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Our suffering world needs a prophetic Catholic church

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

Most Catholics — clergy and laity — were late to condemn slavery, largely absent in the civil rights movement, slow to denounce the Vietnam War, have long ignored the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in general have remained rather quiet regarding nearly every social injustice facing our world, with the exception of abortion — and even there the vast majority of Catholics are only minimally active at best.

The church has a very rich treasure of moral resources — especially the Gospel and Catholic social teaching — ready to be fully used on behalf of the unborn, war-torn, poor, hungry, homeless, uninsured, undocumented and vulnerable everywhere.

But most of us, most of the time, are too busy, too disconnected, too distracted, and too little concerned to actively utilize these treasures for the good of those who suffer.

The Catholic Church is a sleeping giant.

And if we do not awake from our social justice and peace slumber, we will miss contributing our uniquely essential part to what may be emerging as one of the most important socio-economic movements in modern history.

There is a national and global peoples' movement arising to confront power-hungry governments and greedy multinational corporations.

A highly significant part of this movement — Occupy Wall Street — was born last year in New York City's financial district. Initiated in part by the Canadian ecological group Adbusters, the Occupy movement has spread around the world.

Occupy's main concerns are economic inequality, corporate greed, environmental degradation, government corruption and its addiction to war. Interestingly, perhaps providentially, these same concerns find support in Catholic social teaching.

With these themes in mind, on May 20, 2012 Occupy Chicago together with the Coalition against NATO/G8 War and Poverty Agenda will sponsor a planned nonviolent march and rally to protest the May 20 - 21 North Atlantic Treaty Organization's summit meeting in Chicago.

The Catholic Workers have already taken their stand. See Catholic Workers invite Obama, NATO leaders to end war

These grassroots groups object to NATO's 10 year war in Afghanistan, its attack on Libya, network of foreign military bases, nuclear weapons arsenal and its astronomical military spending which is diverting much needed resources away from the poor, needy and middle-class.

Originally the G8 - the eight nations with the world's largest economies - was to hold its summit in Chicago at the same time as the NATO summit. But it was recently moved to secluded Camp David, Maryland to avoid facing large public protests concerning the G8's disproportionate wealth in the face of dozens of impoverished nations, and its support of corporate power and greed.

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The grassroots protesters are demanding that governments and corporations put people's basic needs above shareholder profits and peacemaking over war making.

These demands are supported by the social doctrine of the church.

In 1984, in Toronto, Canada, Blessed Pope John Paul II proclaimed: "The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; the production to meet social needs over production for military purposes."

Furthermore, in his encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life") Blessed John Paul challenges us to wake up and become the prophetic church our suffering world needs: "What is urgently called for is a general mobilization of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together, we must build a new culture of life. ??

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist.]

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