

for the record. It distinguishes between the voluntary poverty motivated by religious conviction that elevates the soul and the involuntary debasing poverty that shatters human dignity. It offers criteria for meeting this challenge with compassion and charity and, no less importantly, with genuine respect for the individual.

The social action department's statement on poverty is concerned not only with remedial services for the unemployed and the unemployable, but also—and perhaps even more importantly—with the underlying economic causes of poverty. The statement points out, for example, that if we are to help the poor to help themselves, we must “above all be concerned about work. Avoiding job discrimination is but one step. It is equally vital to be sure that work is available and that the poor are educated and trained to do useful work.”

(The statement referred to follows:)

STATEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ACTION, NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE

A RELIGIOUS VIEW OF POVERTY

While the problem of poverty is as old as mankind, citizens of the United States have special reasons to be concerned over its prevalence here. We are considered to be the wealthiest nation in the world, yet one-fifth of our citizens are in want. We are compelled to spend billions for armament, although slums and blight disfigure our cities and countryside alike. As a matter of conscience the American people offer aid to developing and impoverished nations around the world. Such generosity is good, but it should not blind us to needs here at home. From our abundance we are able to give generously, both in distant lands and within our borders.

Our response should be from the heart, but it must not be purely emotional in nature. Sound programs will endure to the extent that they are based upon principle rather than feeling. To aid in forming lasting convictions, the social action department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference offers the following considerations on the Christian view of poverty, our personal response to this challenge, and the function of society as it confronts the problem of want in the midst of plenty.

I. THE CHURCH AND POVERTY

There is paradox in the Christian teaching on poverty. The holy gospels teach us to respect poverty, but they also oblige us to help the poor in their misery. Our Lord called the poor blessed. He asked His followers to sell what they had and follow Him, advice that was followed literally by the first Christians. Jesus Christ could say that He had not whereon to lay His head, and He was buried in another man's tomb. St. Paul described the followers of Christ as the poor and the powerless.

“Consider your own call, brethren; that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the world has God chosen to put to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world has God chosen to put to shame the strong, and the base things of the world and the despised has God chosen, and the things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are; lest any flesh should pride itself before him.” (I Corinthians 1: 26-29.)

St. James could say: “Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 2: 5) The ministers of God were described as “poor, yet enriching many, as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” (II Corinthians 6: 10.) This was but a reflection of the life of the Master, “being rich, he became poor for your sakes, that by his poverty you might become rich.” (II Corinthians 8: 9.)

The church has been interested in the poor primarily because it sees every person as a child of God. While the world honors power, wealth, and achievement, the follower of Christ insists upon the moral worth of those who are neglected and even despised. He does not use worldly standards in judging personal excellence. A St. Francis could cast aside his clothes as a symbol of