

A CHRISTIAN ETHIC:

Based on

A SPIRIT OF POVERTY

in

A LAND OF PLENTY

A Thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

People in the United States have become accustomed to living in an affluent society; they have become accustomed to all of its material benefits which have made life easier. In fact many people today look upon certain things as necessities which were considered luxuries in the past. One wonders if Christ's precept: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God," (Lk. 6:20), is valid in such a society. Can Christians living in the midst of plenty be poor? With a correct understanding of what Christ means by "poor," it becomes clear that people today can be "poor," and also know what they have to do if they are to be good Christians. In this thesis, it will be shown what it means to be "poor" and what kind of ethic Christians must have in a land of plenty.

Before beginning this thesis, it is important to define two terms -- material poverty and wealth. Material poverty is not destitution, because a person living in destitution is forced to continually worry about keeping alive. Thus material goods are his concern rather than Christ. "It would be an error to identify the 'poor' of the beatitude with the destitute."<sup>1</sup>

Material poverty means a voluntary giving up of material goods and wealth except for the minimum needed to live and develop one's life. An example of such poverty is a religious who gives up his possessions as his total commitment to Christ.

The term wealth is being used in a wide sense. People with an income over \$6,000 will be considered "wealthy" in this thesis. The reason for this is that this sum doubles the yearly income which the United States govern-

ment sets as the maximum to be eligible for its poverty aid. Also, an average size family with at least a \$6,000 income can buy luxuries which have become necessities in the United States. Fifty five per-cent of the U.S. population live in this category. Another 19% of the people have an income ranging between \$4,000 and \$6,000.<sup>2</sup>

It will be shown in this thesis that today, the type of Christian vocation is not the problem. An individual has to choose "not between a higher and a lower standard of living, but between taking care of himself, and dependence on God."<sup>3</sup> The reason for this is that a spirit of poverty is the basis of any Christian life. This conclusion is reached by studying the meaning of the spirit of poverty and its historical development. It will be shown that spiritual poverty is necessary in an affluent society so that people can dominate temporal goods.

It must be stressed that this thesis concerns a Christian ethic for the people living in affluency today. It is readily admitted that one-fifth of the nation still lives in poverty; however, the concern of this thesis is the other four-fifths of the nation who live in relative affluency. What type of poverty should these people have? Should these people live on an ethic based on want? Should wealth be abandoned? Should these people be committed to help less fortunate people? These are some of the questions that will be answered in this thesis. No claim is made that this work contains all of the answers for the simple reason that the problem is so difficult. Few authors agree on any given point and for that matter, little has been written on this topic. The preparation for this thesis was interesting since various aspects of it have proven to be thought provoking. Again it must be stated that this

does not solve all of the problems; however, it does present a Christian ethic based on a spirit of poverty.

## MEANING OF THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

The meaning of spirit of poverty is total commitment to Christ, to God. It is a detachment from the world and complete attachment to Christ whom we have to imitate and represent. People must realize that Christ is Lord over all things and that they are his stewards. Consequently, as long as possessions are viewed as a steward looks upon his possessions, which his lord has given him to use and develop, material things are good and should be used. "...evangelical poverty is free in everything except the will of God. It does not consist in attachment to deprivation as such, but in readiness to accept deprivation, if God asks it. Privation will be good, when it is willed with God; so will prosperity, when it is willed with God."<sup>4</sup> It allows an individual to carry out his responsibilities "with liberty of spirit, in taking on occupations without preoccupation. From this point of view, evangelical poverty manifests itself primarily as a disposition not to keep goods for oneself, but to share them with others. This does not in the least imply that personal acquisition is to be repressed but that greed and the spirit of possessions are to be destroyed."<sup>5</sup>

## LACK OF POSSESSIONS DOES NOT DETERMINE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

A comparison of two vocations will show that a spirit of poverty is the essential meaning of evangelical poverty. A person can be materially poor and dedicate himself to Christ, yet not be totally detached from the world. The world includes all possessions, not just those that are external. Such a person has to give himself and lose his unrighteous self-love; he must look upon all of his talents as means to serve God. His material poverty must remind him that he is the steward, and God is the master. St. Thomas says:

"Poverty is not good in itself but insofar as it liberates a man's impediments to spiritual occupations."<sup>6</sup> This of course is the ideal. Yet is this the case in reality?

