"BLESSED ARE THE POOR"

INTRODUCTION On a recent cover of Life Magazine there was the face of a Negro child. The baby was crying - his mouth was open, his eyes were closed, and there was a tear starting down his cheek. From the top of the cover down the page were written the words: "The Cry That Will Be Heard".

I remember leafing through the magazine intent on finding the feature article dealing with race and poverty. On the first inside page of the magazine there was a picture of five beautiful white children, one with a teddy bear in her arms - an ad for air conditioning to keep their suburban home comfortable during the long, hot summer. On the opposite page there was a color photo of five handsome, well-groomed, prosperous white men with attache cases, in the background a white picket fence, a new station wagon - an ad for Equitable Insurance with the slogan, "The Protectors Are Out To Help You". Further along, a youngmobile from Oldsmobile; a wide-track Pontiac, a sky-blue model with an attractive blonde standing at the door; Fleischman's Preferred; brightest color tube ever made from Sylvania; tempting travel scenes from Scandinavian Air Lines; more pretzels hang around Budweiser's than any other beer - all of this in the way of a journey through American luxury to a section dealing with American poverty.

There was the picture of that crying baby again - that tear starting down his cheek. It was an article about a Harlem family named Favanel. The reporter had written that the coming of winter this year was a bad time for Norman Favanel.

"When I first saw him he had just been laid off from his part-time job as a railway section hand. There was almost no money left, no food, none of his kids had winter coats, and if it turned much colder they wouldn't be able to go to school. 'It's awful' he said, squinting through eyes that are always bloodshot. 'The black man gets the walking papers first and he's the last to be called back. The white man does all the hiring and the firing. I haven't had any education so I can't get anything better, so that's why I hang on to this job. But after working eleven years for a company you'd think they'd take you on steady. I got ten mouths to feed here, and there ain't enough in that ice box to fill even the stomach of the baby. What can I do? Is anybody going to hear the cry of that father - of that baby?"

THE POOR: WHO ARE THEY? "Blessed are the poor" said Jesus. How many poor people are there in rich America? That depends on where you set the poverty line, and most people are setting it about $3,500 a year for a family of four. Can you imagine trying to feed two children in New York City in 1968 and house, clothe, pay medical and all other bills on $70 a week? If that's the line - then there are just over fifty million Americans who live in poverty, one out of every four Americans in this richest of all nations.

Who are these poor people? Let me share with you a few facts taken from some of the recent books that have been published that dealing with Poverty: Harrington's "The Other America" - "The Shame of a Nation" by Philip Stern - "There Shall Be No Poor" by Richard Hirsch. I'm usually skeptical, as perhaps you are, of statistics, but the statistics I quote this morning will be from those books and from government tables. Here are some of the facts: Half of the fifty million American poor are children under 18. Three-fourths of the poor are white - a startling statistic until you remember that the proportion of Negroes in the whole population is only 10%, and that most of the rural poor are white. In fact, to get a more accurate view - one in every six white families is poor; almost half of all the non-white
families are poor. I was taken back to learn that the United States is 14th among the nations of the world in the rate of infant mortality, and when it is broken down in this country to the black nation of America and the white nation of America - the white nation stands 14th, and the black nation stands 39th.

Dr. Joseph English, Assistant Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, in Washington, in an article called, "The Poor Get Sicker, the Sick Get Poorer" made this observation: "Poor families have three times more disabling disease than the more affluent, seven times more visual impairment, five times more mental illness".

I think it comes as a shock to us that 50% of the poor children in this country still lack immunization, that 64% have never seen a dentist, that 45% of their babies in public hospitals are delivered without benefit of pre-natal care. The rich get the best medical care available, and they get it fast; the poor wait for hours in crowded, dehumanized emergency rooms of public hospitals for the worst medical care. The rich can hire the best lawyers to defend them, and until six years ago the poor weren't even guaranteed by Constitutional Law a lawyer if they didn't have the money to pay for it. The rich get the best recreational facilities from the city for their children; the poor get the worst.

Richard Hirsch offers us a startling observation in his book, "There Shall Be No Poor". "Of all the groups in America the poor have benefited the least from social welfare legislation". And he supports this observation by pointing out to us that millions of workers (the lowest on the economic scale) are still excluded from Social Security, and the benefits of Social Security are based on earnings, which means that those who need them most get the least. Out of 69 million workers in the United States, only 29 million are covered by minimum wage laws. Unemployment compensation still does not exist for one out of three American workers.

