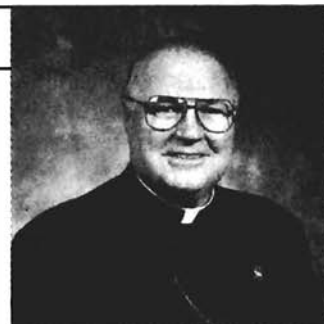

Interview: Most Reverend Daniel Patrick Reilly



'There is a call for us to help the least in our midst'

Bishop Daniel P. Reilly was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on May 12, 1928, and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest on May 30, 1953. He attended two sessions of the Second Vatican Council, 1962 and 1964. He was named a Domestic Prelate with a title of Right Reverend Monsignor by Pope Paul VI, on Jan. 29, 1965. On June 17, 1972, Pope Paul VI named him bishop of the Diocese of Norwich, Connecticut. He served as chairman of the Board of Catholic Relief Services, 1978-86. He was a member of the Drafting Committee National Conference of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference (NCCB/USCC) Pastoral Letter on "The Challenge of Peace," 1981-83; member of the NCCB Pro-Life Committee, 1989-; and chairman of the USCC International Policy Committee, 1993-96. For the Holy See, Bishop Reilly served on the Pontifical Council, Cor Unum, 1984-89. He was named to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, October 1994. He was named bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts, Oct. 27, 1994.

The following interview was conducted by William F. Wertz, Jr., for Fidelio magazine, on Nov. 12-13, 1996 at the annual meeting of the NCCB/USCC in Washington, D.C. Bishop Reilly granted his permission for the interview to be published in EIR.

Fidelio: Bishop Reilly, I would like to ask you a number of questions, beginning with the very serious crisis in Africa and then, if possible, on economic policy overall. First, I know the Bishops Conference has issued a statement requesting that an international force be assembled and deployed to create safe corridors in Africa to deliver aid.

Bishop Reilly: That's right.

Fidelio: I understand from the press today, there are reports that cholera is breaking out in Zaire.

Bishop Reilly: That's the problem. As long as this goes on, and the conditions that are there, which are lamentable, you're going to be exposing yourself to all kinds of additional difficulties. That's why we think there is some urgency to this.

Fidelio: This situation in Central Africa also raises broader policy issues, in terms of how to actually prevent such situa-

tions in the future, that is, even beyond the emergency situation. I know that Pope John Paul II has called repeatedly for a policy of debt forgiveness and economic development, and I wonder if you have any comments on that subject.

Bishop Reilly: What the Holy Father is doing is exactly where we should be and what the Church in the United States is doing, too, and that is, calling upon those in the developed world to be mindful of the developing world. It's a legacy of all kinds of problems that have been left there from colonial days. We know, too, that there are tribal problems that are there, and we call upon the local leaders to have some sense of responsibility in bringing peace and doing away with the violence in the area.

But the developed world has its responsibilities, too. But what I sense in our own country is this desire to turn away from that. We've got our own problems at home, so we've got to figure them out first, especially if they're not threatening to our own stability and our own interests in other parts of the world.

So, yes, the Church has this worldwide voice and will continue to use it to call all peoples together who can do something about this. And, since we are bishops here in the United States, we call upon our own country to be a beacon of respect for human dignity and human rights, wherever they're being violated in the world.

Fidelio: Yesterday, Bishop Ricard invoked the exemplary policy of the Marshall Plan after World War II. Of course, as you're pointing out now, and as has been emphasized in this conference, there has been a reduction in foreign aid. What do you think can be done, and what is the Catholic Conference doing, to attempt to reverse this attitude and begin to get a climate in which the United States can play the kind of role it did with the Marshall Plan, not just in Africa, but in many locations which are in such need?

Bishop Reilly: What we can do is to continue to point out the moral dimension of this problem. That it is not something that's a luxury for us, to care for those most in need. That it's not an extravagance on the part of the United States. There is a call for us to help the least in our midst, and that's where we're coming from with our own theology.

I was in France after the Second World War, when the Marshall Plan was functioning. That was a marvelous plan; some self-interest in there: We had to develop nations' economies, too, that we could deal with to boost our own economy. That kind of attraction probably wouldn't be with some of these other countries that we're calling on our nation now to be concerned about.