#### Religious Poverty

Religious, for example, even though they have given up material possessions, might desire them. They could still love themselves and just want to get away from society, away from wealth because they are afraid of it and the responsibilities it gives a person. Then again, such a person can always secretly be proud of the fact that he renounced material goods and is better than others. Then there is always the community to live in and the many little traps which such places have. The closeness of community living can breed contempt of others; or perhaps one could get caught in an inordinate power structure of a monastery. Of course a person living in such a community has many spiritual benefits, but here again, this could be his downfall. Perhaps because of all of his "holiness," he begins to look down on petty lay people who visit the monastery. Religious are also well educated and this could be their downfall too. They could look upon themselves as knowing so much; that lay people are mere plebeians who have to be administered to, but who never seem to become better Christians, who know so very little about their religion.

The purpose of the last paragraph is not to demean voluntary material poverty. Most religious are very good Christians. The point here is that a person has to not only detach himself from external possessions, but also from himself. He has to be totally poor in spirit.

## Poverty and the Layman

All vocations have pitfalls. The goal reached from a religious way of life is ideal just as other vocations are. However, this does not mean to say that both ways cannot lead to and enhance one's dedication to Christ.

A person using wealth as his means to serve Christ, has a dangerous life to lead because wealth could cause him to continue to seek more and thus rule him. However, a life in a materialistic society can also help one to be a good Christian and also serve as a check against failure to serve Christ.

A monastic or religious house provides security for its inhabitants. Religious do not have to worry about money as individuals. Their educational and spiritual development is readily available through the library, spiritual advice, and exercises. People in the material society do not have things so easy in this respect. In any type of secular vocation, a person has to fight to hold his own since he has to compete with everyone else to hold his position. If he does not produce, he loses his job.

Persons in the world are also constantly faced with decisions because of their contact with society. The racial situation, poverty, labor and management, civic duties and numerous other things face an honest man. Repeatedly, he must decide what to do; as a result, he constantly realizes his limitations and his dependency on God. All of these experiences force a man to go out of himself to others and to realize that he cannot have things the way he alone wants them. A sensitive and sincere man will know that he must look upon his possessions and the world as if he were a steward and must serve his Lord with the best of his ability.

Family life can provide much happiness, but it can and does provide many responsibilities and, at times, worries. Parents are concerned that their children are raised properly so that they become good Christian citizens. To do this, parents must know and understand their children, which takes time and sacrifice on the part of the parents. Then they must be patient with their children when they go through periods of adjustment. It is at times like these when parents realize that, despite all of their help, their guidance might not be enough, and they wish they would have been able to do more -- their dependence on God is realized. Then there are times of sickness and maybe even death which cause parents worry, sorrow, and a realization again that despite all of their efforts, they cannot control life--only God can.

From these examples it can be seen that people living in the world and those in voluntary material poverty have the same basis for their lives -- a spirit of poverty. For some, serving God, means voluntary material poverty; for others, material goods are necessary for them to reach this disposition. "A strict material poverty is not possible in every Christian vocation. On the other hand, spiritual poverty is central to the Christian life, regardless of the different form it may take in individual vocations."<sup>7</sup> "If less property, or less use of it, makes for God's glory through the perfecting of our nature thereby, we are to have and to use less; if more use of material goods effects a perfecting of our nature and more glory to God, we are to use more..."<sup>8</sup>

"Poverty will be the garment of Christ and of all who are his whenever they wish to imitate, represent and proclaim him."<sup>9</sup> To be Christian means to give witness to Christ. This can be done in a diversity of vocations -- in a

negative aspect of the spirit of poverty as religious or in a positive aspect as people living in the secular world.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF POVERTY

The meaning of spiritual poverty has developed through the centuries. Material poverty is stressed throughout most of the Old Testament, especially after the Babylonian Exile. However, there are places where wealth is looked upon as proof of one's witness to Yahweh. Christ emphasized the need for poverty, but it is a paradox as to what he meant by poverty. During the period between the Church Fathers to the present age, material poverty was stressed, but they gave a hesitant admission that wealthy Christians could fulfill Christ's precept of poverty with a spirit of poverty.

### Poverty in the Old Testament

It seems that in the Old Testament, poverty meant to be poor literally, except in the early era when riches were considered as proof of one's favor with Yahweh. For instance, Job, during his afflictions, wondered what evil he had done since Yahweh was causing him to suffer. In the other parts of the Old Testament, except for Sirach, in which the poor and the rich man could serve Yahweh, it was not exactly stated that a rich man could not get to heaven; however, the implication was that the poor man had better chances because he would realize his limitations and consequently would more readily receive God. Thomas Dubay, S.M. states that Coheleth "intended chiefly the pragmatic view that a man as a matter of fact cannot achieve genuine contentment on earth by a mad rush after wealth."<sup>10</sup> In general the Old Testament writers thought that a person either had to be poor and love God, or rich and be apart from God.<sup>11</sup> The reason for this is that the religious leaders noticed that the poor seemed to love Yahweh better than the rich. Because they did not know why this was, they believed people had to be materially poor to

serve Yahweh.

