

The Church 1975



Fr. Andrew Greeley

Some Catholic leaders and their hired functionaries have recently taken to pontificating about decisions concerning the use and distribution of the world's resources.

A lot of us greet such statements with hollow laughter. Obviously, all Christians should be aware of the moral issues involved in the use of world resources. But there is some irony in hearing advice from Church leaders who never consult with anyone about the use of their own resources.

There are exceptions, but it is still usually the case that the pastor building a new rectory, the bishop shelling out millions for a closed circuit TV network, the administrator closing down schools, the religious order pulling out of a parish do not bother to consult with any of the people who have paid the bill. In the Catholic Church financial decisions are made by the leadership acting in the name of their own divine right. The laity have the opportunity to pick up the tab.

This is one way to run a church. It may even have been a good and efficient way when the clergy were the only people who could read, write and calculate. But even though many of the people in power don't realize it, a lot of the laity have learned to read, write and calculate. Some of them have even learned how to keep account books and build mathematical models. But that doesn't mean you can trust them with financial decisions, I guess.

There were a few crazy people who started a revolution almost 200 years ago over the issue of taxation without representation. But the ideas these nuts were working on do not seem to have penetrated Church leadership quite yet.

And they wonder why collections are going down.

But, like I say, it's one way to run a church. Only when the people who run things that way begin to offer advice to others about economic justice it does sound a little strange.

I am not here questioning the financial ability of Church administrators; some are brilliant, some are average, some few act like raving madmen. I am merely raising the question of whether it is just to spend money that has been collected from the people without any participation from the people in decisions about how the money is spent.

Can we really continue to argue that once the money has gone into the collection basket it becomes the churchman's to spend as he sees fit? Is the only check on what happens to the money his conscience and the approval of those within the clerical circle who are responsible for monitoring the use of funds? And who effectively monitors the use of funds on the diocesan level? If there were any such check would the disasters that affected certain dioceses and religious orders recently have happened? Or if the laity were

dealt in would they have gone along with kooky get-rich-quick investment schemes? One suspects that they would not have been taken in so easily.

The decision not to build any more Catholic schools has been made in many dioceses throughout the country — though it is usually a tacit and unacknowledged decision. Have those who paid for the schools in the past been consulted about the decision? By what right does any man refuse to continue on his own authority a system in which so many people have put so much of themselves for so many years?

If anyone but Church leadership so abused financial power, you would be tempted to denounce him for sins which cry to heaven for vengeance.

In most cases, there is no ill will intended. We continue without question a financial system out of the past — not because we want to cheat anyone of his legitimate participation, but because we never thought of the possibility that things might be done differently.

But it's time to change the system before it is too late. Otherwise, the day may dawn when there's nothing left to spend.

Hunger Study Widely Distributed

American slum dwellers eat 30 per cent of the pet food they buy. One and a half billion of the world's inhabitants are perpetually hungry. An estimated 20 million will die of starvation or malnutrition in 1975.

While more people are hungry today than ever before in history, the average individual consumption of grain in the U.S., mostly in meat and dairy products, is 1,850 pounds yearly. In poorer countries the annual average is 400 pounds of grain per person, with almost all of it being consumed directly.

These estimates, quoted in the Packet on World Hunger prepared by the diocesan World Hunger Committee, indicate the complexity of problems and priorities confronting the nation and the world. The Rochester booklet, a project recommended by the Social Action committee of the New York Priests Council, was compiled and written during the summer by a committee of priests, sisters, and concerned laity, including some from other churches.

Since September 2,500 copies have been distributed across the country. Requests have come from as far away as Hawaii and South America. Two small parishes, one in Freehold, N.J. and St. Monica's in Cohoes, N.Y., ordered one packet and then requested 400 more. Locally, all parishes have received packets and many Protestant churches have purchased quantities for distribution.

Sister Mary Ann Weiland of the Office of Human Development worked on the packet and feels that world hunger is difficult to combat because the problem demands so many personal changes in lifestyle and values. "People here think they are having hard times, so it's hard to consider sacrifice. Really we have no idea what hard times are," she said.

"Food scarcity is becoming chronic," the Packet on World Hunger warns.

The booklet, available to persons and groups through OHD, outlines steps that can be taken to ease the food shortage.

(A slide-tape show on world hunger is also available through OHD.) Meatless days are suggested. Pork and chicken are recommended as more efficient meats than beef, because the grain-to-beef ratio is 10-to-1. "Beef is to food what Cadillacs are to energy. Move to compact models," the booklet challenges.

It points out that even the best efforts to conserve are futile unless resources that only governments control are more fully committed to hungry people. "Groups and individuals are urged to write to their legislators to press for governmental concern and action."

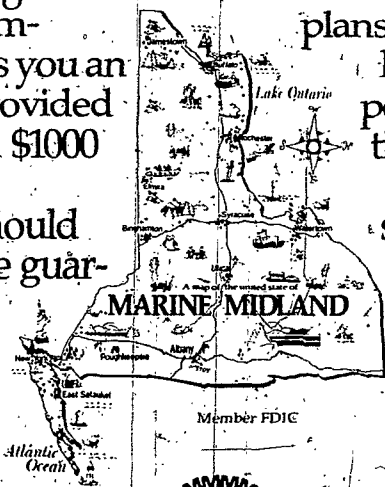
"I believe the American people are a generous people," Sister Mary Ann said. "The government needs to hear that the people really want to help needy countries." The complex mission of feeding the hungry at times is frustrating, because there is no chance of being a saviour, she observed. There is no simple, universal solution. Even so, she added, people must act and not despair. "We must be moved to pray."

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