

Cry of the Poor / The Cry of Poor Mother Earth

by Bishop Frederic Henry

Alberta MacKenzie Provincial Convention

Fort McMurray, AB

June 1, 2007

Dear Sisters in the League,

These are my notes from Bishop Fred Henry's talk at Provincial Convention in Fort McMurray in June 2007. They are certainly not a complete and concise recount of the Bishop's talk. I ask for your understanding where there are errors and omissions.

As I reread these notes, I am once again moved by the Bishop's message to listen for the cry of the poor. It is so difficult. Let us pray for the strength to be moved into action and always be the hands and feet of Jesus in our times.

Blessings,

Jeanne Davis, VP & Spiritual Development Chair

Edmonton Diocesan Council

Cry of the Poor

What does the Cry of the Poor mean to us? Look at the world, through the lens of our faith. We see that billions of people are excluded from our habitual lens. Once there was a US investment banker that went to Mexico. He was on the pier and asked a local fisherman how long it took him to catch the 10 yellow-tailed tunas in his boat. "Oh, not long" said the fisherman. "You should have stayed out longer and caught more fish" said the banker. "Oh, I don't have time" said the fisherman. "Why?" asked the business man. "Well, I need to plant my garden, have tea with my elderly mother, go swimming with the kids and spend time with my wife today." "Well, if you go fishing and catch more fish, you can buy a few more boats. Then you could sell your fish on the international market." "Oh, why would I do that?" "Well then you could go public" said the businessman. "Oh and why would I do that?" asked the fisherman. "Well, then you could merge with a shipping company." "And then what?" asked the local man. "Well then you could retire on a beach and fish a bit, spend time with your mother, children and family" said the businessman. In our lives, all our decisions should have the question: How will this impact on the poor? Ask this at meetings, in your homes and at work. It will ALWAYS point you in the right direction.

- 1) The poor are all around us yet they can be invisible. They aren't part of our circles, they don't always go to church and if they do, they try desperately to not look poor, to be part of our circles. We don't see them at the mall, restaurants; in fact, one needs to make an effort to find them. DO IT!

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- 2) Don't make distinctions between the poor - don't think that some deserve our love more than others. Such as the single mom that the husband abandons. No person is undeserving of our love.
- 3) If you help the poor, be prepared to be hurt and probably taken advantage sooner or later. Helping the poor has its risks. So does forgiveness and that is why Jesus said to forgive 7 times 70 times.
- 4) Helping the poor is hard. They are a mix of virtues and vices. Sometimes they are downright obnoxious. It's hard work.
- 5) Food baskets are great but really, that's the easy part. The hard part is dealing with the causes. There was once a small village where the people noticed one day that there were babies floating downstream in the river that ran beside their village. Of course, they waded in and rescued the babies, dried them off and took them into their homes. But the next day there were more babies in the river, and more the next day. The people continued rescuing the babies. Finally, one wise person in the village started walking upstream. When the rest of the villagers asked why, the person answered: "I'm going to find out why the babies are being put in the river, and do something about it!" Going upstream is difficult. It is then that we look at the political, economic, social, religious causes that lead to some being rich and some being poor. We need to put ourselves in the shoes of the poor - only then we can understand how the poor can be overwhelmed into inaction (and all the things we see as wrong - drink and eat poorly, bad shopping habits,...) There is so much for them to deal with - they are truly overwhelmed by their circumstances.
- 6) Homelessness needs to be addressed at its roots. In Calgary, there are approximately 3500 homeless people. It is about 32% increase from 2004. It's an alarming rate. We need to deal with the poverty, the mental illness, addiction (substance abuse and gambling), those seeking employment, aboriginals, and often a combination of 2 or more of the above. The range of issues indicates that it is systematic in nature. We see that federal and provincial governments both cut funding to affordable housing programs when cost of housing was increasing. Let's not be fooled by the dollar figures being thrown at us. It is miniscule since we are starting from ZERO.

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Have we become so desperate to buy just about anything that we buy bottled water, a perceived necessity that has a 3000% mark-up? Research shows that bottled water is no safer or perhaps less safe than the water in most Canadian municipalities.

On the topic of privatization of water supplies - 88% of water bottles are not recycled. Tons and tons of plastic is not composting and leaching toxins into the soil, seeping into our water table. In fact, there is even some who suggest that we shouldn't reuse the bottles as they leach toxins into our drink!

Following are five themes to help provide a foundation for ecological spirituality:

- 1) Affirmation of the sacredness of creation. Nature speaks to us of God. Nature is like the book of God for us to admire, to enjoy, creating in the image of God. It has a deep restorative power. It restores us to our wholeness, to health. It imparts peace and serenity. We need to restore a sense of reverence for the whole of creation.
- 2) Thinking of future generations - go beyond immediate aims. God has entrusted creation to us. We are not into this for ourselves, but for all. It is the "garden of the world". (John Paul II).
- 3) There is a need for meaningful work for us to be co-creator. We are not here to destroy nature but to perfect it. Pope John Paul II told us "We are created in the image of God. And our dominion over creation must also resemble God's dominion. We must cultivate and care for the Earth as God does, with love and wisdom. We are called to exercise dominion in ways that allow God's original Creative Act to be further unfolded. And because we resemble the Creator, we are also in a sense co-creators with Him."
- 4) Poverty and ecology: the uncontrolled deforestation is forcing rural people to move to urban centres to survive. They are not prepared for this migration and we see more and more poverty.
- 5) Authentic development: we must restraint from actions that are not ecological - buy local goods, reduce fossil fuel use. Read the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the topic. ([ww.cccb.ca/site/Files/pastoralenvironment.html](http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/pastoralenvironment.html))

There is only one earth, its beautiful and it deserves to be saved.