

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

The Hunger Crisis

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Hunger is not a pleasant theme to write about, but it is a harsh reality that we must face up to and find ways to remedy. As



Christians, we have a divine imperative to make a personal response to feed the hungry of the world.

Hardly a day goes by now that we do not read about the starvation that is the daily horrible companion of millions of our brothers and sisters in a world which has become a small global village. Science and technology have annihilated the geographical distances that once separated us from the people of the earth who are hungry. We can no longer plead ignorance of their sad plight.

Just about two weeks ago this U.P.I. report appeared in our local papers: "Famine stalks the Indian subcontinent this year, spreading death, turning mothers into murderers, daughters into prostitutes, and bright, happy children into mental cripples."

Starvation and severe malnutrition are already the lot of millions of people throughout the world. An estimated 10,000 deaths a day are attributed either to the lack of sufficient food to sustain life or the correct food to ward off disease. This problem, in a real sense, becomes our problem. The Christian vision of the world is that, despite all differences of color, language, nationality and ideology, we are still called to be a community, not simply a competing crowd. Indeed, we are called to be a community which lives as a family. Our basic Christian teaching that God is our Father is made known to us through Jesus, whom we recognize as our brother who has shared his life with us. To accept Jesus as brother means accepting all those to whom he is united. The gospels demonstrate that Jesus came to identify Himself with the poor and oppressed. He came to serve all and save all. Part of His saving message is that justice should come to the oppressed. Jesus promised that we would find him in a unique way in the claims, needs and demands the poor make upon us. One of the main purposes of the Church in the world is to be a voice, an agent and an advocate of the needs and claims of the oppressed. These claims are not requests for charity, but demands of justice. Since we believe that the goods of the earth are destined by God for the use of the whole family, we have a corresponding obligation to do what we can to raise voices of concern to help those whose voices are too weak to be heard.

Affluence brings with it both blessings

and curses: blessings when we realize that the goods of this earth are to be used properly, not squandered or abused; a curse when we become victims of our own greed and self-righteousness. Unless we feel the pain of hunger we often cannot identify with the problem.

The Christian imperative is stated so well in the Vatican II document, THE CHURCH in the MODERN WORLD (69), which says:

"God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the guidance of justice together with charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in an equitable manner . . . Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this same Council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, 'Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him', and really to share and use their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help or develop themselves."

It is predicted that as many as 20 million people may die in various parts of the world during this next year because of famine and corollary illness and disease. Every Christian and every human principle and instinct we possess compels us to respond to this pressing problem. Did you know that:

* In the United States, as much as one-third of the dog and cat food sold in city slums is being eaten by people. (Times-Union 6/20/74)

* The United States has 6 percent of the world's population but consumes over 40 percent of the world's goods and resources. (We seem to be devoid of all sense of stewardship of our blessings.)

* The average U.S. citizen has an income level probably 100 times that of his counterpart in Bangladesh.

* Our country devours \$215 million dollars a day for military purposes. The total cost of the arms race is staggering.

Together we must look at the problem, address ourselves to it and see what we can do about it. St. James asks us:

"What's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will that kind of faith save anyone? If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing, and you say to him, 'Well, good-bye and God bless you,' stay warm and eat

heartily, and then don't give him clothes or food, what good does that do?"

(James 2: 14-16)

May I proffer a few suggestions:

* First, thank the good Lord each day for all that you have received. God has blessed so generously the likes of us with good homes, food and so many other, material blessings.

* We must use these blessings wisely — always with the attitude of willingness to share, to sacrifice, to give of our substance when we can — not only when it is convenient or expedient.

* We must, at least vaguely, be aware that the resources of our globe are not infinite. Let's not take God's goodness to us for granted. Be responsible people!

* In our daily living we must work toward global justice based on our personal and communal moral decisions. Living locked together in a limited globe means learning how to fulfill our rights and obligations in a way which allows others to fulfill their rights too.

* Capitalize on opportunities that come our way which permit us to show our deep-seated concern. May I suggest your active participation in the Annual Clothing Drive, Human Development Appeal in November, and the sub-Sahara money collection to help drought victims. By our voluntary, poverty and self-denial we give witness to our concerns for our needy brothers and sisters. Seize opportunities that will permit you to give that "cup of cold water."

* A return to self-designated days of voluntary fast and abstinence to identify more closely with the pain of our neighbor's hunger.

* I recommend for your meditation this Thanksgiving Season a fine booklet published by our diocesan office of Human Development. It is an information and action booklet that is already being used by many families in our diocese to arouse their level of conscience to the response that Jesus expects of all of us as He walks this earth in the emaciated features of the victim of hunger.

Voices of caring people are being raised around the world. The current focus on the problem of hunger — very tangible, fairly comprehensible even to the well-fed — may be offering us, as a Church, one of the finest opportunities to renew within ourselves an awareness of our human brotherhood, interdependence and community.

Rome Asks Prayers For U.N. Food Parley

Rome [RNS] — A day of prayer and reflection in the Diocese of Rome in connection with the U.N.-sponsored World Food Conference was proclaimed for Nov. 10 by Cardinal Ugo Poletti, the Vicar General of Rome. The conference opened here Nov. 5.

In an announcement, the cardinal who represents Pope Paul, who is the Bishop of Rome, recalled a human rights declaration issued at the recent world Synod of Bishops at the Vatican. Among the rights singled out for special mention were the right to live and, consequently, the right to eat.

Cardinal Poletti said that the World Food Conference offered the Christian community the opportunity to reflect upon its personal and social responsibilities toward the whole world, and to pray earnestly to the Holy Spirit "who illumines minds and comforts men of goodwill," to give wisdom to the deliberations

of the conference delegates, "so that they may answer the expectations of justice and respect the fundamental values of human coexistence."

The highlight of the day of prayer and recollection will be a solemn concelebrated Mass, with Cardinal Poletti presiding, in the Church of the Apostle Peter and Paul.

Meanwhile, Dr. Francisco Aquino, executive secretary of the U.N. World Food Program said in a Vatican Radio interview that while he was "optimistic," he had "my doubts" about the outcome of the food parley.

"These doubts," he said, "are due particularly to the present worldwide political situation, which is rather complex. I maintain that it will be practically impossible for the delegation attending the Conference to focus on the problem of world hunger and the ways to resolve the problem."



Kissinger Confers with Pope

U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (right) examines a book of ancient Italian etchings on religious subjects presented to him by Pope Paul VI during a special audience at the Vatican. At center is Henry Cabot Lodge, the presidential envoy to the Vatican. Kissinger was in Rome for the opening of the United Nations-sponsored World Food Conference. The Vatican gave no details of the meeting between Kissinger and the Pope, though it is generally believed that the two men discussed the Middle East situation, and the crisis of food throughout the world. (RNS)