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Culture Shift

A major mindset change is needed to transform the indifference engendered by the market into an attitude of stewardship.

By Luigino Bruni

The fact that a large swath of humanity suffers from hunger is the result of an unhealthy relationship between the rich and the poor. And much too little is said about this.

There is a clear correlation between world hunger and hyperconsumerism. The present situation is characterized by an affluent minority and an indigent majority (lacking not only food, but rights and freedom as well). If we want this to change, we might try turning our attention away from economics and politics (even though both remain essential) and look to the cultural side of things.

Focolare founder Chiara Lubich was prophetic years ago when she launched the Economy of Communion in Freedom (EoC). She declared that a new economy is impossible without a new mentality, a new culture. It's not by chance that profits from EoC businesses are used in part for business development, in part for the needy and in part for culture training for both those who share the profits and those who receive financial help.

As Giulio Meazzini reports in this issue, one necessary prerequisite for solving the food crisis is to change lifestyle and to figure out how we can become more frugal, share more and consume less. At the same time, we need to think about how we can reward businesses that practice fair trade, maintain ethical finances and refuse to use products that are harmful to the environment. Misery, hunger and the environmental crisis are so bound together that it is impossible to solve them separately.

The book of Genesis speaks to this relationship in a very strong way. When God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, he entrusted its care to them. Then Cain killed his brother Abel, and when God asked him, "Where is your brother?" he answered, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Those who cannot care for their own neighbors cannot care for the earth, either.

A major mindset change is needed to transform the indifference that the market engenders into an attitude of stewardship. Only then can we begin to work toward solving the serious environmental, ethical and social crises of our times.

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