

Poverty as an Evil for the Rich

Speech at the World Bank Conference
by HAH Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

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My beloved and distinguished participants,

I would like to congratulate you on the zeal that you have shown on the issue of eliminating poverty on our planet.

You all know that wealth comes mostly from human labor, capital, and natural resources. The amount of wealth is more or less a given, what varies is its distribution. Great wealth in the hands of just a few entails poverty for the many.

Poverty for the many is worse for the rich rather than for the poor, both on metaphysical and worldly terms. The stress that arises from maintaining one's belongings and from the danger of the uprising of the poor reminds us of an ancient proverb: "to protect goods is harder than to earn them."

Practically speaking, it is very difficult with the *homo oeconomicus* attitude that is predominant in our times, to resist the sheer desire of an uncontrollable gain of wealth, which is prevalent in this time of liberalism.

However, we cannot remain mere spectators. We, the religious workers, cannot take any practical measures. What we can do though, is to sensitize and move consciences. We believe that this is also a practical measure.

We are also aware of the fact that the "audience" we are addressing is extremely scant of number, and extremely bound to the idea of the utmost gain and profit.

How can they be convinced to lessen their demands? Unfortunately, only if they are convinced that the utmost gain and profit is achieved through apparent sacrifices, namely through expenses, will change occur. This, however, at first sight seems to be purely philanthropic and without any recompenses, namely without any

benefit for the ones who are making the expense. Nonetheless, the actual result is benefits for themselves as well.

This is the concept on which all the programs of developmental aid through gratis dispensations are based upon. The final result, as the specialists confirm it, is that the amount of aid returns manifold to the ones who gave it to begin with.

There is a well-known example of a western man who visited the continent of Africa to sell shoes. He left rather dissatisfied because he saw that the people there neither wore shoes, nor did they have the money to afford them. However, another man who was more intelligent than him left the continent happy and content, because he saw an unexploited market that was able to absorb millions of pairs of shoes, as long as the people would be given the means to do so.

The aid that is given for immediate consumption is not productive or profitable, neither for the one who receives it, nor for the one who offers it. The kind of aid that is needed is such that the one who is being helped will become able to produce and to preserve oneself through one's income.

Such aid is the developmental, the educational and the moral.

The usefulness of the first two types of aid is generally accepted. As far as the third type of aid, moral, we need to make a clarification, because it has become a habit to differentiate morality from productivity. Nonetheless, criminality on the one hand, and corruption on the other, become obstacles for productivity. Criminality increases the cost of safeguarding; drives away investors; creates the cost of suppression and detention of the criminals, and damages the activity of the civilians. Corruption impairs the functionality of the mechanisms of economy and comprises a hindrance to development. Therefore, the cultivation of morality is an extremely productive work endeavor.

Nevertheless, this does not get the necessary attention, and education has, more or less, detached itself from the ideals of moral upbringing and discipline. The moral upbringing and discipline should be the first duty of education, because the economic progress of a society can only be relied on moral members of that society.

We would like to thank you for your attention and We wish you every enlightenment and assistance from God for your good work.
