POVERTY: HUNGER......Elliott #546

Bob Barron asked Bill Webber, who asked me, to answer Johnson C. Montgovery's THE ISLAND OF PLENTY (23 Dec 74 NEWSWEEK, p.13), which is against sharing basic resources (chiefly, food) with the rest of the world. Barron says "...in many ways what he says amkes sense, but from a Christian standpoint what can you say?" Banker Barron is disturbed by Lawyer Montgomery.

- 1. Trying to answer this is the most foolhardy thing I've done at least since last Thursday. I don't know how to answer. The rest of this thinksheet is probably not worth reading—except as a refreshing contrast to all the other thinksheets, in which I did know how to answer.
- 2. The chief hindrance to answering is hearing: our "Christian," kneejerk compassion takes umbrage at any proposal that bypasses hungry mouths in order to (1) protect the resources of one's own nation and children, (2) impress the governments of the hungry with the need for reducing population, and (3) let nature (i.e., famile) take its course, restoring the eco-cycle (the synergistic balance of the human/nonhuman world). I'm sure this pseudoChristian mindlessness is ignorance if not also arrogant. Whew! At least I'm sure of something!
- 3. Montgomery's anxiety does not allow for the appearance of novelty, of emergents in the short run that cannot be foreseen, either by projection or by imagination, in the present. If we act on simple, mindless, evangelic charity ("If your neighbor hunger, feed..."), a soon solution of the long range problem may appear in the short run: God may bring "the early rain out of season." This direct, mindless charity is an act of trust, and "mindless" in the good sense, i.e. uncalculating. Montgomery's article is nothing if not calculating, cold calculation, animal offspring-protection, defense of earth-soil against humankind. It's straight out of the rational, the brain's left hemisphere. I'd agree with it if Jesus would, which he wouldn't: he'd expect the "kingdom of God" to intervene.
- 4. I'm stuck with this intervention-of-the-kingdom-of-God business: I'm a Christian. I think it's daft when American ecclesiarchs appeal to Congress to go all out to feed the starving Indians and subSaharans; it angers me, it's so irrational and, in the long run, canceling of human interests by (1) depleting us and (2) making our benefactees dependent on us. I've got a mind/gut split: my mind is with Montgomery, my heart—and I think Jesus'—is with the ecclesiarchs. I'm a mess.
- 5. In thinksheet #338 I tried to do something with "'Poverty' and Programming." I'm more comfortable talking about poverty when there are no hungry folks close by. The trouble is, with television and photography there's no place any more to be where hungry folks are not close by. I'm miserable.
- 6. Eze.11, which I chose for the first reading in the 1975 Kirkridge Lectionary, talks about getting rid of "a heart of stone" and letting God give us "a heart of flesh." Flesh eats, stone doesn't. When flesh eats insensitivity, flesh turns to stone: that's the point of thinksheet #471, a cartoon self-examination on wealth's power to entrap and harden. Flesh can squeeze through the needle's eye, stone'can't-but (M.10.27//Mt.19.26) "with God all things are possible."
- 7. Our one positive correlation here is negative: up the education of peasant women, down the birthrate (on which see the excellent work of Dick Fagley, WCC expert on population/demography). A coalition of "missions," political and religious, is needed here, under UN auspices. But persuasion cannot work soon enough: the world needs also coercion, the automatic sterilization of women at (in my opinion) the third birth—the plan I presented to the Government of India in 1961, and got a 30% favorable vote in parliament. (After the failure, the Minister of Health wrote me, "Cheer up. Try it in New Jersey first.") But 30% is high...coming....

## The Island of Plenty

he United States should remain an island of plenty in a sea of hunger. The future of mankind is at stake. We are not responsible for the rest of humanity. We should not accept responsibility for all humanity. We owe more to the hundreds of billions of Homo futurans than we do to the hungry millions-soon to be billions-of our own generation.

Ample food and resources exist to nourish man and all other creatures indefinitely into the future. This planet is indeed an Eden-to date our only Eden. Admittedly our Eden is plagued by pollution. Some of us have polluted the planet by reproducing too many of us. Too many people have made excessive demands on the long-range carrying capacity of our garden; and during the last 200 years there has been dramatic, everincreasing destruction of the web of life on earth. If we try to save the starving millions today, we will simply destroy what's left of Eden.

