

Should Church Tax 'Wealthy' To Aid Third World Needs?

San Francisco —(RNS)— A world-renowned Catholic theologian, treating the coming World Synod of Catholic Bishops' consideration of justice, suggested some form of "taxation" on wealthier dioceses so the Church can redistribute funds "justly and freely" to Third World needs.

Speaking of the need for justice "within" the Church as well as on a world scale, Father Bernard Haering, told an informal gathering of priests here that the nomination of bishops "in a manner closer to the Gospel and the modern mentality" also was a matter of justice that should be considered.

He said that while the September synod in Rome should not give the impression that the Church is concerned only with its internal affairs, "I feel the Church must face the question of justice within itself."

Pointing to the synod's other major topic, the priesthood, the German Redemptorist said "it would also be a sad moment if the . . . synod . . . were to speak only about priests. But to speak of priests and justice will give a new dimension to the priesthood."

Father Haering, who has taught moral theology at the Lateran University in Rome and served as personal retreat master for Pope Paul, spoke with 17 priests during a wide-ranging discussion at Our Lady of Lourdes Community Center here.

He said the redistribution of wealth within the Catholic Church would be "the best way to speak of justice to the world. We must see ourselves as a world-wide community and examine our conscience if some of us are wealthy while others are impoverished."

The theologian admitted that efforts such as the Propagation of the Faith and other mission fund drives are evidence of the generosity of Catholics. "But it isn't enough," he added.

In suggesting some form of taxation on wealthier dioceses for redistribution in poor countries, he said this would "free the Third World Church from haphazard dependence on personal friends or begging."

"At the same time," he warned, "we must avoid any kind of paternalism. If a di-

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cese builds a cathedral, perhaps it could send 10 per cent of the cost to an African diocese where priests and people live in extreme poverty."

Citing the need for more relaxed standards in the ministry of the Church, Father Haering said he thought the peoples of Africa and Asia — two areas where he has lectured extensively — were being short-changed unjustly on the Mass and sacraments.

He said this was so because married catechists are not allowed to celebrate the Eucharist. "This is a case of man-made law blocking the gift of the

Lord," he charged. "We need celibate priests who are mobile and free at all times. But I think we should also ordain married men and allow them to become bishops."

Father Haering said the Church must preach fidelity and reconciliation in marriage, but "if the first marriage is dead and irreconcilable, can we exclude the stable second marriage from the life of the Church?"

"Christ never asks the impossible," he stated. "Cannot the Church forgive the sin of divorce if there has been true repentance?"

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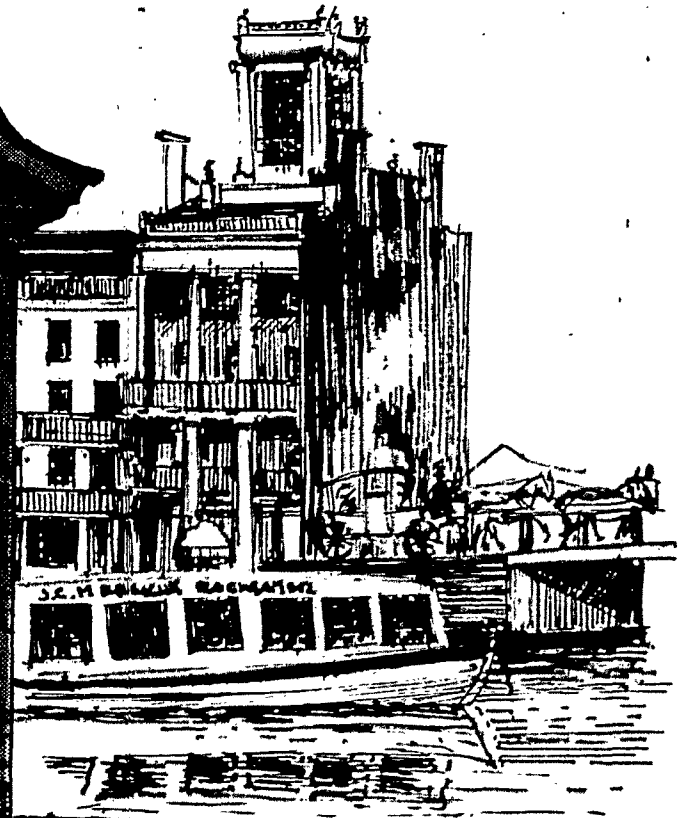
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