

The Spirit of Poverty

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD

(Sixteenth in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

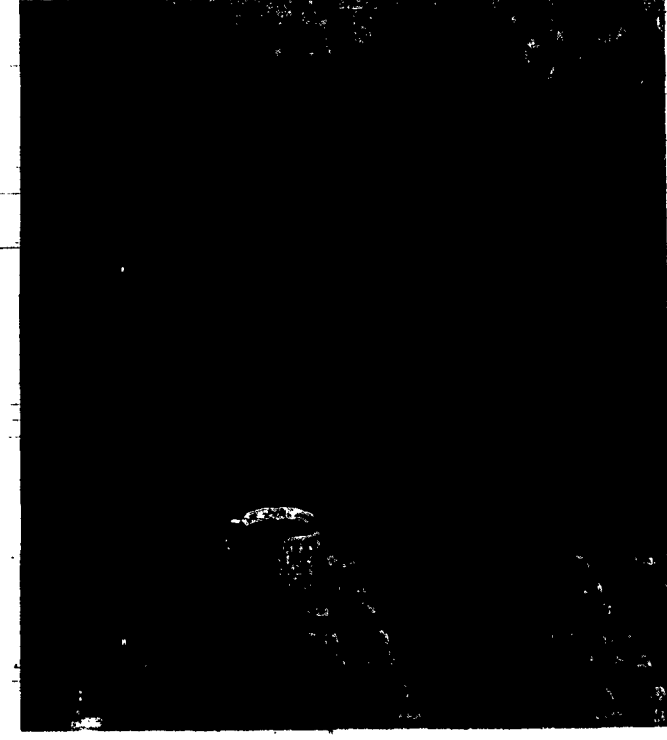
Fifty years ago the church doors swung inward to the sanctuary; now they swing outward to the world. Our problem today is to get them to swing both ways, so there may be both world-acceptance and world-renunciation. As Cardinal Newman beautifully expressed it: "We must at least in certain seasons defraud ourselves of nature; if we would not be defrauded of grace."

This brings up one of the basic conditions of renewal mentioned in the first of the beatitudes, namely, the spirit of poverty. But even the word "poverty" has become impoverished of meaning.

What is interesting is that the world today insists on poverty more than the Church insists upon it. Once again in history, the protests of the world are more right than the defenses of the Church. The alleged wealth of the Church is a "scandal" to many who rightly ask that it be used as a means of relieving poverty. But the Church, too, sees the need of poverty and knows full well that a heart possessor by things cannot clearly heed the call of God to reconcile the world to Himself.

Things Which the Spirit of Poverty is Not

1. Poverty is not essentially economic. A man can be poor in cash and rich in greed. A Communist is often a rich man in desire without any cash in his pockets. Avarice is like adultery. A hus-



"A man can be poor in cash."

band may not have a chance to be adulterous, but the lust may be already there. "If a man looks on a woman lustfully he has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt. 5/28)

Anxiety or an inner worry about security often precedes avarice or the outer greed for things. Long before psychology found the subconscious motivation, the Gospel was already fixing guilt in the wish long before it passed into act.

2. Poverty does not necessarily mean making a sanctuary bare and impoverished in order to avoid giving a "scandal" to the world. It was Judas, not Christ, who complained about "waste" in an act of worship.

Once persons made themselves poor, now the mood is to make the Lord poor by making His sanctuary bare. Nidity has taken over the theatre; now it invades the altar. First the body is stripped, then the sanctuary. The tabernacle which the Lord ordered to be covered with gold is now denuded and shifted to a corner in the church. A tree stump, or a boulder becomes the altar; cheap wicker baskets hold the Bread of Life; the Lord has His garments torn from Him even within the Holy of Holies.

This vicarious practicing of poverty, by which we get credit for being stripped, by stripping the Lord, is the inverse of the Biblical spirit of giving to the Lord. Judas comes back and "out of presumed love for the poor" asks: "Why was not this ointment sold . . . and the money given to the poor?" (John 12/5)

The point here is not that churches should be big and ornate, for they should not. Churches should be multi-purpose buildings so as to be utilized every day of the week. Rather, protest here is against making the sanctuary poor as a substitute for our own want of poverty. As the cross is laid on the backs of others by blame and protest today instead of on our own, so poverty is practiced occasionally by a show of liturgical nudity.

3. Poverty does not mean excusing the wealth of a religious community on the grounds that the individual members are poor. No community may justify its millions by pointing to their humble cells and their patched robes. As Karl Rahner puts it: "A rich Order cannot have poor members; it may have members who do not own property in a legal sense. But a really wealthy Order cannot have poor members. At most they will be completely dependent members with regard to the common ownership of material goods absolutely vested in the community." They are shareholders in a financial corporation, and are wealthy even though they have the "vow of poverty."

