

Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics Volume 21, Number 1 Aggregate Issue 89 Spring 2013

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23

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Put Your Sword Away...

By Patrick Anderson

But Jesus told him, "Put your sword away! Anyone who lives by the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Jesus said this to Peter just after Peter had drawn his sword and struck Malcus severing the high priest's servant's ear. Jesus had just been identified by Judas to a mob bent on snatching him away for harsh treatment. Peter had the best weapon available to him, and he was intent on protecting himself and others, especially Jesus, from criminal assault and the heavy hand of tyranny.

Every gun enthusiast I know can relate to Peter's action. I never envisioned Peter to be such an accomplished swordsman that he could have taken a foil and expertly lopped off an ear. Rather, I imagine Peter taking a wild swing with a heavy sword, and I believe if Malcus had not ducked he would have lost his head. In such a hostile setting he was lucky to lose just an ear, and Peter was lucky to have survived the response of the crowd intent on arresting Jesus. The crowd was well-armed for their day, with swords and clubs, the Scripture says, and Peter's resisting of arrest was a potentially deadly mistake.

Imagine that scene had it occurred in a town on the Western American frontier in the 1880s when every man was armed with a Colt revolver, the six-shooter as common as boots and hats. That was the gun that Texas historian, T.R. Fehrenbach, describes in his book, *Comanches: The Destruction of a People*, as the weapon Texas Rangers adopted as soon as it was invented and marketed by the gun manufacturers of the 19th century. Comanches prior to that time had held a superior weapon, the bow and arrow. The Comanches would wait until a Ranger fired his weapon and was reloading the single-shot pistol

and then charge in on horseback and shoot several arrows from under the neck of a galloping pony with speed and accuracy. With the six-shot revolver, the Rangers acquired such superior firepower that it was only a matter of time until the Comanches were virtually destroyed.

So, picture the arrest of Jesus in a setting where all the men were armed with a Colt. When Peter drew his, would he have survived? How many people could have been shot and killed before Jesus had the chance to say, "Put your gun away!" No wonder that the great lawman of the 19th century, Wyatt Earp, required

A re-written gun amendment suitable for the modern era would replace an antique law with one which adapts to modern technological and cultural developments.

every man to check his guns when he entered town. Earp knew how dangerous a well-armed citizenry was, and how volatile the human psyche, how prone to violence. Wyatt Earp would use his own gun to crack a man's skull to subdue him, and permitted no more violence than could be carried out with fists and boots. No guns allowed. Peter may have survived in Earp's town when the arresting mob came for Jesus. But what of the towns where gun control was not in effect?

Now, imagine the arrest of Jesus taking place in American society today, in a setting where people have

ready access to powerful guns with rapid fire capabilities, a huge number of bullets ready for use, so powerful that bodies explode upon impact. Instead of swords and clubs, or even six-shooters, an angry mob would be armed to the hilt just like pirates in Somalia or warlords in the Congo or drug gangs on the Texas-Mexico border, and Peter's unwise action to protect Jesus could result in a shoot-out of epic proportions.

Hear Jesus say, "*Put your AKs and Bushmasters and Glocks away....*"

I raise this scenario, readers of *Christian Ethics Today*, for us to consider the extent to which the gun control debate today is relevant for us. I have been around guns -- guns held by both good guys and bad guys -- all my life. I like the feel and smell of a gun. I have a healthy respect for what guns can do. But today, guns scare me more than they used to. Too many unstable people have them. Too much careless talk and casual gun-toting suggests a frightening specter of armed school teachers, college students packing heat in class, anybody with a pulse and cash able to purchase an armory, more guns rather than fewer in our culture. It is like Wyatt Earp, instead of requiring people to check their weapons as they came to town, handing out guns to all comers. The carnage resulting from modern firearms and other weaponry is well known to all of us.

I cannot picture Jesus carrying a gun -- even, or most especially, for self-protection. I am not sure how Peter managed to strap on a sword on the night of the arrest or whether any other followers of Jesus were similarly armed. But I do hear the words of Jesus when the weaponry was drawn. And I think those words can also help us sort out and give context to the "Right to Bear Arms" in 21st Century America.