The problem is not that there is too little food. The problem is there are too many people-many too many. It is not that the children should never have been born. It is simply that we have mindlessly tried to cram too many of us into too short a time span. Four billion humans are fine-but they should have been spread over several hundred years.

But the billions are already here. What should we do about them? Should we send food, knowing that each child saved in Southeast Asia, India or Africa will probably live to reproduce and thereby bring more people into the world to live even more miserably? Should we eat the last tuna fish, the last ear of corn and utterly destroy the garden? That is what we have been doing for a long time and all the misguided efforts have merely increased the number who go to bed hungry each night. There have never been more miserable, deprived people in the world than there are right now.

## A COOL RECEPTION

It was obvious even in the late 1950s that the famine the world now faces was coming unless people immediately began exercising responsibility for reducing population levels. It was also obvious that too many people contributed to the risk of nuclear war, global pestilence, illiteracy and even to many problems that are usually classified as purely economic. For example, unemployment is having too many people for the available jobs. Inflation is in part the result of too much de-mand from too many people. But in the 1950s, population control was taboo and those who warned of impending disasters received a cool reception.

By the time Zero Population Growth, Inc., was formed, those of us who wanted to do something useful decided to concentrate our initial efforts on our own families and friends and then on the white American middle and upper classes. Our belief was that by setting an example, we could later insist that others pay attention to our proposals.

## POWER IS IN KNOWLEDGE

I think I was the first in the original ZPG group to have had a vasectomy. Nancy and I had two children-each doing superbly well and each getting all the advantages of the best nutrition, education, attention, love and other resources available. I think Paul Ehrlich (one child) was the next. Now don't ask me to cut my children back to the same number of calories that children from large families eat. In fact, don't ask me to cut my children back on anything. I won't do it without a fight; and in today's world, power is in knowledge, not numbers. Nancy and I made a conscious decision to limit the number of our children so each child could have a larger share of whatever we could make available. We intend to keep the best for them.

The future of mankind is indeed with the children. But it is with the nourished, educated and loved children. It is not with the starving, uneducated and ignored. This is of course a highly elitist point of view. But that doesn't make view incorrect. As a matter of fact, the lowest reproductive rate in the nation is that of one of the most elite groups in the world-black, female Ph.D.'s. They had to be smart and effective to make it. Having made it, they are smart enough not to wreck it with too many kids.

We in the United States have made great progress in lowering our birth rates. But now, because we have been responsible, it seems to some that we have a great surplus. There is, indeed, waste that should be eliminated, but there is not as much fat in our system as most people think. Yet we are being asked to share our resources with the hungry peoples of the world. But why should we share? The nations having the greatest needs are those that have been the least responsible in cutting down on births. Famme is one of nature's ways of telling profligate peoples that they have been irresponsible in their breeding habits. Naturally, we would like to help; and

if we could, perhaps we should. But we can't be of any use in the long run-partic-ularly if we weaken ourselves.

Until we have at

least a couple of years' supply of food and other resources on hand to take care of our own people and until those asking for handouts are doing at least as well as we are at reducing existing excessive populationgrowth rates, we should not give away our resources-not so much as one bushel of wheat. Certainly we should not participate in any programs that will increase the burden that mankind is already placing on the earth. We should not deplete our own soils to save those who will only die equally miserably a decade or so down the line-and in many cases only after reproducing more children who are inevitably doomed to live and die in misery.

## THE PIE IS FINITE

We know the world is finite. There is only so much pie. We may be able to expand the pie, but at any point in time, the pie is finite. How big a piece each person gets depends in part on how many people there are. At least for the foreseeable future, the fewer of us there are, the more there will be for each. That is true on a family, community, state, national and global basis.

At the moment, the future of mankind seems to depend on our maintaining the island of plenty in a sea of deprivation If everyone shared equally, we would all be suffering from protein-deficiency brain damage—and that would probably be true even if we ate every last animal on earth.

As compassionate human beings, we grieve for the condition of mankind. But our grief must not interfere with our perception of reality and our planning for a better future for those who will come after us. Someone must protect the material and intellectual seed grain for the future. It seems to me that that someone is the U.S. We owe it to our children-and to their children's children's children's children.

These conclusions will be attacked, as they have been within Zero Population Growth, as simplistic and inhumane. But truth is often very simple and reality often inhumane.

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