

# Comedian: End world hunger? Sell the Vatican

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By NICOLE WINFIELD (AP) – Oct 15, 2009

ROME — Comedian Sarah Silverman has a new proposal for ending world hunger: Sell the Vatican.

In a new profanity-laced monologue making the rounds on YouTube in time for U.N. World Food Day on Friday, Silverman suggests that it's time for the pope to "move out of your house that is a city" and use the proceeds to feed the world's poor.

"On an ego level alone you will be the biggest hero in the history of ever!" she exclaimed. "Sell the Vatican. Feed the world."

The Vatican clearly has no plans to follow suit. On Thursday, a spokesman declined to comment. But the Catholic League, the U.S. Catholic civil rights organization, denounced Silverman and cable broadcaster HBO for her "obscene" and "filthy diatribe."

In a statement, it noted that such an attack would never have been leveled against, say, the chief rabbi of Jerusalem or the state of Israel and added that the "Catholic Church operates more hospitals and feeds more of the poor than any private institution in the world."

Yet the Rev. James Martin, culture editor of the Jesuit magazine America, says Silverman may be onto something. In an online article, Martin noted that Jesus himself told his followers to sell what they had and give it to the poor.

"Of course Pope Benedict XVI could not 'sell' any of the treasures of the Vatican, the same way that your local archbishop couldn't sell off the cathedral at a whim; they are not his, they are the church's," Martin wrote. "And the church is not simply the hierarchy but the entire people of God."

But he added: "Still, perhaps Ms. Silverman, in her postmodern, potty-mouthed way is on to something. Like Jesus was. Sell the Vatican? Well, maybe not everything but perhaps a statue or two?"

For the record, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, which just released its annual report on the state of world hunger, says global food output will have to increase by 70 percent to feed a projected population of 9.1 billion in 2050.

To achieve that, poor countries will need \$44 billion in annual agricultural aid, compared with the current \$7.9 billion, the Rome-based FAO said. Overall, an annual net investment in agriculture of \$83 billion is needed to feed the world.

Even if the pope were to sell the Vatican, it wouldn't be enough.

In 2004, the Vatican disclosed that the Holy See's real estate was worth 700 million euros, or about \$908 million at the time. That doesn't include St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, which the Vatican termed priceless and valued at a symbolic 1 euro.

While the Vatican's artistic holdings are obviously worth millions, the institution itself doesn't bring in a lot of cash. In 2008, it ran a euro0.9 million (\$1.28 million) deficit, the second year of losses. Revenues were euro253.9 million and expenses euro254.8 million.

The Vatican began publishing its finances in 1981, when Pope John Paul II ordered financial disclosure to debunk the idea that the Vatican was rich.

Silverman, who is no stranger to religiously and racially charged slurs, gained international attention with her 2008 "The Great Schlep" campaign in which she exhorted Jews to go to Florida to convince their grandparents to vote for Barack Obama.

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