### Poverty in the New Testament

The meaning of evangelical poverty is paradoxical. Christ's precept of poverty is not clear. Mathew's Gospel reads: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, it,..." (Mat. 5:3) On the other hand Luke relates the beatitude as: "Blessed are the poor,..." (Lk. 6:20) Today, scripture scholars believe that both men had the same thing to say. Everyone has to be poor in this world. The difficult question is: "Does a person have to be materially poor?" It will be seen that in the New Testament, poverty takes on a wider meaning -- one including people with money and living in a spirit of poverty.

Christ was poor, and he evidently seemed to favor the poor. His ministry was directed toward them, and he favored the poor with many miracles. Yet he had rich friends and dined with them. Karl Rahner says that "Jesus was not miserably poor nor did he suffer from hunger; he had money and rich friends."<sup>12</sup>

Christ himself never told anyone that they had to be materially poor. The beatitudes themselves are precepts and not commands. When the rich man came to Christ and asked him what he should do for salvation, Christ told him to keep the commandments. Only after the rich man told Christ that he had already kept them and that he wanted to do more, did Christ tell him to sell all of his possessions and give them to the poor.

Everyone is not expected to be poor materially. This is evident from the Gospel account of the rich man. Christ did not intend to start a social, economic program for the whole world. In an article on poverty, Rahner says:

"We presuppose that Jesus did not want to institute a social program, necessary or ideal, for the common social and economic formation of the world as a whole."<sup>13</sup> "For Jesus, poverty has significance only in as far as it furthers the radical readiness for the kingdom of God."<sup>14</sup>

#### Poverty and the Church Fathers

The Church Fathers emphasized material poverty, but hesitantly admitted that wealthy people with a spirit of poverty could serve Christ. St. Augustine particularly did not like wealth because it hinders a person from reaching perfection. "One of those dangers (of wealth) is attachment, and so one of the advantages of being poor in fact is that a man can thus easily prove his spirit of poverty."<sup>15</sup> St. Thomas believed that the spirit of poverty is a minimum requirement for salvation.<sup>16</sup> The perfection of poverty is material poverty because one cannot love this world and God. St. Francis of Assisi's teaching agrees with this vein of thought also. The stress of Christian tradition is evident, but a spirit of poverty was not denied.

#### Modern Concept of Poverty

The meaning of evangelical poverty is better understood today. It is a spirit rather than simply material poverty. Pope Paul VI writes in his book, The Christian in the Material World, that the spirit of Christianity rests upon the spirit of poverty.<sup>17</sup> By studying the various social teachings of the Church it can be seen that the Church expects laymen to have a spirit of poverty since it demands that everyone has the right to a job and the right to a just wage. This is true because everyone has the right of self preservation, self development and the means to raise a family properly. The earth belongs to man in general rather than to a few powerful individuals; as a re-

sult, all men have the right to own property, which preserves the rights mentioned above. Now, today because everyone cannot own a sufficient amount of property for his livelihood, man freely works for others in return for payment of his skills, thus owning property in this sense. A just wage has to be paid to laborers which will allow them to live with the dignity that belongs to a human being. The social encyclicals continually demand a just wage for the laborers so that they can fulfill themselves and their families.

National wealth inasmuch as it is produced by the common efforts of the citizenry, has no other purpose than to secure without interruption those material conditions in which individuals are enabled to lead a full and perfect life.<sup>18</sup>

Wherefore, we judge it to be our duty to reaffirm once again that just as remuneration for work cannot be left entirely to unregulated competition, neither may it be decided arbitrarily at the will of the more powerful. Rather, in this matter, the norms of justice and equity should be strictly observed. This requires that workers receive a wage sufficient to lead a life worthy of man and to fulfill family responsibilities properly.<sup>19</sup>

'This is the heart of the matter: whoever has received from the divine bounty a larger share of blessings, whether these be corporal or external or gifts of the mind, has received them to use for his own perfection, and, at the same time, as the minister of God's providence, for the benefit of others.<sup>20</sup>

From these quotes it is evident that the national wealth belongs to the citizenry who consequently, must receive an equitable portion of it. Workers must also receive a wage which is sufficient to live a life worthy of a human being and which will allow them to carry out their family responsibilities. Those with more talents must contribute to the aid of others, thus living a life of spiritual poverty -- detachment from possessions and sharing one's gifts with his fellow man. It is evident that the Church stresses the material advancement of laborers. Now, by the very fact that the Church

is saying that everyone should share in wealth, it is saying that people should have a spirit of poverty rather than material poverty.