4. The Spirit of Poverty is not shabbiness. The word "bum" used to be applied to the man who was so poor he dressed in rags and was shiftless. But today some of the young dress as the "bums" of another generation. The "bum" was not proud of the way he dressed; but the "hippie" is. But it must not be thought that the "bum" has a spirit of poverty, for as a worker in a social mission observed: "Can a man think about God when he is so filthy that he hates himself?"

The boy who dresses badly, for the sake of conformism, is either weak because he dare not break with his peers, or proud because he is showing his contempt for the rest of society, or vain because he wants to attract the attention of others. What strange twists pride has taken in our times!

Foppishness has given way to shabbiness. Excessive luxury in dress was once used to cover

up inner spiritual nudity. Adam and Eve felt the need of clothes only after they sinned. The more naked a person is in soul, the more garish that person becomes in dress; now inner nudity is being matched by outer nudity. Like chameleons, the unwashed costume imitates the unpurified soul. The "show-off" quality remains in both; the difference is in what is being shown:

Pride changes its complexion in different centuries, but it still remains inflation. The egotism which once expressed itself even in religion as a "Holier-than-Thou" now delights being "Less Holy-than-Thou," sneering, "Do you really still believe that?"

In conclusion, because the spirit of poverty is humility, it is the very opposite of pride. The Jesuits used to take pride in their quality as "spiritual directors"; the Dominicans in their "learning"; the Benedictines in their "strictness"; while some of the lesser ones were proud of their humility.

A story is told about a Franciscan, a Capuchin, and a Jesuit visiting the Divine Babe in the Crib. The Franciscan said: "Oh, we so delight in seeing You born in a stable, but our monastery is just as poor." The Capuchin said: "Oh! how happy we are to see that You have no heat. We too are cold in our monasteries." The Jesuit turned to the Blessed Mother and, ignoring all talk about poverty, said: "Send Him to one of our schools when He grows up."

Poverty of spirit is at the opposite pole of any form of grandstanding or playing to the galleries. Egotism has its status symbols, such as, split-level homes where you almost break your neck going from one room to another; a hi-fi; an outdoor swimming pool; barbecue pit, and a rumpus room. I overheard one woman saying to another: "So, you are going to Florida. Do you have a mink stole?" "No." "Then cancel."

The difference between American and English pride is that the American "admits" he is good and tells the world about it. The Englishman goes about more subtly. He deprecates himself, so that you, instead of him, do the praising.

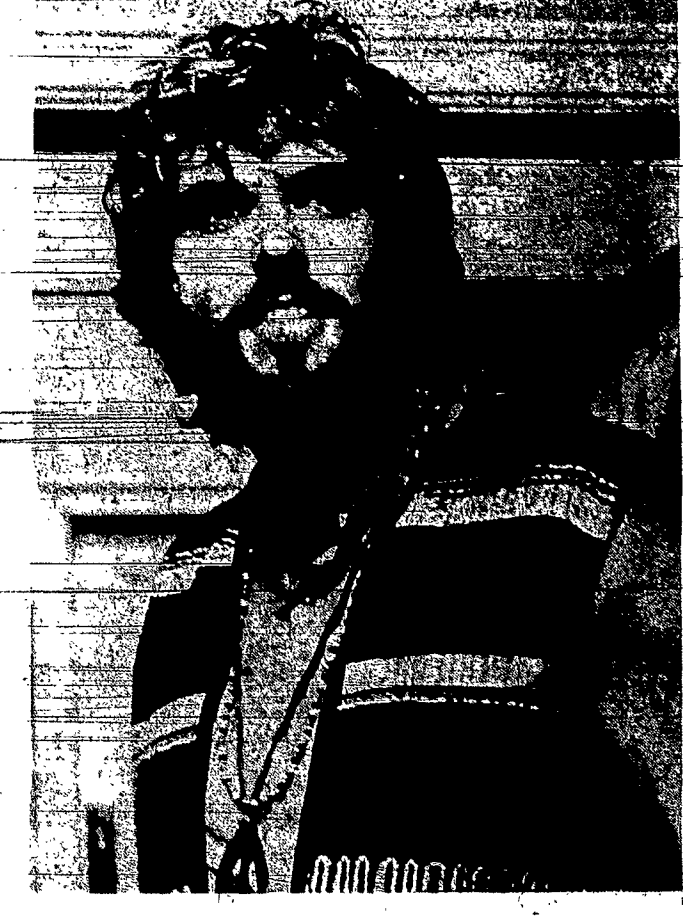
What the Spirit of Poverty Really Is

To discover the real meaning of poverty one must go back to the first Beatitude: "How happy are the poor in spirit." (Matt 5/3) The Greeks had two words for "poor": one was penes which describes the man who lives from hand to mouth, who works for his living but never has anything superfluous. Socrates described himself as being in such a state, having dedicated himself to truth, he found no time for making money. Aristophanes, the Greek dramatist, described the poor man penes as one "who had to scrape for his existence."

