

wish to share with the Commission in summary form the reasoning which underlies that conclusion.

Our first premise is a theological one, rooted in the Christian understanding of the plan and purpose of God in creation. We believe that the riches of nature and the fruits of human ingenuity and productivity are intended, in the providence of God, to be shared and enjoyed by all his children, not hoarded by some chosen (or self-chosen) few.

Through the centuries of mankind's history, because developed resources and technological skills were scarce, poverty for some was inevitable, although even during the ages of scarcity, the Church has maintained a consistent protest against unnecessary and immoral inequities between rich and poor.

Today, as far as our American society is concerned, we have clearly crossed the great divide from an economy of scarcity to one of abundance. We now possess the technological and productive capacity to eliminate dire poverty and want from this nation. Having the capacity to abolish poverty, we have the moral obligation to do so. As the General Board put it in another policy statement, adopted in 1966:

"Our burgeoning productivity makes possible, and our Judeo-Christian ethic of justice makes mandatory, the development of economic policies and structures under which all people, regardless of employment status, are assured an adequate livelihood.¹

In this connection, we wish to take the occasion explicitly to disavow and repudiate certain pseudo-Christian arguments which are frequently put forward to condone continuing poverty and injustice. One is the contention that poverty is "good for the soul," a basis for self-discipline and hence spiritual growth. True, there is a place in Christian doctrine for *voluntary* poverty as a means of self-discipline and as a witness to humility and servanthood. But this has nothing to do with the kind of grinding, degrading, humiliating *involuntary* poverty which is the lot of over thirty million citizens of the world's most affluent nation. Nor does the undenied fact that a good many poor people have "risen above their poverty" in some sort of triumph of self-fulfillment and spiritual achievement provide any defense for the perpetuation of great pockets of involuntary poverty in a nation which has the resources to guarantee income at levels permitting minimum health and comfort. No one will deny any man the right to remain poor if he wishes, either for religious or secular reasons; but no one in an affluent society has the right to demand that other men remain poor "for the good of their souls."

A second false argument sometimes heard in religious circles is that the plight of the poor is God's punishment upon them for their sins. The self-righteousness of this argument on the lips of the affluent is a moral offense, and the falsity of it is apparent upon the most superficial review of the composition of the poverty population and the nature of the causes and circumstances surrounding their poverty. To be sure, the poor are sinners, as all men are sinners; but there is no causal connection, at least not on any wholesale basis, between the degree of their sinfulness and the depth of their poverty. Any lingering doubt on this point can be quickly dispelled by a cross-section review of the morals of the rich.

The most spurious of all the pseudo-religious defenses of poverty is the proof-texting which quotes the words of Jesus from the Gospels: "For you always have the poor with you." Even the most superficial reading of the passages in which these words are found reveals that Jesus was not uttering a socio-economic prophecy, but using a very immediate situation to teach a moral truth. And part of that teaching was that the Christian has a responsibility to do all that he can in behalf of the poor. In Christ's time this could legitimately mean charity. Today, in our view, it means primarily hard work in behalf of the elimination of poverty.

The second basis for the position of the National Council of Churches on guaranteed income comes from our appraisal of the present welfare system. In view of the abundant documentation which will be available to the Commission from the work of the Advisory Council on Public Welfare and other sources regarding the woeful inadequacy and the dismal defects of our present welfare set-up, we will confine ourselves in this statement to a simple quotation from our basic policy statement:

"As presently designed and administered, however, the public assistance programs fail to provide the answer and frequently violate the human dignity of

¹ "Christian Concern and Responsibility for Economic Life in a Rapidly Changing Technological Society," A Policy Statement of the General Board, February 24, 1966.