Everyone must share in a nation's wealth since they help to produce it. Sharing of wealth does not in any way refer to socialism. Everyone can own property; the state cannot dictate to its citizens who can and who cannot own property. The reasons why this is true have been stated above. Sharing of the wealth basically means that everyone has the right to receive an equitable amount of the nation's wealth. A president of a company, for instance, should receive a larger income than a factory worker because he has more responsibility and he could also lose his job if he made the wrong decisions. Sharing of the wealth also means that all men should be able to get work since they need an income in order to preserve their lives, raise their families and develop themselves. It also means that everyone has the right to own any type of property -- land, a business etc. (In a wider sense, it also means that people with more gifts, either monetary or mental, must help others who are less fortunate.) The right to work and the right to receive a decent wage rest on man's inherent right to have property. Property is a term which has a much wider meaning today than it had in the past. Today, property can mean monetary wealth, capital invested in stocks, land, insurance programs, professional educations which almost guarantee the professional with a job, etc. All of these various forms of property give a person security which formerly was attained only in land; and all men have the right to have property because of the reasons stated above.

From this summary of the Church's social teaching, the conclusion can be drawn that people should continue to grow in material goods; consequently,

it is saying that people should have a spirit of poverty rather than material poverty. Now in the United States, incomes in wages amounted to \$297.1 billion in 1962. Many of the principles laid down in the encyclicals are in practice. Admittedly, everyone does not have a job -- one-fifth of the nation lives in poverty; minority groups such as the Negro and the Puerto Rican are discriminated against when they try to get jobs; these groups have difficulty getting decent educations for their children; they must live in slums and pay exorbitant rents for the shacks in which they live; they are degraded and forced to live off of charity and so forth. Yet, this thesis is not directly centered on the poor; its main theme deals with the other four-fifths of the nation who are living in affluency. Also it will be seen in the latter chapters that affluent people must use their talents to help everyone get decent educations and jobs so that they can raise their families and develop into a full person, which they cannot do when they are constantly worried about where the next meal will come from. The claim that more and more people are receiving a decent wage can be borne out however.

The modern era is noted as the space age. Science, technology, capital, and wealth are its trademarks. During this age, affluency is governing more and more people's lives. Preceding this age, the Catholic Church's social encyclicals, beginning with Pope Leo XIII's, have asked that all men receive an equitable amount of the nations' wealth. This has been increasingly possible due to technology and the capitalistic system.

While poverty continues in many countries, there is legitimate hope that the tide can be reversed. Only recently has poverty ceased to be the common plight of man in certain growing areas of the world. "Several countries have joined the affluent society, and more are on the way. The United States of

America is the primary example."<sup>21</sup> As technology advances, more and more people will live comfortable lives materially. In 1900 one-tenth of the people of the United States owned and controlled nine-tenths of the nation's wealth.<sup>22</sup> Today, because of governmental regulation, public demand, and unions, a greater percentage of people share in the wealth. This is due to an increase in wages and governmental control over large corporations. Today 55% of the people have an income over \$6,000.

The opposite was true especially before the Industrial Revolution. The majority of the people were poor and the wealth was controlled by a few individuals who fought for power. Anyone who wanted to attain wealth had to get into this power struggle. It was because so many people were poor that the Church stressed material poverty as the main way for reaching salvation. The ethic was based on scarcity. Today, because of technology, and the capitalistic system, scarcity is not the problem, but abundance is.

Our society has changed from a land economy to a capitalistic system in which everyone can share in the wealth by owning land, because of a professional education, or because of the necessity of laborers. Laborers can be sure of a just wage because of strong labor unions. Because of the many types of insurance programs people can be assured of security in case of sickness or death which was formerly only found in land.

It is also quite clear that today the number of persons is increasing who, because of recent advances in insurance programs and various systems of social security, are able to look to the future with tranquillity. This sort of tranquillity once was rooted in the ownership of property, albeit modest.<sup>23</sup>

The Church has recognized this change and has fostered it. Just as there is a new economic trend, there also is a new trend in the meaning of poverty.

This meaning does not exclude the old meaning of material poverty for individuals, but includes a meaning for people with wealth. Both meanings are legitimate; both are idealistic.

## THE ETHIC

People are living in an affluent society and yet, they have not learned to cope with it. Ideally, affluency should help people to develop since it gives them the time and security needed to develop according to the ideal of human character, actions and ends. However, this is not necessarily the case since many people are constantly trying to "keep up with the Joneses." People have missed the purpose of material things because they do not view them in their proper perspective. Consequently, people need to take time to reflect over their situation and their relationship to the things around themselves. If they would, they would see that material things can be enjoyed only if they are detached from them and if they dominate them.