The other Greek word for poor is ptuchos which means absolutely destitute; Homer calls himself "the cringing, suppliant beggar." His problem was to keep body and soul together. Plato would not allow a ptuchos in his ideal Republic.

Now which word is used in the Beatitude? It is the word ptuchos. Poverty is a spiritual rather than an economic state; it is a consciousness of one's own inadequacy, worthlessness, our destitution. Therefore, all trust must be placed in God.

The Beatitude is, therefore, the antithesis of pride and "I will work this out by myself." Intellectually, it means that a man admits he knows little and therefore must be taught, which is the virtue of docility. A Roman master of oratory once said: "They would have become excellent scholars, if they were not so persuaded of their own scholarship." Economically, it means that a man never puts his trust in the material or the physical. Isaiah pronounced a woe against those who went down to Egypt for help, trusting in horsemen because they were many. (Isaiah 33/6, 9) Psychologically, the spirit of poverty means a sense of dependence and surrender. The agnostic need not pray to God to reveal Himself. He must first act, or create a void within himself. Only valleys, empty cups and contrite hearts can be filled. Only when there is a need is there a giving. "They who are well have no need of a physician." (Matt 9/12)



"The boy who dresses badly for the sake of conformity, is either weak . . . or proud."

A consciousness of utter worthlessness is the very opposite of egotism and self-assertiveness. That is why "The poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matt 11/5) because they have a void to be filled. It is to the poor an invitation is sent to sit at His banquet table in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 14/13, 21)

Humility is not the emptiness of the modern man; emptiness is the ego confronting itself; humility is the ego confronting God. Humility is the earth ready to receive the seed; emptiness is the Grand Canyon gaping in its own loneliness. Humility is the reed ready to receive the breath of

(Continued on Page 11)

LETTERS

to the editor



On Finances

Editor: May I comment on the column (Now Hear This, 4/11/69) which suggested broad revelation of school costs to encourage parish support of the parochial schools?

People who are deeply committed to the Catholic school system respond very well when they receive a detailed account of costs of operating the parochial school. The School Board of our parish has the obligation of drawing up a budget on a detailed basis. This is put in our financial report to the parish and is discussed from the pulpit annually.

Although we have no school collection the parishioners as a whole subsidize the parochial school beyond the tuition paid by the families of pupils. Actually 62 per cent of the total Sunday offering income goes to support of the school.

In recent years we have been doing more and more to broaden the Saturday instruction courses for the public school children and the adult education program we are offering to the whole parish.

—Msgr. Charles V. Boyle, St. John the Evangelist Church, Humboldt St.

(Receipt of other comments on the issues of school-support prompts us to promise a new feature on School Boards and their financial functions in a future issue. — Editor.)

Join CEF

Editor: In recent months articles in the Courier-Journal have stressed the crisis confronting God-centered academic schools in Rochester, in New York State, and in the country as a whole. Unfortunately not enough emphasis has been placed on the necessity for an effective, grass-roots organization of parents and others to present a collective voice in Albany and Washington.

In the past Citizens for Educational Freedom has provided such a voice. The Ferrall-Mangano-Speno textbook loan bill, which provides that local boards of education must loan textbooks to all children in N.Y. in grades 7-12, was passed largely through parental support generated by CEF.

It is our belief that the time is ripe for a concerted effort for more positive action by the New York Legislature. Specific pieces of legislation which should be constitutional are the Bookson-Stockmeister bill for auxiliary services, such as remedial remedial reading and speech therapy, currently denied our children and the March-Gallagher tuition grant bill.

The purposes of this communication are:

1. To ask all of your readers to join CEF. Family membership is \$5 per year; contributing membership is \$10. Your name, address and zip code should be sent to: Robert Scholz, 21 Columbia Parkway, West Seneca, N.Y. 14224.

2. To ask those CEF members who did not receive the March newsletter of N.Y. CEF to communicate with me. Apparently some CEF mail from

the Buffalo area was lost when a U.S. mail truck slid into the Genesee River last month.

