

MORAL ASPECTS OF PROBLEMS OF THE INNER CITY

It is the hope of these comments to raise areas of consideration for theologians that they might have missed rather than to give answers to the problems pointed to. It is meant to suggest that they need to increase this kind of contact with the realities of life in the changing cities of our country. My comments will be divided into five areas under which I have tried to sum up some experiences savored over a seven-year period of much contact not only with poor people in the so-called "inner city" but with most of the governmental agencies concerned with urban renewal and housing and with most other aspects of community life such as schools, welfare, police, youth and employment.

1. *The function and role of the priest.* The cleric is forbidden by canon law to engage in politics or business. Yet today he may be found in the most aggressive role in community action which, although hopefully non-partisan, is very political. Even the most pollyannish of social workers have come to admit that decisions of public agencies and policy changes in bureaucracy are matters of political action. The priest is even encouraged by authorities, ecclesiastical and civic, to be involved in housing ventures which, no matter how non-profit in intent, deal with great amounts of money. In a more ideal order, perhaps, the Christian-committed laity would be handling these functions, but for now there are many such real and inescapable challenges to the involvement of the priest.

2. *The ethics of the poor and the bureaucracy.* The promotion of the general welfare by the American state has certainly multiplied the governmental bureaucracy with which the lives of the poor are touched. Its progression has been from schools and housing to employment and health. The ethics and perhaps even the psychology and psychiatry of bureaucracy needs study, but the poor's way of "beating the system" does also. Perhaps it all fits neatly under the morality of lying. Perhaps, on the other hand, confessors, advi-

sors, and community leaders need moral direction on rent strikes, welfare "minimal standard" demands, the filling out of forms, or interviews with degrading information demanded, or, in short, the mental reservations of the disadvantaged within the system.

3. *The meaning of Christian civic virtue.* Should it mean more today to be a good citizen than to obey just laws, vote and pay taxes? Traditionalists ask what is the sin of refusing to go to school board meetings, while the new voices say join a community organization rather than give up candy for Lent. Clear moral leadership would seem to be needed on the specifics of the Christian's obligations regarding residential integration (which, I am sure, those concerned with the ethics of real estate operations are seeking to clarify) and on the concern for justice in urban renewal planning beyond institutional church interest (which is rarely voiced by parish or diocese).

4. *The ethics of government-aided private enterprise.* Personally, I hear more politicians speak of codes of ethics than I do theologians, but it may be only a matter of my location. The specifics of conflicts of interests in government are increasingly spelled out by such codes of ethical behavior. Our state governments, where lawmakers are allowed to function as lawyers before boards over whose finances they have control, is one of the glaring abuses. At present, in the field of privately-developed but state (or federal) subsidized housing, investigations have already pointed up legal but still ethically unconscionable situations. Influence-peddling, expediting, "slide greasing" are all ways of describing it. Theologians, it would seem, should catch up to it for the forming of the consciences of the people involved and for the assistance rendered to moral fulminations needed on the scene to effect reforms.

5. *A moral critique of the American free enterprise system.* American trade unions demanded a just wage and the right to organize for collective bargaining long before our ethicists caught up to the realities of social and economic life. Two aspects of our socio-economic scene, it seems to me, from this poverty corner of affluent America cry to heaven for ethical clarification and popular preaching, namely, the co-operative versus the free enterprise approach

and the even more future-looking question of the guaranteed annual income.

As a non-economist, and yet a non-profit "houser," I know from experience the economic advantages of co-operative housing. Yet the Christian basis for the whole co-operative philosophy and technique remains a mystery to both priest and people. St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, trains people in this mutual self-help from all over the world, but in the United States our Christian social ethic, in this regard at least, seems buried under the allurements of the free enterprise system.

As an observer and advisor of welfare recipient organizations in today's society, and as a peripherally-related labor school enthusiast of a generation ago, I submit that we must keep theologically abreast of Theobald and those who see a future America completely recast in terms of automation and an economy that must be gaited toward a guaranteed annual income for every family, working or not.