### An Understanding of Material Possessions

Material goods and wealth are good in themselves; the "become bad" only when man misuses them. To avoid this, man must learn to dominate them and to use them for his development.

Our technological society is good, but people must reflect over its numerous aspects to understand it before they can get any enjoyment out of it. To do this, they "must love that which the Creator has made, be interested in it, be fascinated with the multifarious splendors and possibilities of nature and the material universe."<sup>24</sup> However, mere fascination with nature is not enough since man might thus be controlled by nature. If nature is not to control man, people "must remember that they do not have unlimited and unguided domain over material things, and that they must always preserve their proper relation to property, always dependent on the Will of the Supreme Owner and

on His purpose for the use of it by them, His stewards."<sup>25</sup> The solution then, if people are to use material goods, is to use them with a realization that material possessions are not their end. Man must dominate goods and use them to achieve a higher end.

#### Domination of Material Goods

A person can make use of material things and enjoy them only if they do not dominate him. "People enjoy other things only by extrinsic denomination, only inasmuch as they aid them to enjoy themselves. The reason why people do not enjoy what their possessions are, is that there is nothing to enjoy in what they themselves are."<sup>26</sup> Because people cannot enjoy themselves, they continue to seek happiness in a hoard of possessions which will never provide happiness. In the end, they "are denatured by their possession of non-selves...."<sup>27</sup>

Man himself controls nature; consequently, people have to realize that material possessions are not at fault if man is denatured by them. It is man's own immaturity which lets nature own him. St. Thomas says that "created things by themselves do not separate us from God, but on the contrary they lead us to him. But if instead they should separate us from God, the fault lies with those who use them in an unreasonable manner."<sup>28</sup> Material goods can help the development of man; they can also be detrimental to his development if not used in a mature way.

An immature person will look upon happiness as the voluminous possession of material goods. On the other hand, the mature person realizes that possession of money and status symbols are never an end. Such a person realizes

that he must dominate his possessions which is done by realizing that whatever he has comes from God and that they must be used to develop himself and to serve others. Three quotes from Pope Paul VI's book. The Christian in the Material World, illustrate a mature outlook on possessions.

Temporal goods can certainly help the development of man, but they do not constitute the ideal of human perfection nor the essence of social progress.<sup>29</sup>

Man must rather see them (material goods) as only a gift of God, carrying responsibilities from which he can draw normal and real advantages for human life and for his eternal salvation.<sup>30</sup>

Riches obtain their value from the service they render.<sup>31</sup>

These quotes sum up the purpose and use of material goods: 1) they aid man in his development, provided he does not view their attainment as his end; 2) they are to be used to reach salvation; and 3) man must use them rather than they owning him.

People will not learn how to dominate and use temporal goods unless they reflect upon them and gain wisdom, which is needed to go beyond external realities. Gary MacBoin, an observer at the Second Vatican Council, says that domination of nature does not mean merely to know and use it. "To the knowledge we already have (about nature) we must add wisdom enabling us to use without becoming attached or absorbed (to it)."<sup>32</sup> The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states: "The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be, for wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and a love for what is true and good. Steeped in wisdom, man passes through visible realities to those which are unseen."<sup>33</sup> The solution of course is to be able to go beyond the material and not to become entangled by it. To avoid entanglement, a spirit of poverty is needed

as well as reflection and action. People "must be willing to be nourished by, to contemplate, and to act creatively upon this wounded paradise that is our earth...."<sup>34</sup>

This point of the need, of the goodness of technology, wealth, and material things is important. Without it, people in the affluent world could not develop because they would think that they would have to deprive themselves of material wealth. This is nonsense. The need for wealth and possessions has been shown. They are necessary for virtue and development.<sup>35</sup> However, a person needs wisdom to avoid being dominated by them.

The reason why people have a problem attaining this wisdom is that they are forced to live in the world and still be out of it. This is why a spirit of poverty is necessary. Otherwise wealth or the desire for it could control man and he could not get a true perspective of reality, if he were even interested in it at all. "A perennial cross of the Christian and that which forces the balance of sanity upon him is the necessity to be, at the same time, both wholly attached to and completely detached from the things and persons of this life."<sup>36</sup> Material things, while needed if man is to develop since they give him security and free time, can easily mire a person searching for truth.

Material possessions, as an end, have a superficial goodness and thus people can become entangled in them and thus cannot see them in their true perspective. Because of this, people cannot see the irrationality of their quest for wealth as an end. The foolishness of becoming buried in physical things is expressed by St. John Chrysostom.