3. For any questions about CEF, write me:

J. K. O'Loane, 331 Seneca Pkwy., Rochester

Educational Plea

Your staff has been doing an excellent job of keeping the abortion liberalization attempt before the people through the activities of the Right to Life Committee. May I plead for a little of the same treatment in behalf of Educational Legislation now pending?

The March-Gallagher Bill to provide tuition grants for students attending private schools is presently before the State Senate. In addition to urging people to write to their legislators on this, we would also urge that they write requesting the legislature to vote to repeal the Blaine Amendment. (This must be done by two successive legislatures before going to a referendum of the people. If passed now and in the next legislature, that would be in November 1971.)

—Msgr. William M. Roche, Superintendent of Schools.

(A news story on this issue appears on page one.)

Parish Finances

Your article in Now Hear This (4/11) on the guess-value of fully informing parishioners about school operation costs, wisely contained the point that expenditures for the "total

teaching mission" of a parish should include all the needs of all the people of the parish.

I contend that many do not give to the "school collection" in their parishes for two reasons: they do not have children in the parochial school, and they do not believe that the parish is properly treating the public-schoolers and the parish adults with a teaching program.

Pulpit appeals to persuade every parishioner to give regularly must demonstrate the existence and value of the OCD program (and its costs) as equal in importance with the parish school. Too many people resent that such a large percentage of the "education costs" of the parish are spent on less than half of the parish children and hardly any adults.

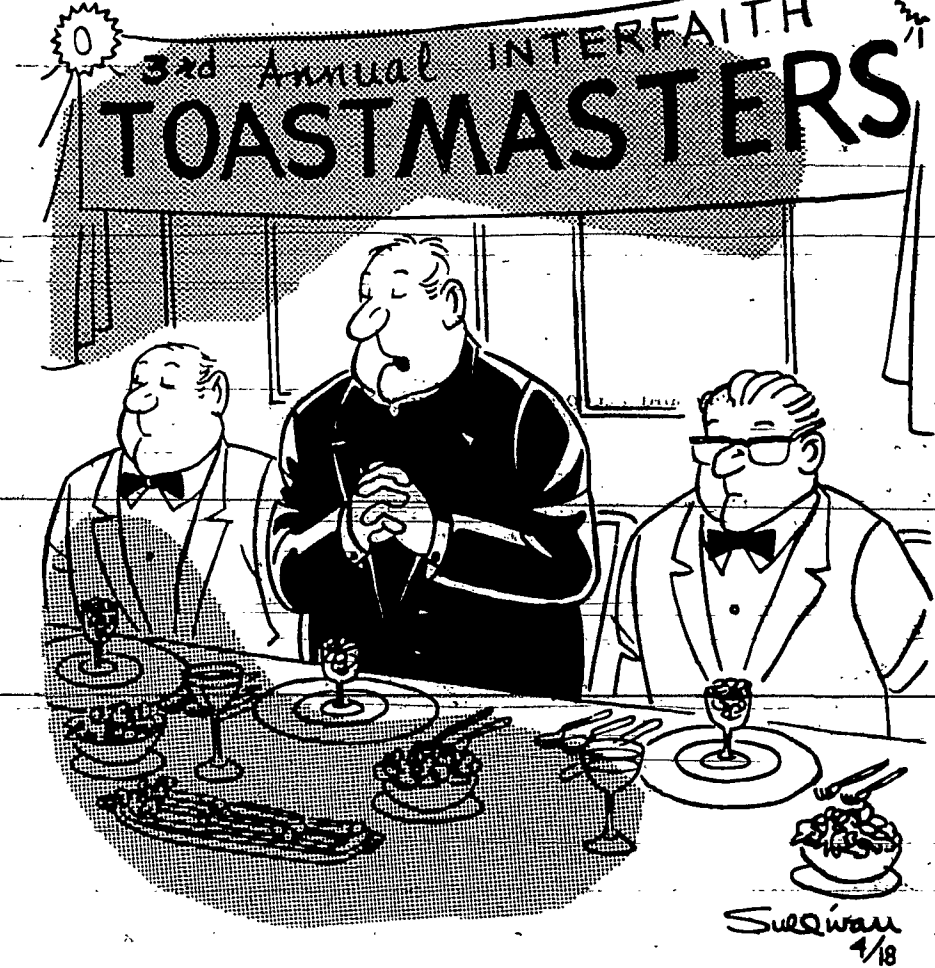
—Thomas Gakerman, Rochester.

Inner-City Coverage

Many thanks for your two-week coverage (4/4, 4/11) of Rochester's inner-city school situation. In the face of the ignorance and inactivity of the Garnett papers, your honest and open airing of the problem and indirect support of FIGHT in this cause is a welcome step indeed.