I, for one, have put my guns away for good. But there is more we could do.

Professor Zachary Elkins of the University of Texas recommended recently in the *New York Times* a constitutional amendment to settle the debate in America regarding what the Constitution says about guns. He correctly predicts a basic consensus exists among Americans about guns in society. The argument for more robust gun control revolves around the first clause of the Second Amendment, which says “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state”, a clause which has been irrelevant for most of our history. When those words were penned American had no standing army, no national guard, no airmen or marines or sailors.

The argument for absolute freedom to bear arms revolves around the second clause of the Second Amendment, “the right of the people

to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed”. The gun-rights people rally behind interpretations of that amendment beginning in the 1980s which expand gun rights for self-defense, an individual right.

Professor Elkins suggests the disagreement is between those who do not understand “well-regulated militia” and those who do not understand “shall not be infringed.” A large majority of Americans recognize the need for a modern understanding of guns. A re-written gun amendment suitable for the modern era would replace an antique law with one which adapts to modern technological and cultural developments. The professor is right. As he says, Americans “who propose responsible limits, like background checks, would welcome constitutional support for common-sense safeguards. Those who worry about the slippery slope of encroachments on gun rights would find comfort in an explicit reassertion and reinforce-

ment of the general right to bear arms.”

Perhaps here is a place Christian ethicists can help connect the dots between “put your sword away” and “the right to bear arms.” Rather than waiting for a divided Supreme Court to settle the issue, a new gun-rights amendment could articulate the basic consensus which seems to exist between gun-rights advocates and gun-control advocates.

In the 1980s a student at the University of Texas wrote a term paper, received a C, and then embarked on a campaign that resulted 10 years later in the ratification of the 27th Amendment. If that can happen on an issue like compensation of Senators and Representatives, why can we not successfully embark on a campaign to replace the archaic 2nd Amendment with a new and relevant constitutional provision, and in the process perhaps avert more deadly violence? ■

Bringing Transcendence In Play

*If I can lift up hope to a soul despairing,
Or strive for justice with the will to stay,
If I befriend another in burden-bearing,
Forgive a wrong through Christlike caring,
Oppose any of myriad evils with daring,
Or show a wanderer lost the way,
Or inspire fresh courage that may
defeating fears allay,
I shall share in bringing transcendence in play.*

—James A. Langley

Why the Red Letter Option?

By Tony Campolo

During the first half of the 20th century, those who still embraced traditional Christian doctrines often referred to themselves as *fundamentalists*. These were Christians who affirmed the doctrines of the Apostles' Creed; believed that the authors of Scripture were inspired and guided by God to write infallible directives for faith and practice; and were convinced that "salvation" came as a result of having a mystical transforming, relationship with the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. Those who identified with this movement did so in reaction to "modernist" doctrines coming out of Germany, which doctrines questioned the inspiration of Scripture, raised doubts about basic Christian beliefs such as the virgin birth of Christ and the claim that He performed miracles, and even raised questions about whether or not He was resurrected from the dead on Easter morning.

The label "fundamentalist" served them well until about 1928 or 1929. From that time on, and especially following the famous Scopes trial in which William Jennings Bryan argued against Darwin's theory of evolution, fundamentalists began to be viewed by many as being anti-intellectual, unscientific, and extremely naïve. Added to that image of anti-intellectualism was a creeping tendency among fundamentalists towards a "holier-than-thou" judgmentalism that not only condemned those who deviated from orthodox Christian doctrine, but any who did not adhere to their prescribed legalistic lifestyles marked by opposition to such things as dancing, smoking, and the use of alcoholic beverages.

By the time the 1950s rolled around, the label, "fundamentalist" carried as much negative baggage leaving many wondering whether it

could be used any longer in any kind of a positive manner. About that time, Billy Graham and Carl Henry, who was then the editor of the magazine *Christianity Today*, began using a new label: "evangelical". Once again, orthodox Christians had a word that served them well, and it did so right up until the middle of the 1990s. Unfortunately, by then the word evangelical, like the label fundamentalist, also had accumulated negative connotations. The name had become politicized. Evangelicals had come to be viewed as married to the Religious Right and committed to being part of the most conservative wing of the Republican Party. Not surprisingly, evangelicals gave the Republican candidate, Mitt Romney, 79 percent of their votes in the 2012 election and were considered propagators of the kind of partisan politics that was polarizing America.

