged them to imagine “that ending hunger in our world is a real possibility” and to believe “there is enough food in the world and that having access to food is a human right.”<sup>9</sup>

Ending Hunger Now concludes with a chapter designed to help persons of faith re-think traditional theological practices along with re-appropriating biblical imperatives related to social justice and combating world hunger. Individuals and churches are encouraged to develop and implement a practical theological strategy that embraces both personal involvement and political commitment to end world hunger in our time.

## Ways of Using This Book

This essay in practical theology is designed to challenge and engage Christians and other persons of faith in addressing world hunger in the United States and internationally both as a spiritual and moral imperative. As individuals read it, and groups use it for study and reflection, may it reinforce the work of persons, churches, and many organizations that are dedicated to eliminating hunger in their neighborhoods and around the world.

The temptation was to create a longer book, considering the opportunity to include the substantial writings of Senator Dole and McGovern. However, the purpose was to make the book accessible for local church congregations and others to become more deeply involved in studying the subject of combating world hunger. Thus it was developed for a possible five sessions, complete with questions following each chapter that may stimulate reflection and conversation. A short PowerPoint CD summarizing each chapter has been included that may prove helpful for teaching.

Other excellent books exist that address world hunger from a Christian viewpoint. A selected bibliography has been included to assist persons who want other perspectives and/or seek more specialized information. Additionally, several hunger-related websites have been included to assist in keeping abreast of the latest statistics and updated developments about world hunger.

Since many fine government and non-governmental organizations exist to address world hunger. The authors have provided a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, listing.

## A Word about the Authors

Two of the three authors literally need no introduction. Senator George S. McGovern and Senator Robert J. Dole are household names, who have had eminent careers of public service. Decorated veterans of World War II, they epitomize the best of what Tom Brokaw has called America’s “greatest generation.” Both men are recognized political leaders, having served in the United States Senate

and having been nominees of their parties for the presidency of the United States (McGovern in 1972 and Dole in 1996).

Because these two men often have sharply different political perspectives and champion partisan politics, what many do not realize is that they share a deep friendship, love of country, and strong moral commitments. Throughout their Senate careers and beyond, they have worked in a bi-partisan fashion to combat world hunger. Senators Dole and McGovern have authored legislation together over the years to secure programs like food stamps, WIC (“Women, Infants and Children” supplemental food assistance), and more recently the McGovern/Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition plan.

Through the decades both Senators Dole and McGovern repeatedly have spoken out on issues of domestic and world hunger. This book represents yet another effort on their part to marshal persons of good will to be concerned advocates for the malnourished of the world.

Standing in the shadow of these two moral and political giants, it has been a privilege and honor for me to work with them in creating this book addressing a core ethical issue of our time. I am deeply grateful that Senator McGovern invited me to join him and Senator Dole in preparing this document. My contributions to this book reflect my educational training in Christian social ethics and my work as a professor of practical theology at The Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado.

As a native South Dakota, I have known of McGovern’s passion for combating world hunger since my high school days. I first met him in 1961, when he was the first Food For Peace Director under President John F. Kennedy and he visited southern India where I was studying. In the years that followed we developed a special friendship, particularly during the ten years I served as president of our alma mater: Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, South Dakota. In many ways he has served as my mentor, demonstrating how to combine politics with theological ethics for the good of all humanity.

Since my mother was a native of Kansas and both parents were life-long Republicans, I likewise was well acquainted with Senator Dole’s perspectives and policies. Like many Americans I have admired his warm wit, winsome personality, and courageous ability to overcome a wartime disability to give invaluable leadership to this nation.

### A Word of Gratitude

Without the generous spirit and gifted contributions of Senators Dole and McGovern this book could never have been completed. Their willingness to speak out consistently in favor of the impoverished hungry of this world contributes to the moral imperative of this book.

Thanks also are due the editors of Augsburg Fortress press for their professional assistance and encouragement at every stage of publication.

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