

Drug Addiction, Student Protests, Poverty in America
Interviews
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This article contains excerpts from a panel discussion at the Religious Conference sponsored in March 1969 at St. Andrew's Camp by the Upper New York State District, Junior FROC. Members of the panel are: Father Thaddeus Wojcik, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church, Rochester, and retreat master; Peter Danilchick, church school teacher at St. Andrew's School, Syracuse; Daria Warnecke, freshman student at Barnard College; and Carol Marintez, conference chairman and sophomore student at Pebble Hill, Syracuse, New York.

Fr. Thaddeus Wojcik: Drug addiction, student protests and poverty in America – These are three broad areas and it could take us days and days to discuss each one. But I think that in a way these topics are related to each other. They are connected in a positive way and they are connected in a negative way. The negative way is the way we might try to talk about first. In this negative way, all of them tend to exclude the Christian ideal, the integration of the individual person and his relation to God. Certainly drug addiction makes a person a slave to himself. Certainly it doesn't bring him to any higher quality except the satisfaction of the moment, or the few moments to come.

Student protests in America – This is very fluent situation and it could change from day to day, and it does. But the very idea behind student protests as it is today is one of destruction without any positive construction. The proposals that are offered, in my opinion, are not positively expressed. There is no room for improvement unless society and all of its institutions are first thrown down and shattered. Again, we must remember this idea that Christ is absent in this type of thing, and how can we as students, as individuals, put Him back in.

Poverty in America – I think this is an eternal problem and has been with us for centuries, and will probably be with us in the future for many years and probably forever – but who can say. We just can't say what will happen, but we can ask – how do we, how can we help? How can we put Christi into the idea of where poverty is in America? How can we make this a type of Christian endeavor, an Orthodox undertaking?

Peter Danilchick: I think that the main problem is that we really don't know what is the meaning of Christ, of the Church in our daily lives –you know, as it applies to all of these basic problems. We always look at these problems from the standpoint of the *New York Times*, or the *Syracuse Herald Journal* or your local newspaper. And we look at it in a very practical way, separated from all thoughts of our life in Christ because our country supposedly has a separation of church and state. It almost seems blasphemous against this idea of democracy, to bring Christ into these issues. We tend to always look at issues from the standpoint of President Nixon or Johnson, and say ... well, that is the ideal of the American Nation – What is good for America ...

Obviously, it's wrong for America to be a nation of hot heads, or rioters, or a nation of poor people because we want to be the greatest country on earth. And we tend to look at Vietnam, or any sort of disruption, or riot, or something that is bad as some sort of blot on our nation – that we are losing our national pride, and we stand waving the flag.

We seek to refer all things, all questions, toward making America a bigger and better nation. But all this “stuff” about bigger and better really refers to money or to a standard of living. When John Kennedy was alive, his main purpose was to bring about a good life for every American. This good life was usually defined – as two chickens in every pot; two cars in every double garage; or a big home in suburbia; a good education for everyone. But, to what point is this education? What is the meaning of this whole education? And if you look deeply into this, there is no real answer from the standpoint of operating your own individual lives so as to be good Americans. It just doesn't work! There is no fundamental basis there. We are building our basis on sand and that's why America is in such great trouble today.

And so the whole thing hinges upon – and this is what I have been trying to say – there is a real need for us to think about what Christ and His Gospel means in our daily lives in America. America is at a very crucial point in its history – and so is our Church, really, because all of you young people and all of us are in this thing together – and we're thoroughly Americans. We're not “Old Country” people, in our own ghetto – lower East side, or in Pennsylvania coal mines.... We have to come out and we have to recognize ourselves as Americans. And the duty of our Church, the Orthodox Church, as I see it, is really to look at America through the eyes of Christ and ask: “What are we going to do? What would Christ do if He were here on earth? In accordance with all of these problems, this is the very basic step that we have to first take.

We should not talk about drug addiction, or problems of sex, or problems of poverty, or morality, or protests without looking at Christ and what He would do today. It's a very difficult problem for us today because we can go astray. We can look at the Gospel and pick out a couple of isolated points, like the problem of poverty. Christ said, for example, “if you want to be saved, then you have to give up that you have to the poor and follow me.” Now, it's very tempting to say that obviously this is ridiculous in our society – so just take that and chuck it out the window! Obviously, this is a very narrow minded point of view. What we have to do, really, is ask – “What did Christ mean when He said that we have to follow Him?” What did Christ mean – “Except that a man be born of water and the spirit, he shall not attain to the Kingdom of God.” What does He mean in all of these things? And what does He mean in particular with respect to all of these things that we as youth are embroiled in.

Daria Warnecke: We sort of live in America with the idea that our lives are just for ourselves, and that we have to do things that are going to glorify us, etc. We forget that in our life as Christians, we are responsible to Christ. Therefore, we have to more or less direct our lives so that men will see us not just for ourselves, but that we are Orthodox. We have to show others our good works for the sake of Christ, and not just for humanistic reasons – it's nice to be good to someone because that's the human thing to do!

We want to be good and I think that the fact that Christ came down on earth and became a man makes us responsible to see Christ in each man...

Especially with drug addiction, you have to remember that you are created in the image of Christ. When the priest censes in the Church, he turns to the people also and censes them. He censes you – seeing you created potentially in the image of Christ. And your whole purpose in life must be directed toward this satisfaction and this responsibility that you have – not just as the creation of Christ, but as that person, like every other person, that Christ died for on the Cross. And it is because of this great sacrifice rather than any humanistic idea of love – we're all created and it's wonderful...be good to everybody, but this whole meaning of Christ – that we should try to direct our lives toward a Christian and basically Orthodox type of living in any type of problem.

Carol Marintez: Going along with what Daria said about the individual responsibility, we as Orthodox, as individuals can do much for our country and our Church and everything...All this drug addiction and student protests just to get our parents angry or something...or just to go off somewhere and take pot. It's sort of ridiculous because there is so much that we can do. All this student protest when there is no positive trend – it's all negative and just destructive. We're not replacing it with anything that's worthwhile.

And so, we as individuals can do much in a way of helping people and also changing our church. Many of us are disillusioned with it. Some of us don't know much about it...some of us do but we reject it. It's ridiculous for us to reject the church when we haven't really delved into it very much. That's the purpose of this whole conference...to know our faith better and to really become interested in it, instead of rejecting it before we have sort of tasted of the Eucharist. I think the main focus should be that we're all individuals and we just can't blame the other generation and say – “we're in Vietnam because our parents go us there!”...We should take on our individual responsibilities as a generation ourselves and as individual Orthodox Christians.

Fr. Thaddeus Wojcik: To look at the very root of the whole problem – can we do anything about the whole problem of student protests, drug addiction or poverty? Can we ourselves do anything? I don't think we can...Just going out and saying...Well, I'm going to do something about this – because we don't have the basic frame of reference, first of all to begin with, should be Christian. And anyone who tends to be a Christian, anyone who is baptized into Christ, has to look for his basis, his roots, his seal, in Christ – basically and essentially to know God. It is impossible to solve the idea of any drug addiction without looking at what it is against – something that is basic and essential in our lives, it's against what God is in us, it's against what we are meant to be for God.

What goes does student protests do...where is it leading ...where should it come from...If there is a protest, if there is a legitimate protest, where should this complaint come from?