These days, when someone is designated as an Evangelical, red flags go up. He or she is viewed very typically as being a reactionary, a Christian who is anti-feminist; anti-gay; anti-environmentalist; pro-war; anti-immigrant; and probably in support of the policies of the National Rifle Association. Given this social reality, a group of us, some of whom had been referred to as "progressive evangelicals," got together and tried to ascertain whether or not we could come up with a new name that would not have the connotations that the name evangelical was carrying. After considering various options, we've made the decision to call ourselves Red Letter Christians. We wanted to be known as Christians committed to living out, as much as possible, what the red letters of the Bible (the words of Jesus which are often highlighted in red) tell us to be and do. This, of necessity, would ally us with those, like the Mennonites,

who represent what has been called, "The Radical Reformation."

Red Letter Christians are opposed to the partisan politics that have polarized our nation in such a way that civil discourse is becoming increasingly impossible. When asked if we are Democrats or Republicans, as best we can, we answer, "Please name the issue." This is because on some issues we are with the Republicans and, on some issues, we are with the Democrats. We are not in lockstep with either party and, when it is voting time, there will be Red Letter Christians who will vote for one party and others for the opposite party. In each case, the voting will be done with a certain degree of ambivalence, in the recognition that neither party really represents what the red letters in the Bible really expect of us as individuals and as a nation. We believe that the Jesus revealed in the red letters transcends the ideologies of political parties and stands in judgment of what those ideologies represent. The fact that we are not partisan does not mean that we are not committed to political involvement. Quite the opposite. We believe that the teachings that we find in the red letters call us to bring the values and teachings of Christ into all political discussions.

Our critics responded to our new name by saying, "You people act as though the red letters of the Bible are more important than the black letters." To that, we responded, "Exactly! Not only do we say that the red letters are superior to the black letters of the Bible, but *Jesus* said they were!" We pointed out that over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared that some of the things taught in the Hebrew Bible about such things as divorce, adultery, capital punishment, and requisites about how money should be used had to be

transcended by a higher morality. We contended that when Jesus told us, in the sixth chapter of Matthew, that He was giving us new commandments, we decided to make the point that they really were new commandments.

Jesus taught that we should love our enemies and from that, we concluded that He probably meant that we shouldn't kill them. This, in turn, probably raised serious questions as to whether or not Christians could participate in war. Consequently, many Red Letter Christians have committed themselves to non-violent resistance, refusing to be a part of the military. Several of them who already were enlisted in the military service resigned.

We pointed out that when Jesus said to a young man that if he wanted to be one of His disciples, he must be willing to sell all that he had and to give the money to the poor (Mark 10:17-27). That Jesus obviously went way beyond the tithing concept of giving ten percent of one's income for religious purposes—a prescription common among fundamentalists and evangelicals.

As we read Jesus' teachings in the Beatitudes that if we do not show mercy, we should not expect mercy, we believe this precludes for any Red Letter Christians support for capital punishment (Matt. 5:7). If someone points out to us that a capital crime should be punished with capital punishment, we argue that Jesus taught that the Law of Moses that prescribed an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is no longer binding for those who would be His followers (Matt. 5:38-39). Jesus taught that we must love those who hurt us and overcome evil with good (Matt. 5:43-45).

This is not to diminish the importance of the black letters of Scripture. We Red Letter Christians believe that the Holy Spirit directed the writers of Scripture so that all that they wrote was inspired by God, but at the same time we believe that the teachings of Jesus represent a fuller revelation of God's will than anything that we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. We also want to affirm that the black letters all point to the Jesus we find in the red letters (Heb. 11:1-2; Col. 2:9). Furthermore, we do not believe we

can grasp the full meaning of the black letters until we first come to know the Jesus revealed in the red letters. Do any of us grasp all that is referred to in such passages as Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22 without first coming to an understanding of who Jesus was and is, and what He did and taught?

