

Simply Put... Hunger Is a Moral Problem

By Religious News Service

"Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts, of life are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind."

Henry David Thoreau wrote those words in 1854, but they reflect the thinking of an increasing number of persons 120 years later. Today, as affluent Americans ponder the implications of their luxury, many are giving up material extravagance in favor of "simple living." And religious leaders are highlighting the moral aspects of such changes in life styles.

Last year, Pope Paul urged Christians to "put brakes" on unnecessary consumption, and to try to understand "the moral and civil advantages of austerity." And a striking passage of the Lausanne Covenant, adopted last Summer by participants in the International Congress on World Evangelization, affirmed that "those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple life-style in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism."

At the height of the energy crisis, the Executive Committee of the National Council of Churches declared that shortages of gasoline and other resources may have positive value for Americans accustomed to "conspicuous consumption, extravagant waste, widespread pollution and extensive destruction of natural resources."

A long-range "Pastoral Plan of Action" to confront the world food crisis, unanimously approved by the U.S. Catholic

bishops in November, urged "resistance to advertising and other forms of social pressure which promote affluent and wasteful eating habits." The bishops urged all Catholics to observe at least two days a week as days of fasting.

Concern over conspicuous consumption is not restricted to the United States. On the eve of Britain's general election last October, the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) declared: "We sense the real seriousness of our national situation is not fully appreciated by many people."

The Church committee said that the nation was responsible for the crisis through policies of greed and waste. "We must accept a drop in our standard of living and Christians have a duty to show clear example that they are prepared for self-denial," its statement added.

At the same time, Christian leaders also have cautioned against using "simple living" as a simplistic solution to complex problems.

Addressing the Church of England's General Synod last Spring, Dr. Michael Ramsey, now retired Archbishop of Canterbury, commented: "It is being said that one of the morals is that we have had too high standards and ought to repent of this and settle down to lower standards as a better way of life. That is rather too facile, because there is nothing specially Christian in having lower standards, and neither 'doing with less' nor 'having it so good' is in itself Christian or un-Christian."

A pledge is one thing; actually practicing its principles on a daily basis is another. One religious

predicted we can support some 40 to 50 billion people. With improved fertilizers, processing techniques, storage and distribution systems; with utilization of the high-lysine corn, triticale wheat, improved strains of rice and feed grains; with marine farming and increased nutritional research, the Earth's resources can support ten times the present population.

Following this approach, according to Dr. Revelle, we would create the conditions which in turn would cause a natural stabilization of population growth trends.

In my considered judgement, Congressman Litton's bill if passed would bring almost immediate financial relief to the American taxpayer, without forfeiture of luxuries. America could continue to manufacture and sell arms. Our medical research community could continue to study abortifacients and euthanasia measures. We would be legally protected from the disciplines of moral ethics. And with the population decline of the underprivileged nations, we would witness a corresponding decrease of the photographs of pot-bellied children with the "radar gaze" in their eyes. We could continue to pursue the good life.

An approach based on Dr. Revelle's proposal, on the other hand, would almost certainly require a curtailment of government waste, a reduction of some space exploration and arms expenditures. Some luxuries would be reduced, and abortifacient research would be cut.

American medical research would have to refocus its attention, and our education establishment would have to realign its research priorities. It would be vastly beneficial to our own people as well. The 'next step' will be taken. The ascent of man will go on. But which technology will be offered? And by which nation? Who will lead the continued ascent of man? Right now I think the choice is still ours.

leader who is exemplifying simple living is Roman Catholic Bishop Bernard J. Topel of Spokane, Wash.

Several years ago, Bishop Topel sold his episcopal residence and bought a small house for \$4,000 to live "closer to the poor." He has also been cultivating a small vegetable garden in order to avoid buying food.

In an interview, the prelate said he decided the Lord wanted him to live closer to the poor. He commented that he had "been overwhelmed" by the number of Catholics who wrote to him saying that his life style had given them hope for the Church.

Whereas Bishop Topel has won praise and admiration for exemplifying simplicity in his way of life, a Franciscan leader has charged that order's traditional vow of poverty has lost its credibility because many Franciscan communities have a standard of living that is too high.

Father Alan McCoy, OFM, head of the Franciscans' Santa Barbara (West Coast) Province in Oakland, Calif., told an international English-Speaking Conference of the Order of Friars Minor last year that Franciscans must take the lead in reducing consumption.

"Denial and poverty is part of

Christ," he declared. "I don't see how we can embrace the full Gospel of Christ without poverty. To amass riches at the expense of others not even having the necessities of life is against the very essence of the Gospel."

Expanding his remarks to include others besides Franciscans, Father McCoy added that most clergy "tend to live at about the same economic level as the people they serve," owning TV sets, cars, furniture, and sporting goods. He said that Christianity is not opposed to appreciating beautiful things, only the "greedy acquisition" of them.

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Nancy Murphy

In the closing paragraphs of his scholarly *Ascent of Man* author Jacob Bronowski makes a startling remark. "The ascent of man will go on. But do not assume that it will go on carried by western civilization as we know it. We are being weighed in the balance, at this moment. If we give up, the next step will be taken but not by us."

I think Dr. Bronowski's 'next step' will be a technological solution to malnutrition and world starvation. But which technology will be used, and which nation will offer it? Who will lead the continued ascent of man?

The United States House of Representatives recently heard one propose solution, a food-control bill (H.R. 17513) introduced by Congressman Jerry Litton (D-Mo.). "In order to alleviate the causes of the need for (U.S.) assistance," Litton suggests we apply the technology of family planning by cutting off all food aid to those nations which refuse or fail to meet American population-control proposals.

Some weeks earlier in September 1974 Dr. Roger Revelle director of the Harvard Center for Population Studies approached the dilemma from another angle. With advanced agricultural technology, he reasoned, the earth can well support the 3.9 billion people now living on it. In fact, Dr. Revelle, although he is a leading spokesman for family planning programs and abortion,

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