But, we are seeing that, if we are to be the nation that we are founded to be, that we believe that all the people are created with certain rights, then these rights are not just in respect to us but all around the world. And we're called, in the position we're in, as the most powerful and richest nation in the world, to take some leadership in that regard. Not to do it all by ourselves, but to give some leadership. The United Nations has a role to play. There are certainly other developed areas of the world, in Europe and in the Pacific area, who have responsibilities here, too. But we should take a leading role.

Fidelio: One of the major initiatives at this conference seems to be the issuance of a *Catholic Framework for Economic Life*, based upon the social encyclicals and the previous statement by the Conference on *Economic Justice for All*. The statement indicated this was an effort to shape the national debate. How do you envision that proceeding, in terms of an education drive?

Bishop Reilly: Whenever you talk about the economy, you're talking about something that everybody is very, very interested in, and everybody's concerned as to how it's going to strike them. When the Pastoral Letter came out from the bishops on the economy, it was met with some resistance. It was very, very well distributed, I think, in many, many copies. People wanted to know what was in there. But it meets with resistance because it talks about a person's individual pocket-book. But, our concern is that the doctrine is there, the teaching is there, the way to move ahead is there, but unless people get to know what it is, unless people are educated as to what the Church is really saying, if it were saying on a very surface level, well, they'll take care of themselves, we'll take care of ourselves. So that's why, with this, on this tenth anniversary, we said, let us try to develop some sort of a mechanism that will bring the Church's teaching and the basic principles that we use in assessing the good of an economy, and what is wrong with an economy, as it seeks to take care of its people. And this is what we've done with this. We hope that that will be widely distributed, so that in our churches, in our vestibules, in our schools, so people will get a sort of Ten Commandments of a just economy. And maybe that will be helpful. We have to use the means that we have; and, the concern is that people were reading the Pastoral Letter and, now, maybe we can give them a little precis of that. That's what we're hoping will happen.

Fidelio: I noted in the letter of the Holy Father, "Towards

the Third Millennium," that he said that it was unfortunate that so many people were unfamiliar with the social encyclicals of the Church, and it would seem to me that this initiative would spark such an interest. I believe it's safe to say, that the social encyclicals were probably more closely followed earlier in this century.

Bishop Reilly: That's right, in the '30s, and especially in the organization of labor, the unjust conditions in the workplace, yes.

Fidelio: For instance, I recently read Monsignor Higgins's book, *Organized Labor and the Church*, and I was amazed to see the extent to which there were labor schools throughout the country. For instance, he describes, in the Chicago Archdiocese, periods in which they would bring in hundreds of priests for two-week classes on the social encyclicals. Is this an effort, then, to really revive that kind of interest in the social encyclicals?

Bishop Reilly: Even on a wider scope, because we're not just talking about the rights to organize and that sort of thing, but we're getting down to the basic thing that we have a right to life, and to be able to sustain our lives in a dignified way.

That was a wonderful period in the Church. I grew up in that period, when I heard about labor schools, and so forth. I remember reading the *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* when I was just in high school, and writing papers on it. So, they were being used very, very widely.

But, we're a different country now. We were in a depression in those days. And now we're a wealthy nation, and that leads to thinking kind of selfishly, and that spirit of caring, one for the other, that got us through the Depression, is not there. So there's a whole mindset that needs to be taken along with this.

Fidelio: Recently, Mr. Camdessus of the International Monetary Fund has warned of the possibility of a very significant banking crisis, despite the appearance in certain sectors, like the stock market, of prosperity. Of course, in the Third World, the underdeveloped world, there are already conditions of massive poverty. So, I think that we are potentially in a situation of a significant financial crisis now, despite appearances otherwise.

Bishop Reilly: The Holy Father is always reminding us at our conferences of the same thing, of the need to help the poor, poor nations, especially with the lifting of the international debt that they have. We're hoping something really great would happen along this line, as we go into the new millennium and into the new century. There's a lot of resistance to that, and Mr. Camdessus pointed that out to us. But it's staggering to think that some of these poor countries are paying more toward the international debt than they are on education and health for their people. Something's wrong with that sort of thing.