The Red Letter Christian movement is growing faster than any of us could have imagined. The television show, *Red Letter Christians*, along with our radio show, *Across the Pond*, is being accessed by more and more Christians via the internet. Our website, www.RedLetterChristians.org, which among other things has blogs from the movement's many spokespersons, has had more than 1,100,000 unique hits during its first year online. The response to the invitation for Christians to sign up to be part of this movement shows that there is a wide audience of those who are looking for a new option for defining themselves as followers of Christ, the future of the church. ■

(One of the founders of the Red Letter Christian Movement)

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Two Kinds of Charity

Natalie Carnes & Jonathan Tran, Baylor University

In a world of poverty, what does the Gospel require of those of us who call ourselves Christians? Two immediate options arise, and we want to name them so we can take them off the table. First, we could choose to do nothing. I could choose to turn my head the other way, bury it in the sand of my nicely manicured suburban lawn, barricade myself from the world's desperation and figure out how to hole up in some version of the gated community and pretend nothing's wrong. This is a wildly popular option among both poor and rich alike. Another option: we might try to figure out how to get rich off the desperation. I could look around at the world in all its desperation and say, "How can I make money off of *that*?" As crude and even rude as that sounds, it is one very attractive way to go. More people are asking, "How can I get rich off the desperation" than "How do I serve the desperate?" Since those two options are not viable for those who seek to follow Jesus, let's take them off the table.

So let's say we go the way of discipleship as the church has traditionally understood it, then, what would be demanded of us? In the following, we offer two answers to this question and point to the one we think must be the answer for those who take seriously Jesus' Lordship on the amazingly important issue of what Christ described as "doing for the least of these." (Matthew 25:44-46)

Worldly Charity

The first option we will call "worldly charity." By calling it worldly charity, we do not mean to belittle this kind of charity. We do not mean "worldly" as in "sinful". We simply mean charity according to the world; worldly charity may be worldly, but, for us Americans, it is charity nonetheless. Rather than belittle worldly char-

ity we mean to take it as seriously as possible. The only reason we call it "worldly" is that: 1) It is what most people in America take to be charity, and 2) It is a model of goodness based on American ideals, not a model of goodness based on what the church is called to. The fact that most Christians view worldly charity as appropriately *Christian* charity tells us everything we need to know about how confused we Christians are on this question. (How readily American Christians replace "Christian" with "American!") The fact that we Christians tend to applaud this kind of charity, that we tend to aspire to it, shows that we are worldly, if by "worldly" we mean resembling, not distinguishable from, everybody else in the world, including those who do not consider themselves Christians.

A telling example of worldly charity ran on a Christian publication recently. On the cover of this particular publication is the photo of a young Caucasian woman with two jars of coins, a smile that could light up a room, and a headline lauding her charity. There is no better way to get at this understanding of charity than to quote the article, which is not very long. Note that the reason this story is on the cover of a Christian publication is because it is largely what we Christians tend to take to be the model for how we are to relate to the poor. Not only do we have a model of charity here, this model is being held up as an example of what Jesus calls us to:

Bethany Jones led an effort that raised more than \$100 in a single day for two unemployed men whom she and a group of friends met in a Wendy's restaurant parking lot a few weeks ago.

Although the group hasn't yet decided exactly what resources it will purchase with the money raised,

Jones said she wants to use it to help the two re-enter the workplace and establish a stable source of income, rather than spending it to satisfy their immediate needs.

"I really have emphasized wanting to get them support so they can stand independently," Jones said, pointing out it was a difficult decision to avoid addressing their short-term needs. "If there's any way for them to have some stable income by the time I move out of the city, I would be really happy."

Jones met the two men after she attended a Christian worship conference that inspired her to reach out to the less fortunate.

"At the beginning of the year I went to the conference, and my real focus was to live like Jesus did in a really practical way," Jones said. "One of the big things that I had been thinking about a lot was serving the poor."

Jones said she felt compelled to provide extra jackets to needful strangers, "We look at our closets and we see all these clothes that are not being used..." Jones later came up with the idea to hold a coin drive to raise money for them. "I guess my idea initially was if we raised enough money maybe we could help them," she said. "I was thinking to help them get out of that house and that we could help them get a deposit on an apartment. ... As I was talking to them they said they preferred to stay there ... and I didn't think that was going to be best for them."

