

# Our Rich Church

by Carl E. Olson

A few years ago I attended a diocesan conference focused on the theme of stewardship. One middle-aged man, a lifelong Catholic, said he was deeply troubled by the fact that the Church has great buildings and facilities but doesn't bother to do much for the poor and the needy. Taken aback, I asked him if he had forgotten about the thousands of hospitals, shelters, orphanages and soup kitchens founded and operated by the Church. He reluctantly admitted that perhaps he hadn't given enough thought to those institutions.

That conversation came to mind when I recently came across an article titled "Buddha Never Bowed Before a Statue and Jesus Never Kneeled Before a Cross." It was written by New Age medium Barbara Rose, whose company slogan is "Uplifting Humanity One Book at a Time." Her message? Humanity needs to "reorganize" religion and realize that she has the answers that will end suffering, war, strife and organized religion. "So many religious organizations," she writes, "have great plans to build large structures for worshipping before statues, and yet are they really doing anything to help the little ones in dire need? This is where the 'organized' part of religion needs to be reorganized. There must be a budget to help the children that are sick, hungry and homeless, before the money is spent on more statues, decorations and items to create a structure of worship."

Especially odd is Rose's distinctly Buddhist claim that people must learn that suffering is in the mind" — juxtaposed with her complaint that organized religion cares not a whit about the physical needs of the poor. The truth, as always, is revealing. According to the Catholic Health Care Association, there are 60 non-profit Catholic health systems in the United States today, which is exactly 60 more than Barbara Rose operates. The CHCA website states: "The Catholic health ministry includes 19,484 parishes; 2,988 missions; 1,069 pastoral centers; 617 hospitals; 3,044 social service centers; 1,117 day and extended day services; and more than 1,500 continuing care ministry facilities." Meanwhile, the Catholic Charities web site informs readers the "137 main Catholic Charities agencies and their 1,341 branches and affiliates provided a myriad of vital, community-based services 10,507,116 times in 2003."

So it's obvious that Rose, and those who mouth similar criticisms, don't know the facts. Or maybe she doesn't care about facts. In any case, judging her according to her own criteria, she is a flagrant hypocrite. She demands that a budget to help needy children be created before money is spent on religious practice and worship — and then peddles a flood of pricey books and resources, including private consultations costing \$550 each. The reason is simple. Barbara Rose, like so many others, is a counterfeit. And counterfeits operate by demeaning what is authentic while insisting that they are the real deal. They attack "organized religion" and offer shabby, cheap substitutes. They mock the charity of serious Christians while eschewing any substantive, lasting work of charity. Unfortunately, the Barbara Roses of the world are legion in our day. Don't let them take you in, much less take your money on behalf of the "neglected" poor.

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