THE SHAME OF OUR NATION

This is the shame of our nation, that we allow, and indeed perpetuate, grinding poverty for one-fourth of all of our people in the midst of fantastic national richness. Forbes Magazine dramatically pointed up in its cover several months ago this poverty in the midst of luxury. You may have seen it. On the one side of its cover page was a refrigerator with the doors open; on the top shelf golden turkey, brown chicken, ham slices; then on the next shelf, eggs, bottles of olives and pickles; on the inside door, ice cream; next level down, fruits and drinks; and in the freezing compartment, meats of every kind. Next to this open refrigerator stands a little Negro boy without much on and with an empty bowl in his hand. His eyes are looking up - wondering if anybody is going to fill that bowl.

Who will see that boy's beseeching eyes. Who will hear the cry of a baby when there is nothing in the refrigerator to feed his stomach? Who will heed the bitter anguished cry of a father who cannot decently feed, house and clothe his children - who wants to and who is willing to work? How can a father stand not to be able to take care of his children? Could you? "How can a father love a society that forces him into and keeps him in that kind of a situation? Do you see where a riot comes from? Is there no compassion in us for the poor? Is there no fear of the Lord in us in the knowledge that according to Jesus, nations and men are judged on the basis of their treatment of the poor? Jesus' words are clear: "I have come to preach good news to the poor.....blessed are the poor". Blessed - how, we ask? Not in the sense that it's great to be poor. Sophie Tucker says, "I've been rich and I've been poor, and believe me - rich is better!" But in the sense that God has special care for the poor, if you will, God is biased in favor of the poor. God is on your side - "blessed are the poor for yours is the Kingdom of God. God will take care of you and that right early." There is the seed of revolution in those words of Jesus.
This week I looked through our hymnal to find hymns appropriate to our concern today for the poor, and I made an interesting and appalling discovery. Among the categories of the various kinds of hymns in our hymnal there are fifteen hymns under the heading "Angels" and there are exactly five under the heading of "social justice". Three to one for the angels! I've got nothing against the angels - I think they're out of this world. I don't want to offend them, and I may need their help at some future time. But let's get the message clear. Jesus did not say, "Give us plenty to eat, and good jobs and houses in heaven", but "give us this day our daily bread". Bread on the table - here and now.

March 21, 1964 about five days after President Johnson declared the War on Poverty, the Gallup Poll revealed that 54% of the American people believed that when a person is poor it is due to a lack of effort on his own part rather than caught in circumstances beyond his own control. 54% - isn't that amazing. Where did that sanctification of the rich and the condemnation of the poor come from. We have to acknowledged that much of it has come from the church. We might have thought that Job punctured once and for all the idea that prosperity is a sign of moral rectitude and the favor of God; that poverty is a sign of immorality and the displeasure of God. But no - this myth that you get what you deserve has come down to us by way of John Calvin and the Puritans for whom the pauper ranked next only to the criminal in public condemnation. At one time in this country - in the state of Pennsylvania - paupers were required to wear a badge on the right arm with the letter P. Itinerant beggars were whipped in public and driven out of town. We're just a little more subtle today; we just go out of town ourselves, and herd them all in a ghetto and not try to listen.

A few years ago one of the conferences of the Methodist Church (here in the east) voted to spend in the next four years $650,000 on building new church buildings in suburban areas - church extension it is called - and at the same time, they voted to spend $50,000 for work in the inner city among the poor. Ten to one - the suburban rich over the city poor. A motion was offered on the Conference floor to cut that first figure to $600,000 and to raise the second to $100,000 and the motion was defeated. I fear the church has been so eager to make members and money in the suburbs - it has not been willing to follow its Lord into the city where his poor dwell.

What can we do? Whatever a man - a church - a nation sows, that will it reap. For some years we have been sowing racism and poverty and now we are reaping the whirlwinds of riots. What can we do? What can we do to improve the situation? We can study and read more? We can pray more? We can support the church in its concern to help those caught in the yoke of poverty. Isaiah, long ago, told us what to do. He says, in the words of the Lord, spoken to him: 

"Is not this the fast that I choose to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the homeless, and to bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

What can we do? We can live our religion - we can practice what we preach - we can stand with the poor, we can help to plead their cause. We can lend our weight to help mobilize the national conscience to eliminate poverty from this nation. We can lend support with our money and if possible, our presence, the Poor People's Campaign in Washington. We can support the political efforts that are being taken to galvanize the country and Congress into action.
Let me share with you a few lines taken from the Editorial page of Friday's New York Times:

The President's Commission on Civil Disorders has underscored the emergency conditions in our cities. We can be grateful for this blue ribbon commission which so strongly and so clearly and so unambiguously has stated that the root cause of riots is white racism. The remedy, as we face another long, hot summer, is massive attacks on poverty - on jobs - on poor schools - and on poor housing. And the time for action is now - one minute to midnight.