Jones's fundraising efforts consisted of asking fellow members of her life group and church to contribute pocket change toward their efforts. Instead of just coins, she said, many life group members gave larger donations.

Fellow life group member Robert Smith said the efforts to help others made him and the rest of the group

stronger in their Christian faith.

“Once you step out and love someone who really needs it, you grow so much,” Smith said. “You really feel like you’re living for a purpose, and the purpose is to give glory to God.”

(We have generalized names and details and omitted the title of this publication because this story is indicative of so many instances of what we are calling worldly charity and the positive attention it draws.)

Now we could start by criticizing this picture, but we want instead to take it seriously as a possibility for Christian discipleship. After all, Jones names Jesus as her inspiration and it is her desire “to live like Jesus did in a really practical way” and her Christian faith was made stronger by the experience. If we were to imagine discipleship like this then what would it involve? In examining this example, we come face-to-face with the prevailing understanding of what charity is, what faithfulness is, what loving the poor is.

If this is a picture of worldly charity, then what does worldly charity require of us? First, it requires that we see the poor as worthy of moral consideration. It requires that we think of the presence of the poor as something worth thinking about, not something we can easily disregard. This picture of charity doesn’t allow us to go to Wendy’s without taking into consideration the homeless man sitting in front of Wendy’s. When we see poor people, we need to take notice.

Second, it requires that we do something. Our noticing someone is our noticing that we need to do something in regards to that person. It requires that we involve ourselves in that person’s story, which presumes that person has a story. Jones, in this story, helps us to humanize the person, as a person in need who comes across our path and so intersects with our lives.

Next, it requires that the something we do is something helpful, practical, something like giving money for rent, getting a jacket for the cold. Worldly charity doesn’t ask for cheap

sentimentalities, serving in principle or in the abstract. Worldly charity isn’t limited to telling poor folks Jesus loves them, but rather requires great lengths, that you show them through your actions, through your money, your jacket, your effort, that Jesus loves them.

Fourth, this helpful and practical something you do, this service to the poor, will require something of you. In this story, this woman gives of her time (that could otherwise be spent working), her energy (that could otherwise be used at her church), her attention (where she could otherwise be watching television), and of course her money (which she could otherwise use). In giving of her time, her energy, her attention, and her money, she gives.

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Fifth, it requires that you gather and encourage others to participate in helping the poor. Worldly charity necessitates that you see the problem as requiring others to join in, and so you will have to mobilize (as she does with her life group and church) group action. The article talks about a larger purpose, and so helping this person is a collective enterprise, her and her friends doing this thing together.

Sixth, it requires that you see the problem as systemic. In this case, Jones recognizes these two men need jobs, need work, have needs beyond the “immediate” needs they are asking for; and so helping them will require some recognition of their needs beyond those immediate needs.

In this article, it means helping them get jobs, which necessitates their getting cell phones, which Jones and her friends help arrange: “I really have emphasized wanting to get them support so they can stand independently,” Jones says, admitting that it was a difficult decision to avoid addressing only short-term needs. “If there’s any way for them to have some stable income by the I move out of the city, I would be really happy.” And by this she shows she understands that the problem is bigger than this encounter outside Wendy’s.

Finally, worldly charity requires and results in self-examination: How am I living a purpose-driven life? Do I need all my coins? Do I need jackets I don’t use? What does it mean to really help someone? What would Jesus do? The ultimate benefit here is not for the two homeless men, but more so how the two homeless men benefit us, the rich person, toward self-realization, self-actualization, deepening of one’s relationship with God. Worldly charity is part of one’s bigger personal journey toward goodness.

As a picture of what it means to relate to the poor, worldly charity is pretty intense; it requires a lot of us. We can say as this publication was obviously saying by featuring this story so prominently, that worldly charity is laudable; it is commendable. We can say that if everyone lived like Bethany Jones, the world would be a better place; or at least we can say that even though not that many people regularly act like Jones, people should act like her.

