

Forum

Are Governments To Blame for ... HUNGER?

By Martin Mawyer
Religion Today

Washington — Renowned musician Harry Chapin is singing a new song these days, and it is not a happy one.

As co-founder of World Hunger Year, he said, "Millions of people are dying from hunger each year and all these deaths are entirely preventable because the hunger problem is a poverty problem."

Chapin, along with hundreds of individuals working to solve world hunger, is convinced the problem is not due to lack of food.

"There is a predominating myth that underlies all discussion of the problem. There is simply too little food for too many people."

In fact, Chapin said, there is plenty of food to feed the hungry "if it could be distributed equally."

Today, more than 500 million persons are suffering from hunger throughout the world and more than 800 million are not getting proper nutrients and proteins. In the United States alone more than 20 million people are reportedly malnourished.

Locating the cause of world hunger, Chapin drew an analogy which underscored the problems and needs of the hungry. Poverty, Chapin said, is like the battered child who has nowhere to turn for help and no one to plead his cause. The destitute have no money to shop for either food or influence.

Dr. Patricia Kutzner, director of World Hunger Education Service, said the hungry are "powerless to affect what their country does."

Hunger revolves around the world of politicians, government, big business influencing government, and agricultural practices from past days of colonization, she said.

The land in many Third World countries is becoming, or has already become,

specialized in certain agricultural products. In the past, sufficient amounts of land were set aside for domestic use, retaining a variety of crops to insure the proper amounts of food. But now substantial portions of land are being used to produce goods exclusively for export.

With only one or two crops grown domestically, citizens are hard-pressed to feed their families. Workers on specialized lands are paid a wage, but earnings are so low they cannot buy expensive imported food items.

Third World governments, Kutzner said, deserve more blame than landowners. Government has the ability to make landowners "behave." Government can make it a national objective to see that people are properly fed.

Most governments, however, are more interested in modernization than feeding the poor, she said.

Many less-developed economies export raw goods and rebuy the same goods as packaged products.

Ghana, for instance, grows cocoa which it ships to England, only to rebuy the cocoa in finished form. This type policy causes the producing country to "sell cheap and buy dear," Kutzner said.

Although it seems logical that such countries should manufacture their own finished goods, this is not always possible. "Tariffs prohibit other countries from buying Third World goods," she explained.

Large, established manufacturing countries have the markets politically sewn up and it is difficult for Third World countries to break through the barriers.

It can be easily argued, however, that these poverty-stricken countries should have enough industries at least to supply finished products for their own citizens. Kutzner said if governments wanted, they could at least "meet their consumer needs as much as

possible." Instead, these countries are "almost exclusively export-oriented."

The reason is found in the countries' elite. Most have been educated in Europe, she explained, and have "little or no commitment to the lower class."

But when these governments take up the concerns of the poor, they run into difficulties. Often, farmers who have been supplied with equipment, newly-developed grains and technologies, have set such innovations aside and refused to use them.

Kutzner said this results from the method used in supplying farmers with such equipment. Often, farmers are not consulted about their doubts and reservations concerning such equipment and technology, nor are they given confidence that such innovative methods would work.

The mid-sixties Green Revolution resulted from such problems. Noble Prize winner Norman Borlaug developed a grain capable of producing more bushels per acre than the conventional type grain. But the new grain had to have plenty of water and pesticide spray, unlike the standard grain.

When farmers began to use the grain, only the rich were able to afford irrigation in times of drought or had the money to buy pesticide spray.

When the crops didn't grow for many farmers, they lost their lands. Usually large landowners bought the land which sometimes was vacated by the debt-ridden farmer.

Capitalism, which to Third World countries implies "every man for himself," and a strong possibility of defeat, commands less interest in these countries, while socialism is finding a welcoming hand. Socialism helps allay the go-it-alone fears.

The United States is not without exception when linking politics with hunger.



Today, more than 2,000 farmers per week, Kutzner said, are leaving their farms for financial reasons.

Of the many-faceted political reasons, one of the most important is a result of land tax. Most counties tax land as if it were for commercial use. Since commercial land prices are much higher than farming prices, a heavy burden is placed upon the small farmer. As a result,

many are selling their farms to land speculators.

But it is not only the small farmer who is selling his land. Though large farm owners can well afford the commercial rates for tax, still land value for commercial use is going up so high farmers are selling out.

Compounding the problem, many tenant farmers on these large lands have their farms

sold out from under them, leaving them rootless.

Hunger is a complicated issue. Contrary to the idea that CARE packages, seeds, equipment and dollars will end the food crises here and abroad, it is evident that reform will have to come through politicians, businessmen and concerted joint efforts with the poor if an ultimate cure is to come about.



"NOT TOO MANY PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT OUR SPECIAL GROUP OF HARDNOSED AUDITORS AT THE IRS."

Fr. Albert Shamon

Word for Sunday

Prayers Of Petition

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 11:1-13. (R2) Col. 2:12-14. (R1) Gn. 18:20-32. (R2) Col. 2:12-14.

All of us are familiar, I am sure, with the Peanuts cartoon. There is a 4-frame one that goes like this:

In frame one Lucy is jumping rope and Linus asks, "Do you ever pray, Lucy?"

In frame two Lucy stops jumping rope, looks Linus square in the eye and blurts, "That's kind of a personal question, isn't it? Are you trying to start an argument?"



In frame three, her anger has mounted and she shouts, "I suppose you think you're somebody pretty smart, don't you? I suppose you think ..."

In frame four Linus, with his right thumb in his mouth and his security blanket clutched in his left hand, is seated next to Charlie Brown and says, "You're right religion is a very touchy subject."

Prayer is the subject of next Sunday's liturgy. But prayer is so broad a topic that it can never be covered in a single article. Suffice it to concentrate simply on the kind of prayer in the first and third readings, the prayer of petition.

St. John Damascene defined prayer as the petition of "fitting things from God. Abraham's prayer and the Lord's prayer in Sunday's liturgy are petitionary prayers."

We petition for things in one of three ways: we may beg or covet or ask.

A student who drifts through a semester without really studying and then prays for help the night before examinations is begging, not asking — "putting all his begs in one ask-it." Some still think God is Santa Claus, and all they do is beg things from Him and fail to desire above all else His friendship.

Covetous prayer is even worse than begging prayer, because it is entirely devoid of relationship. It seeks to cash in on prayer: the petitioner puts in his order and sits back and waits for God to deliver the goods.

The real prayer of petition is based on both relationship and a real need. In the Our Father, Jesus emphasized the

father-child relationship. Because God is our Father and we are His children, we can ask and hope to receive. However, our need must be genuine, a legitimate asking. God is a Father, not a senile uncle.

One of the greatest blunders modern man is tempted to make is to belittle the practice of asking for help in the simplest needs of life. The older I get the more reluctant I am to begin anything without prayer. There is no reason why we should not ask for everything we need. There's an old song:

"Pray for peace and grace and spiritual food: for wisdom and guidance, for all these are good — but don't forget the potatoes."

Some think it beneath the dignity of prayer to ask for small personal needs. Is it? Does not God number the very hairs on our heads? Did not His Son teach us to ask for daily bread