You must forgive me if I give evidence of being behind in my knowledge and appreciation of the advances in the field of moral theology. I have not even been able to finish Harvey Cox for his unreality! I am years behind in reading in my field of training which is history and in fields of interest such as housing and the problems of the city. In the latter, at least, I have brains that I regularly pick from among experts and in history I have to teach it and go to occasional conventions. This is my first theological convention and maybe, as a social actionist, I have been remiss in not seeking you out earlier, but the "situations" have moved so fast and many judgments have been demanded in the field. I hope not too many have distorted the Christian ethic.

HENRY J. BROWNE

(President, Stryker's Bay Neighborhood Council)

St. Joseph's Seminary

Yonkers, New York

Digest of the Discussion

Rev. Joseph T. Leonard, S.S.J., the discussion leader, asked Father Browne if the problem of the inner city was not the racial problem. Father Browne agreed that essentially the problem of the inner city was the racial question. Father Leonard indicated several areas of Father Browne's presentation which might give rise to various questions and discussion. These were (1) a delving into the moral values prevalent in the inner city and their effects, especially on marriage; (2) the function of the priest in social questions; (3) the possibility of evolving an ethic for bureaucrats inasmuch as bureaucrats are increasingly influential in modern life.

Rev. Robert Springer, S.J., Woodstock, Maryland, in reference to the marriage problems of the inner city, asked if the so-called "Chicago solution" in certain marriages could not also be a possible solution here. Further, Father Springer indicated that he believed moral theology should not attempt to present solutions to all questions in modern, complicated life, but should be content with inculcating sensitivity to moral life.

Rev. Edward Hamel, Chicago, Ill., brought up the problem of the current trend of leaving the city to move to the suburbs and to refuse to recognize, not only the problem of the inner city, but also, any responsibility. Father Browne in reply indicated the need of showing our people the existence of a Christian responsibility.

Rev. Joseph McKeon, Brooklyn, N.Y., expressed some confusion regarding the role of the priest in the inner city, as to exactly what it should be and asked Father Browne for clarification of his position. Father Browne stated that he believed that when the priest takes a position vis-a-vis the inner city, it is taken not merely as a private citizen, but as a leader with his people, and as part of the community. Hence, it must not be unilateral leadership but should reflect community attitude. Father Browne also emphasized the need to utilize Catholic lay technicians in order to correct the priest's technical deficiencies, but the use of these lay technicians has been widely neglected. The role and work of the priest is not merely social work, but it is educational leadership.

Rev. James Griffin, New York, N.Y., questioned Father Browne in regard to the people in a changing parish as to whether it was an obligation or an ideal for them to remain in the changing neighborhood. Father Browne indicated that it was, of course, an ideal, but that changing conditions could make a neighborhood intolerable and dangerous. Hence no hard and fast rule could be given regarding obligation but that according to the case, the priest has an obligation to help his people form their conscience. Father Springer, S.J., compared the problem to the question raised by a college professor as to whether a book is pornographic. This, in many instances, can best be answered by the question, "How does it affect your students?"

Rev. Aloysius Fahy, C.P., Union City, N.J., questioned Father Browne about work among Spanish-speaking groups of the inner city. Father Browne indicated that the Puerto Rican is advancing mainly through his own organizations which are outside the influence of the Catholic Church, e.g., storefront churches, etc. The Cuban refugees are better prepared than the Puerto Ricans for advancing. He said that the first arrivals from Puerto Rico were not Catholic, so that today the leadership is not Catholic, hence the difficulty of Puerto Rican work to a great extent. Father Griffin pointed out that already the Puerto Ricans and the Cuban refugees have attained a higher economic scale and standard than the American Negroes, which is indicated in the extent of the utilization of the Poverty Program.

The question was brought up whether or not housing was the solution for these problems inasmuch as much of the new housing is not properly taken care of. Father Browne called this the classical argument of the real estate people, and indicated he knew of more than 1000 families who were given new leases on life with new housing.

Rev. James F. Towns, C.M., Houston, Texas, questioned Father Browne on his description of the role of the priest. He did not think it is to lead, but to teach others to lead, otherwise it is mere paternalism. The priest should have the inner city make its own leaders. Father Browne agreed wholeheartedly with Father Towns that we want to train the poor to form their own panels, and to make their

own decisions. However, trained leadership is now lacking in the poor areas. Also, he indicated that the laity needed catechumenate as to why and how to be involved which theologians have not given.

Recorded by: REV. JOSEPH T. LEONARD, S.S.J.
St. Joseph's Seminary
Washington, D.C.