We can also say that many of us have had situations just like the one Jones faced outside Wendy’s, and many of us have acted commendably, just like Jones. And when we volunteer worldly charity, many of us feel good about it. In the cases I don’t give away my jar of coins, because I’m too selfish, or too rushed or too scared, or whatever, still I think I should.

And finally we should observe that if you live like this, if much of your life looks a lot like worldly charity as expressed in this article, you’re bound

to get on a few covers. You're bound to be applauded, and esteemed and held up as exemplary. You'll be seen as a model for what charity and even Christian faithfulness looks like. And this is important. Why? Because worldly charity requires, as we said, sacrifices, and we are a people who need our sacrifices noticed, applauded, and even rewarded. Having our worldly charity lauded encourages us toward greater worldly charity.

All this makes worldly charity look really good. But is it Christian? There is no doubt that it involves giving of ourselves, that it is moral, that it's of benefit to ourselves and others, that it is worthy of moral praise. (It is after all on the cover of a Christian publication.) But is it Christian? Well, we won't know until we unpack what Christ requires on these matters. We won't know what following Jesus is like until we turn our attention to Jesus and examine his life.

Even before we do that though, we can already get a sense of the things worldly charity isn't asking of us, the sacrifices it does not require, the picture of goodness it isn't pushing. Worldly charity requires sacrifice, but not much sacrifice, sacrifice but not self-sacrifice, not sacrifice of our selves. Worldly charity allows us to keep ourselves; it allows us to keep our lives as is; to, in the encounter with the poor, keep our lives intact. So in this case, Jones gives away coins, not her bank account; she does not do as the Good Samaritan who says to the innkeeper, "Here's access to my money, take care of him, give him whatever he needs, whatever it takes" (Luke 10:35). She gives coins. Her stuff remains hers. She helps these people, on the way to whatever else she was doing, to wherever else she is going; her well-laid plans remain the same. Remember, she says, "If there's any way for them to have some stable income by the time I move out of the city, I would be really happy" such that the goal is that, by the time she moves, they will have jobs—what is assured in this equation is that she will move, not that they

will have jobs. The non-negotiable is her future, not theirs. It is an entirely different thing if she says, "I will not move, I will not leave the city, until these men have jobs. So deplorable is this injustice, so great their need, that I will tie my fortune to theirs."

The second is embedded in the first: Worldly charity requires we have compassion for the poor, but that compassion cannot overwhelm us. This is a basic principle of capitalism as Adam Smith devised it. It was not that Adam Smith did not have compassion for the poor or that market capitalism doesn't allow for compassion and care for the poor. It does; it's just that compassion is granted its place and cannot overwhelm the system. The system is to stimulate an economy that will first make us prosperous and secondly take care of the poor; but notice, there can be no taking care of the poor, the thinking goes, if there are no rich, if the poor are allowed to overwhelm and undermine the system. The poor are thought about but as an afterthought. Giving to the poor our coins is the logical conclusion of the system we live in; there is nothing radical about it, only the natural result of lives of excess. Our system produces excess, excess riches and excess poverty, and those with excess riches should give of their excess. But never should such giving be done in a way that jeopardizes the system that produces riches.

A third implication: Worldly charity doesn't ask you to live differently than the world. It encourages you to live in and of the world, to do as the world does. We know worldly charity is extolled in this world; that's why instances of it end up on magazines and newspaper headlines. We hear stories all the time of worldly charity in all the ways we've just described, and those stories are almost always paired with adulation, extolling the virtues of worldly charity. To live this way allows you to live with the grain of the world.

And this relates to the next suggestion: Worldly charity assumes God is on our side, the side of the rich. God

is the inspiration for the rich to do good things with their riches. We do these things because we want to be like God, assuming God is like us... affluent and able to give away God's stuff. We do these things because it strengthens a relationship with God which we can be certain of, even in the midst of our riches. Worldly charity assumes God is not offended by our riches, that God is happy to be in company of our money. It assumes God does not mind sharing Lordship with mammon. The poor are the godless and what we do is bring God to them by bringing our money to them. This isn't to say we don't have anything to learn from the poor, but we aren't gonna' get God from them; their god is untrustworthy. How do we know? Because they are poor. If their god were trustworthy, they would be like us: that is to say rich.