What can be more abject and base than those persons

who burrow into riches' dominance and glory? They are base for two reasons: because they grovel on earth and because they esteem those things great, like children who think that balls, jacks, and such ludicrous objects are precious. Those riches are not great and the minds that admire them are petty and base.... When an adult person thinks that dinners, luxuries and pleasures are the values of life, what can be more abject and base?<sup>37</sup>

If wealth and temporal goods are to be avoided from becoming an end, spiritual poverty is necessary because it furnishes one with a "superiority of being over having; it is riches in oneself as opposed to riches in other things; it is the riches of Christ as opposed to the penury of mere wealth."<sup>38</sup> Thus a person is able to go beyond externals to the true value of temporal goods. When a person understands this, he is beginning to dominate his possessions and to grow in maturity and wisdom.

#### Qualities of Spiritual Poverty

A person grows in wisdom as he develops several essential qualities pertaining to spiritual poverty -- faith, humility, honesty and integrity, and love. Faith is vitally important because it allows one to listen to Christ and gives an individual the ability to open himself to Christ's call, thus enabling him to see into and beyond visible reality. Rahner says that a Christian must voluntarily imitate the poor at the Sermon on the Mount, "who transform their humble, insecure lot by faith and thus externalize their undivided freedom to hear Christ's call."<sup>39</sup> Faith gives one the security to face his problems with the assurance that someone is helping him and that he is not alone. It replaces the security of wealth so that an individual can be concerned with developing instead of guarding and increasing his social, economic and political well-being. It also "throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to

solutions which are fully human."<sup>40</sup> Faith will help a person to see Christ acting in this world such as in the racial problem, technology, science, the urban problem and the many other facets of life in the modern age and thus to view them in the right perspective.

Humility is so necessary because one has to realize that God controls the world, including one's life. Consequently, humility and faith are closely related since it is an expression of faith. The individual with wealth must realize that his money, while it makes life easier and helps him to develop, does not furnish security and dominance over life. As has been stated above, man must understand that he is a steward and, as a result, he must use his talents and wealth to carry out his Lord's plans. Despite wealth, the rich person must realize his material insecurity, just as the poor person. When a person is materially comfortable, this is hard and calls for a deep sense of humility which has to be based on a strong faith in God and a commitment to Christ. Also if a person is honest with himself, he will know his limitations and need for God which was pointed out in section two. Bishop Mercier of the Sahara stated at the Council that the problem of poverty is "one to be solved not so much by exterior activity as in the hidden recesses of the heart of man."<sup>41</sup> Status symbols, exterior signs of power and wealth "will disappear of themselves, without any revolutionary break with the past, if men are meek and humble of heart."<sup>2</sup>

A person cannot really be poor in spirit unless he is honest with himself. This is important since a person can easily believe that he has a spirit of poverty because he goes to Mass when he has to, keeps all of the laws of the Church, and donates regularly and generously to the Church and

various charities. Yet, the person might be cheating customers in his business, refusing to hire justly, or refusing to let a negro family live in his neighborhood. Nor does a person possess spiritual poverty if he is passive to such practices. In any of these instances, such a person does not possess a spirit of poverty by any stretch of the imagination since he is protecting his position at the expense of others and therefore is attached to rather than detached from the things of this world.

It is difficult to be honest with oneself and this is why an individual needs to be humble. Montaigne once said: "Every man carries within himself the whole condition of humanity. Within us, in our own breast, where nothing is forbidden and everything is hid, to be honest there -- that's the rub."<sup>43</sup> An individual has to be concerned with his being, with his whole self both in himself and in relation to the society in which he is rather than being concerned with having, possessing material wealth.

An honest person has to be concerned with truth -- with reality as it is and not as he would like it. Honesty is not applied only to externals; it is deeper since "such a rough conception of honesty takes little account of the inner person, of that province of man's being which is inaccessible to others. It is in that province -- commonly called the 'subjective' -- where the problem of honesty takes on a different character."<sup>44</sup> External honesty is not enough since the subjective element is so important because this is where a person's attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs are. These are the elements which really determine a person's actions -- these are the elements which determine if a person is really detached from the world and attached wholly to Christ.

Honesty is not enough, though, for a person to be wholly detached from material comforts since it is one thing to know the truth and another to comply with it. This is why honesty implies integrity which, in the context of spiritual poverty, means the correct way of "behaving in regard to earthly goods in working for the primacy of God and his kingdom."<sup>45</sup> It is important therefore for a person, after exploring his totality, to live a life in compliance with what he has discovered himself to be and his relation to his fellow man and God.<sup>46</sup>

A man cannot have integrity unless he can love. Pope Paul VI states that love is "the distinctive mark of our being Christians."<sup>47</sup> In other words, without love, a person will continue to turn inward to himself; therefore, he will not be detached from the world -- he will not possess a spirit of poverty and give witness to his honesty and faith.