Father David Finks suggested in his column on 4/11 that the issue of inferior ghetto education is one that the Catholic Church is uniquely qualified to touch. If the Church took this step, the country would remember its contribution long after the advancement of sex education had become commonplace.

—Sister Thaidous St. Agnes High School.



"BLESS OUR FOOD AND ALL WHO ARE PRESENT, LORD . . . WHICH REMINDS ME OF A FUNNY THING THAT HAPPENED DURING ONE OF YOUR BLESSINGS LAST YEAR . . ."

Word for Sunday

Sheep Know Their Shepherd

By Father Albert Shamon

One day our Lord sat near the Sheep Gate in the northern wall of Jerusalem. He watched shepherds leading in sheep to the pool near Bethesda or to the Temple for slaughter. This scene, coupled with the rejection of the blind man from the synagogue by the Pharisees (false shepherds), triggered the beautiful Good Shepherd Discourse.

I heard a psychologist say that perhaps the most unfortunate image in all Scripture was that which represented Christians as sheep. He thought Christians too long had been poor, dumb followers instead of leaders.

Others apparently have cherished the same idea, for today we often see the sheep becoming wolves at attacking, not the other sheep, but the shepherds themselves.

Neither Pope nor bishops nor pastors (the Latin word for shepherd) are spared. The sheep, like the donkey in Aesop's fable who found a lion's skin and donned it, and then proceeded to terrorize the other animals in the forest, have arrogated to themselves roles never intended by God and have proceeded to tear and rend the Church.

The psychologist may think the sheep image an unfortunate one. But I cannot think that God would have used this image so often throughout the Scripture were it not a good and proper one.

Of course sheep are dumb, but that was not the point of Christ's comparison. In the Near East the broad-tailed sheep were not raised just for

slaughter. Shepherd and sheep lived many years together. Between them a remarkable intimacy developed, so that sheep came to know even the shepherd's voice, and followed it.

A traveler in Syria saw three shepherds bringing their flocks to the same brook. The flocks drank there together. Finally one shepherd arose and called out "Men-ah! Men-ah!" the Arabic for "Follow me!" His sheep came out of the herd and followed him up the hillside. Then the next shepherd did the same, and his sheep went with him; and the man did not even stop to count them. The traveler said to the remaining shepherd, "Give me your turban and staff and see if they will follow me." So he put on the shepherd's dress and called out "Men-ah! Men-ah!" but not a sheep moved.

The traveler said, "Won't your flock follow anyone but you?"

The shepherd replied, "Oh yes, sometimes a sheep gets sick and then he will follow anyone."

Christ said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and mine know me." Christ was referring not to the dumbness of sheep but to their knowledgeability. They could tell a voice that was not the shepherd's. Just as a person with a musical sense knows good music, so Christ's own sheep know his voice. They have a Catholic sense. They know when the Church speaks, it is the voice of the Good Shepherd. — "who hears you hears me." They follow it, not like dumb sheep, but like sheep who "know" the shepherd has only their good at heart and alone can lead them to the green pastures of eternal life—which is not being so dumb!

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NEWSPAPER OF THE

Vocat A Lif

In the Rochester Diocese, Vista and other such have accepted 13 people. Forty-three men have been entering programs for the Diocese. In the religious community, 17 have entered religious women's communities.

"The whole vocation turned toward building a Christian life," said Father Lawry, Diocesan Director of Vocations.

"We now feel we must have the Christian Family, the tion of service."

Sister Margaret Mary, I Postulant for the Sisters said:

"Vocations are of the man's life. We now speak of a 'life search', each 1 her talents and qualities service."

Sister Margaret explains as going out to speak ladies, at their request, ties of Christian service today. Both she and phy remarked that they n concerned with "recruit men and women into t life, but rather to help er the best ways they, as can apply their talents to of God and man.

However, should a woman feel called to t life, he or she would p the following steps:

A young man consideri san-priesthood, first con Murphy as the Director and, after consultation enters King's Preparat Becket Hall or St. Bern nary, depending on his background, to prepare ordination.

Sister Ann Mary, Dir cations for the Sisters, c and consultant to the Ea of the National Sister's V fference, explained the y steps as she enters the Joseph.

After consultation with munity's Director of V careful testing both p psychological, the yo application is reviewed.

Sister Mary McAul ter-racial relations



100 Groups Jo

Mor

Nearly 100 organ groups already have "Money Labels," a new and money-making project organized throughout

The new program, v place the now-ending is sponsored by the C in the Rochester Dioc newspaper Magnificat Diocese.

Key feature of the la gram — labels, box top

FROM "POP" TO enlist for new "M They are women John the Evangel Augustine's Chr coordinator, who is Art Taylor.