This feeds a final implication: Even though it produces poor people, the larger system we live in is just and should be promoted, and we promote this system to a significant degree by trying to get the poor involved in it. Worldly charity assumes that the systems of market capitalism and its global spread over the earth are fundamentally sound and morally beneficial and the best thing we can do for the poor is incorporate them in its infrastructure. That's why it's so important to get these two homeless men phones so they can get jobs, because if we can get them to be participants, not just recipients, they will lead productive lives, furthering the system. They, we think, want to be just like us -- rich. We help the homeless person because we see in him a rich person trying to get out, and it is our job to help that happen. Never is the justice of the system—the meritocracy that requires some to be poor and some to be rich, that encourages consumerism, hoarding, humiliating disparity between rich and poor—put into question. The poor person we encounter is not meant to force the question, "What is wrong with this world that she has to live like that?"

We are not saying that worldly

charity is not good. It is good. We just don't know that it's particularly Christian. Nor are we saying people shouldn't commit to acts of worldly charity. As we said, the world would be a better place if more people did. We are saying that when we do worldly charity, we should not have overmuch confidence that what we are doing is Christian.

Christian Charity

Worldly charity requires sacrifice but not deep sacrifice; compassion, but not overwhelming compassion; a global consideration of poverty without a global indictment of systems that create poverty. Worldly charity allows us to believe that God is on the side of the rich and that we can continue living in the same general patterns that we have always lived.

But as Christians, we are not called to worldly charity but to Christian charity. The difference that "Christian" makes is illuminated by a character in Victor Hugo's novel of revolutionary France, *Les Misérables*. The character is a minor one, a bishop who is serving a church seen as out of touch with the life of the common people. Soon after he assumes his post as bishop, the bishop realizes that his palace is adjoined to an overcrowded hospital, which has barely enough room for the 26 beds it contains. After visiting the hospital, the bishop insists that there has been a mistake: The sick must have his palace, and he will live in the small hospital. So against protests that a bishop cannot possibly entertain and fulfill his duties as bishop in such a small and modest place, he moves into the hospital.

Then he draws up his budget. Bishops, being prelates of the state, did pretty well for themselves in eighteenth-century France. The bishop in our story made £15,000, equivalent to about \$285,000 today. Yet he gave away everything but £1,000. That means he gives away 93% of his salary, or about \$265,000, so that he lives on \$20,000. Yet this is not a worldly charity, but a Christian one, and so goes even further. After giving

away almost all of his salary, he takes the money allotted to him for travel expenses, and he gives it all away. All this charity attracts others. Learning to see him as a trustworthy man, people entrust him with more and more money. And he simply gives more and more away. Victor Hugo describes it like this, "Like water on dry soil; no matter how much money he received, he never had any."

When the bishop visits the villages in his see, he walks or goes by donkey since he has given away his travel funds. And rather than preach at people, he talks to them, holding up to them the examples of their neighbors. "Look at the people of your neighboring village! They have given to the poor, the widows and the

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orphans the right to have their meadows mown three days before everyone else. They rebuild their houses for them freely when they are ruined." It is always the justice and righteousness of neighbors, never of himself, that the bishop elevates. He ends up on no local newspapers. If people ask about him, he points to others.

The tiniest details of the bishop's life are described. There is a whole chapter devoted to the way the bishop wears his robes for too long and has to conceal its shabbiness with a cloak. As his clothes are shabby and uncomfortable, his meals are modest, even meager. Unless there is a guest to entertain, he eats boiled vegetable-and-oil soup. He gives all excess away to the poor, and they love him --love that draws him into yet more giving.

But not everyone loves the bishop.

The rich find him off-putting. It is rumored that at one rich person's house, he remarked, "What beautiful clocks! What beautiful carpets! What beautiful dishes! They must be a great trouble. I would not have all those unnecessary objects, crying incessantly in my ears: 'There are people who are hungry! There are people who are cold! There are poor people! There are poor people!'" He got an early ride home from that party.