The minister of a posh Episcopal parish called lawyer William Stringfellow one time and said, "I have a woman here in my office who can't pay her rent, and is going to be evicted. What can I do to help her?" Stringfellow asked him, "Do you still have those tapestries hanging on the walls of the sanctuary?" The minister replied, "yes". Stringfellow said, "Sell the tapestries and pay the rent", and hung up.

What tapestries do we have to sell? Yes - it's one minute to midnight. What can we get along without? There may be some in the congregation who have considerable savings and investments piling up for a comfortable retirement and bequests for future generations. Take a little bit of that money - find some project for the poor in which you believe - give to it and stay with it and support it. Let some of your money serve Christ's poor while you are still alive. There an old expression, "The Lord said, 'You take one step and I'll take two'". One step - two steps - many of us haven't taken that first step...not really. Take it - take it today - let your goodwill, your concern, your compassion for the disadvantaged, your generosity - let it flow, let it flow freely...that you listen to that desperate cry - the cry of the poor that will be heard.

LET US PRAY

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through Thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the nor and praise of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
Progress for the Poor

The ill-starred Poor People's Campaign—plagued by the woes of weather, communications, leadership an woes that grow out of poverty itself—has taken positive turn toward a climax of hope.

After weeks of tumultuous confusion—weeks were not, however, without moments of simple sequence—campaign leaders have at last produced a manageable list of practical goals. They have is a clear call for the kind of broad national sup they will need to make a start toward achieving these goals.

Many of the Poor People's demands can be achieved without new legislation. The Administration, to credit, is beginning to show signs of heeding the signs of these petitioners in overalls. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare has taken steps to increase health services to the poor and has promised to move to make benefits financed with Federal funds uniform throughout the states. The Office of Economic Opportunity has announced modest increases in poverty funds for some Southern states. The Secretary of Agriculture has at last acknowledged the need for a substantial expansion of Federal food distribution programs, a primary concern of the campaign.

Other vital demands will necessitate Congressional action. Prospects are good for enactment of some elements of a comprehensive new housing bill. But it is obvious from the negative reaction of many members of Congress that it will require more time, more effort and new tactics to obtain all the desired legislation.

One way to influence Congress will be to must the widest possible representation from across the nation for the Solidarity Day march planned for this week—and to conduct that demonstration with dignity. Every American has a stake in the success of this mass display of support for the poor. The demands are, after all, essentially the same as recommendations made by the National Commission on Civil Disorders to promote domestic tranquility. The campaign's goals are, in fact, national goals.

The Poor People's may lack the wealth of the defense lobby, the finesse of the oil lobby and the single minded purpose of the National Rifle Association, but their cause is just. With patience and perseverance they will prevail.
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FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
June 16, 1968

ORDER OF WORSHIP
11 a.m.

ORGAN
"Intermezzo"                  Rheinberger

CALL TO WORSHIP
HYMN NO. 382 "Glorious things of thee are spoken"

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward thy kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness. And make us to come, as came thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

RESPONSIVE READING    "The New Covenant"       Page 589
GLORIA PATRI
AFFIRMATION OF FAITH    No. 3, Page 512
***
ANTHEM            "Brother James' Air"        Arr. by Jacob
SCRIPTURE              Luke 6: 20 - 31
PASTORAL PRAYER       Choral Amen
ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN
OFFERTORY SOLO         "Then Shall the Righteous" Mendelssohn
                          (Carroll Alexander, tenor)
PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY
HYMN NO. 454 "The voice of God is calling"
SERMON                "Blessed Are The Poor"        Mr. Clarke
HYMN NO. 279 "God of grace and God of glory"
BENEDICTION
ORGAN                "Scherzo"                  Rheinberger

*** Interval for ushering

AN INVITATION

Visitors, newcomers and any others who would like to make closer contact with the parish are invited to come to the Community Room of the church following the service where punch and cookies will be served.

USHERS

The ushers for today's service are Mr. Boeckmann, Mr. Culver, Mr. Heger, Mr. Poulos, Mr. Smith, Mr. Hirsfeld, Mr. McCown, and Mr. Wise.

CHILD CARE

During the summer months, child care service is available from eleven to twelve on the fourth floor. This service is primarily for infants and pre-school children. Mrs. Levy and Miss Raeburn are in charge.

WOMEN'S SOCIETY TO MEET

The final meeting of the Women's Society of Christian Service for this year will be held on Tuesday evening of this coming week at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room. Sister Ann Louise of the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor will speak on the newly initiated Community program called "REACH", sponsored by the Stanley Isaacs Community Center.

An invitation is extended to all women of the church to share in this program.

MINISTERS TO BE AWAY

The ministers will be away the greater part of the coming week attending the sessions of the New York Annual Conference being held in Bridgeport, Connecticut, from Tuesday, June 18th to Saturday, June 23rd.