

UTOPIA REGAINED?

Then there was the man arrested for stealing the collection for the needy at a Billy Graham rally. Excuse? "Just trying to cut out the middle man!"

"What has happened is what has always happened when a noble idea has to be transmitted to the masses: a professional group inserts itself between the idea and its intended beneficiaries."

So, according to William Broderick ("teacher and lecturer for 40 years" . . . "witty, perceptive and provocative" social commentator) an army of professional welfare and social workers have created job opportunities out of the funds intended for the poor.

It could be similarly argued that doctors have inserted themselves between the idea of health and its intended beneficiaries, the patients. (Yes, it could be argued. I am told the shortest book in the world is entitled "The Humanity and Altruism of the A.M.A.!!") It could be argued that barristers and solicitors have inserted themselves between the idea of justice and its intended beneficiaries, the plaintiffs. (At \$300 or more a day for barristers fees, it **could** be argued.) It could be argued that artists have inserted themselves between the idea of beauty, and its intended beneficiaries, the eyes of the beholders. (How much did they pay for 'Blue Poles'?)

It could be argued that William Broderick has inserted himself between the idea, social comment, and its intended beneficiaries, the readers of "The Age". (I never received a cent when **my** work and I got written up in that newspaper. Mind you, it was one of the "Insight" exposes, complete with editorial and comments from the Leader of the Opposition.)

The helping professions (even if some do call them the prying professions) have developed out of the

Graeme Gregory replies to William Broderick

The Rev Graeme Gregory has been a parson and social worker for the past twenty years. His dreary, dull and irrelevant social comments have been rejected for the past two editions of Australian Child and Family Welfare.

EDITOR'S NOTE

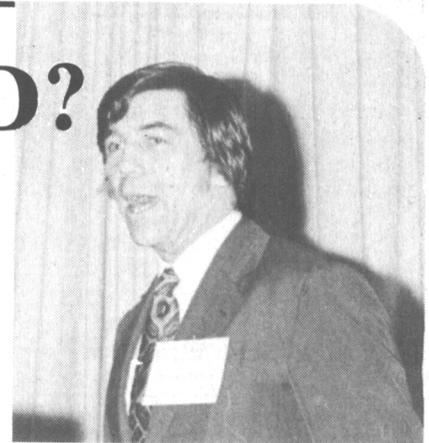
realization that people's needs are not always met in the simplistic fashion implied by Mr Broderick. True, the basic deprivation experienced by the poor is that of money. Income redistribution continues to be an urgent priority, but "Mr Lynch's direct handout of child endowment to mothers" will hardly make inroads on this problem. It could, in fact, further impoverish the separated father who no longer receives tax deductions for his children living with his estranged wife, and is probably supporting two sets of children.

Mr Broderick fails to distinguish between (1) inevitable administrative processes (the "bureaucracy"), (2) officialdom that can perform the function of screening clients **out** of aid and support programmes instead of in, and (3) those helping professionals who provide preventative and remedial services to meet a host of needs (or potential needs) associated with poverty.

Examples of (1), (2) and (3):

(1) Even the computer with which you correspond in the Department of Social Security, and which writes all those odd replies, costs money to process pension, benefit or allowance payments.

(2) An applicant for housing commission accommodation was told



that there was a unit immediately available, but unfortunately it would take two months to process the application.

(3) The professional agency that, having provided day care and other supportative services for a lone parent family, paid removal expenses for the family to move from a high rise flat to a house in the country. "You've no idea what it is like to step out of your back door onto earth," she wrote.

If the new army of social workers is creating "job opportunities out of the funds intended for the poor", and nothing else, then the most that can be said is that they are preventing poverty — their own. And that may be some contribution to the economy. If they have "become the only ones who 'understand' the poor, and the only ones with the 'training' needed to cope with them," then the most that can be said is that they have followed the lead of the teachers in education.

Advocates?

If, however, they have become advocates for the poor: if, more importantly, they have provided encouragement and resources for the poor to become advocates for themselves: then there is always the possibility that they are less part of the Lost Utopia, and perhaps contributing to Utopia Regained.

But then, I am a social worker.