The Christian has to love both God and man. God and other persons have to be one's primary concern rather than personal material possessions. St. Augustine says: "The poison of charity is the hope of obtaining or retaining temporal things."<sup>48</sup> "... perfect charity has neither a desire for the world nor a fear of it; that is, no desire to acquire temporal things and no fear that it may lose them."<sup>49</sup> Christian love is basically the same as humanistic love, except that it is raised to the higher plane of God for its motivation. The humanist loves because all men are equal, thus deserving his love, and because he realizes he has to go out of himself to others to be completely a human being.

While externals differ, all men are the same insofar as they are composed of a body and soul as well as the powers common to all humanity. Ad-

ding to this, the Christian believes that all men share in Christ's Mystical Body, which makes them his brothers; therefore, the need to love.

#### Active Aspect of Poverty

Love is the active aspect of a spirit of poverty. It is the proof of one's disposition of detachment. As proof of their spirit of poverty, people risked their lives at Selma and at other places in defense of the equality of all men. Others have risked their reputation and easy way of life for this problem by speaking out or refusing to move from their homes when a negro family moves into the same block. Others serve their fellow man in other ways, many of which are much less spectacular. Some people volunteer time to assist people in slums; others help the physically and mentally handicapped; some people volunteer time and money for various charities; men and women lead or work in civic organizations so that a city's standards remain or become good; employers give just wages instead of keeping a large profit; employees give a just days work; a mother keeps her family's interests at heart and is constantly giving herself to them; a husband saves his extra money and goes without "necessary luxuries" so as to be able to buy his wife an automatic washer in order to make life a little easier for her. There are as many ways to express spiritual poverty as there are possible situations. Each person to reflect on his personal situation and see what his commitment must be.

#### Reflective Aspect of Poverty

Reflection plays an important role if a person is to know what he must do in his situation in order to prove his spirit of poverty. He has to confront himself, honestly and with the light of faith, with the vital issues

of the day and see how they affect him and what response is demanded from him.

There are many and fast changing issues which ultimately effect everyone. The problems that faced the preceding generations have either altered and must be viewed in a new light or there are wholly new problems. A Christian must study the problems in the light of faith in an attempt to see where God is leading him and the world. The issues must be viewed honestly and then acted upon without any regard for personal likes or dislikes since a person has to be wholly detached from the world.

A Christian must realize that he has a very definite duty to keep abreast of the current problems and decide what is right or wrong and to have the courage to differ from society if its ethic is wrong. Today, he must confront himself with several basic issues. What is society's ethic toward racial relations, sexual behavior, urban living, cybernetics, hiring process, politics, war and many other attitudes which exist? Is society's ethic right? Why? Why not? What can he as an individual or as a part of a group, do to foster a correct ethic in society?

These are all important questions which a Christian, possessing spiritual poverty, must ask himself. He must be able to put these issues into the light of the Gospel in order to know what his Christian commitment is today. Because of his faith, "the Christian believes that the New Testament brings him an understanding of God and man that is basic to all human relations and decisions. He must discover the meaning and implications of the biblical faith and understanding for modern situations that are not mentioned in the Bible."<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Using faith as a motivation, using humility, honesty, and integrity to understand today's problems and how they effect us, and using love to serve Christ and man, people of the world must be active in the owrld so that it can eventually come to the perfection and fulfillment that God has intended it to reach. "Their activity in the world is the medium of a creative providence. The poor in spirit by the guidance of the Spirit create the loving expression of God's Will."<sup>51</sup>

People must recognize that there is no single way to give oneself to Christ, except that he must be followed. The ethic is not static. "People must recognize the truth that there is nothing arbitrary in the life of Christ: it is the right pattern for human existence."<sup>52</sup> It is an ethic based on the natural law, on the intrinsic truths found in man and nature. It is an ethic of reflection and action. One must read and think to understand what God wants him to do; once the course is decided upon, it must be put into action, since the love of one motivated by positive poverty is expressed through action.

Harvey Cox in his book, The Secular City, constantly reiterates the theme that a person must seek Christ and follow him wherever he is -- be it in slums, racial equality, cybernetics and automation, prosperity or any of the many other problems which plague this affluent society. By one's action he gives proof of Christ's redeeming action of man.