So it's not a question of just giving people handouts. You also have to give them a chance to breathe the air and to get one foot under them at least. There should be incentives for the emerging economies, something to give them a chance to look to the future.

Fidelio: Unfortunately, Mr. Camdessus's apparent solution is not so much debt relief, as to tighten the screws.

Bishop Reilly: I know. And I talk to him, so I know. That was kind of discouraging to hear that. But I think that's the kind of resistance he runs into when he goes around talking to the wealthy nations of the world. They don't see it the same way we do. They're coming from a different framework.

But along the line of what the United States should do, I read these figures the other day. Just 1% of the federal budget goes to foreign aid, less than half of which goes to humanitarian aid programs that help poor people around the world. The United States is last on the list of industrialized countries in the percentage of its annual commitment to development assistance. Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, even Australia and Portugal, contribute more assistance to the poorest countries than the United States.

The expected peace dividend following the breakdown of the Cold War never materialized. In the last two years, U.S. spending on development assistance programs declined by 30%, with some programs as great as 50%. So, that's a real concern that we have, especially since we run a magnificent program through Catholic Relief Services. In some 60 countries around the world, we serve the really needy, especially with food and so forth. It's going to be very, very hard for us to get some sort of change of mind and some kind of change of policy.

Fidelio: I just received a report that Pope John Paul II, speaking before the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), called on people to come up with plans for an increase in production of food for the poor and starving of the world, and stressed that human genius is capable of developing such programs, and said that the idea that population growth necessarily leads to poverty is a totally false, Malthusian idea.

Bishop Reilly: It's like fighting the world on that one. The Catholic Church stands up very bravely and boldly along that line. What you're hearing now, is that we're reaching the limit of what we can produce; and, that we've tried all these chemicals and there's no hope that we can do more than we're doing. The fact of the matter is that we can do much better in distributing the food that's there, which is more than enough to take care of all the people on the Earth. No, birth control and population control seems to be the easier solution, and you see that going on in the developing nations at an alarming rate. To us, in the Catholic Church, it's certainly an assault on human dignity. And we speak up on that in all the great meetings of the world. Thank God we're able to be there.

Fidelio: The pope also made very strong statements regarding the development of plans for debt forgiveness at the FAO conference.

Bishop Reilly: We must undertake this task and implement it. Our hope is to see relief from the debt, which worsens all these terrible situations like the one we are facing in Africa now.

Fidelio: Is this the kind of issue the executive committee of the Bishops Conference will discuss with President Clinton in its upcoming meeting?

Bishop Reilly: I'm sure it will be part of the discussion, because it is very high on the agenda of the Holy Father. I'm sure it will be discussed with political leaders internationally. As I told you, I already have discussed it with Camdessus. Actually, I discussed it in two meetings with him rather recently, one with our Committee [on International Policy], the other with other representatives. Mr. Camdessus says he agrees with our concerns and then demonstrates to us how very difficult his situation is.

Fidelio: But, as I said, Camdessus says his response to the kind of total banking collapse he acknowledges to be imminent, is to tighten the screws.

Bishop Reilly: Of course they can't tighten the screws. The situation is already tragic in these countries—for their people. This is why the Holy Father has emphasized the Jubilee legislation of debt forgiveness.

Fidelio: We have taken note of the strong emphasis on the social encyclicals in this meeting of the Bishops Conference.

Bishop Reilly: Well, that is the wonderful thing about the Church—we stay where we are. Political fashions and cultural fads may come and go, but our principles are always the same and the world hears these things whether they are popular or not. And we represent our principles which are unchanging. Cardinal Bernardin, in his own death, was a witness in this sense. The fashion has been fear of death, denial of immortality.

Fidelio: Certainly Cardinal Bernardin's death-bed letter to the U.S. Supreme Court against the so-called "right" to assisted suicide, and against the idea that a less than "perfect" life is not worth living, was a remarkable witness.

Bishop Reilly: His death and the way he died will do more than anything else anyone could say to change the view of "live life for today," "death is our enemy," to our view that death is our friend, because our contributions are eternal.

Fidelio: Thank you very much.

Bishop Reilly: Keep up the good work. Be a witness—we need it.