People must realize that there is a new ethic of affluency rather than the old one of scarcity and want. The ethic of scarcity was basically one of

self denial; the ethic of affluency is basically one of reflection and action. This is due to the fact that today the economy is totally different -- one in which scarcity need not be the problem. D.L. Mundby states in his book, God and The Rich Society: "God is in process of transforming our economic order.... We can, and should, participate in that activity."<sup>53</sup>

A correct ethic of affluency is based on a spirit of poverty because in this way man views himself as a steward, constantly striving to serve the Lord. Such a person is concerned with his fulfillment and that of his fellow man, rather than with his personal prosperity. In so doing, he is in the world, but not of the world. Such an ethic is checked by studying the society's affect on people, in humility and honesty. Roger L. Shinn, author of Tangled World, writes:

How shall we tell the difference between valid worldliness and heedless worldliness? How shall we distinguish between the workings of God in our economic order and the workings of sordid ambition and blind greed? One way is question our sincerity, to seek to discover how and why decisions are made, and to learn what the social process is doing to people.<sup>54</sup>

If the social process is harming people or harming the individual, each person has to try to correct this situation so that society and the world can be perfected. Man cannot do this though unless he understands himself and the society in which he lives. As each individual matures, society continues to be perfected. The combination of personal development and social development is man's human and Christian apostolate. It is one that requires reflection and action. It is one that requires a spirit of poverty, a willingness to seek out Christ, to understand him and follow him.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. Danielou, "Evangelical Poverty," Theological Digest, 11 (Spring, 1963), p. 57.
2. "The Economy," U.S. News and World Report, 60 (March 7, 1966), p. 52.
3. C. Jackson Robinson, "The Poor in Spirit," Ave Maria, 95 (March, 1962), p. 10.
4. J. Danielou, op. cit., p. 58.
5. Idem, p. 58 & 59.
6. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, III, c. 133.
7. James W. Douglas, "Blessed Are The Poor in Spirit," Spiritual Life, 9 (Spring, 1963), p. 11.
8. F.J. McGarrigle, "The Humility of 'The Poor in Spirit,'" American Ecclesiastical Review, 144 (May, 1961), p. 56.
9. Pope Paul VI, The Christian in the Material World, trans. Michael M. McManus. (Baltimore: Hilicon Press, 1964), p. 56.
10. Thomas Dubay, S.M., "Poverty and Love in Christian Tradition," Sponsa Regis, 34 (January, 1963), p. 53.
11. Idem.
12. Karl Rahner, S.J., "Religious Poverty in a Changing World," Theological Digest, 11 (Spring, 1963), p. 53.
13. Idem.
14. Idem.
15. Thomas Dubay, op. cit., p. 151.
16. Thomas Dubay, "Poverty: A Means to Love of God," Sponsa Regis, 34 (February, 1963), p. 180.
17. Pope Paul VI, op. cit., p. 23.
18. Mater et Magistra, par. 74.
19. Idem, par. 71.
20. Idem, par. 119.
21. Roger L. Shinn, Tangled World, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 25.

22. Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant, A History of the Republic, (Boston, D.C. Heath and Company, 1965), p. 536.
23. Mater et Magistra, par. 105.
24. Ronald Lane, "To Be Poor in Spirit," Ave Maria, 95 (April 21, 1962), p. 8.
25. F.J. McGarrigle, op. cit., p. 313.
26. Idem, p. 318.
27. Idem.
28. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Prima Pars, q. 65 art. 1 ad 3.
29. Pope Paul VI, op. cit., p. 23.
30. Idem, p. 30 & 31.
31. Idem, p. 33.
32. Gary MacEoin, "Spirit of Poverty," Ave Maria, 99 (May 16, 1964), p. 24.
33. Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, par. 15.
34. Ronald Lane, op. cit., p. 8.
35. Mater et Magistra, par. 20.
36. Ronald Lane, op. cit., p. 8.
37. St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Psalm 152, ed. Montfaucon, 1836, v.5, p. 544.
38. F.J. McGarrigle, op. cit., p. 8.
39. Karl Rahner, op. cit., p. 53.
40. Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, par. 11.
41. Gary MacEoin, op. cit., p. 25.
42. Idem.
43. Daniel Callahan, Honesty in the Church, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 9.
44. Idem, p. 10.
45. J. Danielou, op. cit., p. 58.

46. Rev. Richard T. Cochran, "Poverty and Integrity," Spiritual Life,  
9 (Fall, 1963), p. 153.

47. Pope Paul VI, op. cit., p. 42.

48. Thomas Dubay, S.M., "Poverty and Love in Christian Tradition," op. cit., p. 150.

49. Idem.

50. Roger L. Shinn, op. cit., p. 59.

51. James W. Douglas, op. cit., p. 11.

52. Idem, p. 12.

53. Roger L. Shinn, op. cit., p. 37.

54. Idem, p. 38.

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