The bishop cannot quite give away *all* his excess. There is one luxury that the bishop indulges. He has six silver knives and forks and a silver soup-ladle and two large candlesticks, which he has inherited from a great-aunt. He cannot seem to give them away. And he says more than once, "I find it difficult to give up eating from silver dishes." And so he eats his meager meals in his modest home on fine silver. It is his one luxury.

This bishop represents for Victor Hugo something more than worldly charity. The bishop, after all, is a Christian figure who constantly talks about his life in terms of the gifts of God and Christ. The bishop, that is, thinks of all his possessions as gifts from God, gifts with which he is entrusted to give to others. They are not his possessions (lest they come to possess him), but gifts to be held as they are received, with open hands. His charity stems directly from his understandings of God's charity to him. So out of this charity, the bishop gives up his nice beautiful home for a small one, eats a simple daily diet, wears shabby clothes, and renounces what is due him.

The bishop, in these ways, models a form of Christian charity deep within the Christian tradition. It is a form of charity that recognizes the common gift of God's creation, which understands that apart from God, we have nothing; we quite literally are nothing. One response to this common gift is a saying in the Christian tradition that has been largely forgotten: "In need all things are common." What that means is that the hungry have a proper claim to the excesses of the rich.

It is not the privilege of the poor to receive from those better off, but their right to demand from their wealthier Christian brothers and sisters. To give away riches is a Christian obligation. And the charitable Christian is the one who can hear the cries from her items of luxury, "There are poor people! There are poor people!" Let the one who has ears to hear, hear from one's cars, one's gadgets, one's savings and investments: "There are poor people! There are poor people!"

Back to our bishop. On the doorstep of this charitable man's home arrives the novel's hero: Jean Valjean. There is nothing particularly heroic about Valjean at this point in the story; later in the story he will become heroic but only by the charity of others. When we catch up with Valjean, he has served many years in prison for stealing bread and trying to escape. He has been turned out of shelter after shelter as innkeepers discover he is an ex-convict. No one wants to risk being near a criminal. When he shows up at the bishop's house, Valjean has a "rough...and violent expression in his eyes." He is, as Hugo describes him "hideous." He is exhausted and angry. And he is hungry.

Stumbling across Valjean, the bishop invites him for dinner and shelter. Unaccustomed to receiving any hospitality, Valjean "stammers like a crazy man." He is still more astounded when he is served dinner on precious silver. Replying to Valjean's astonishment, the bishop replies: "This is not my house; it is the house of Jesus Christ. This door does not demand of him who enters whether he has a name, but whether he has a grief. You suffer, you are hungry and thirsty; and so you are welcome." During his visit, Valjean can't believe it; he knows not the source or motivation of the bishop's unending charity, there is no accounting for it. The bishop, in turn, urges him toward the joyful hospitality of his Father awaiting him in heaven.

If the story ended here, we might have a nice, feel-good tale. The bishop uses his home and silver to make the

criminal feel trusted, and in turn, the criminal responds to that trust by becoming the novel's hero. But the story doesn't end there. This, after all, isn't a story about worldly charity, but Christian charity, which lays bare the thin niceness of worldly charity. Valjean has been treated unjustly, inhospitably, and unkindly for years. He has learned that the world is not a place where he can trust or depend on anyone, bishop or not. His life is determined by habits of survival. And so that night in the bishop's residence, he is haunted by thoughts of the silver on that table at dinner. It torments him. A life empty of charity runs its course: Valjean takes the silver and flees into the night. He takes the bishop's one luxury.

The bishop's housekeeper—who is also his sister—is enraged. She informs the bishop that his one precious item has been stolen. After a pause, the bishop refuses the description of "stolen." "In the first place," he asks, "was that silver ours?... I have for a long time kept that silver wrongfully. It belonged to the poor. Who was that man? A poor man, evidently." And so having already been more kind to Valjean than anyone had ever been, the bishop gives to Valjean his one luxury in life.

Valjean does not get very far with the silver before the authorities arrest him, suspicious looking fellow that he is. They march Valjean to the bishop. Determined to return Valjean to the galleys for life, the authorities are ready for the bishop to expose Valjean's lie that the bishop gave him the silver. They arrive in the bishop's home. Before they can say anything, the bishop sees Valjean and rejoices: "Here you are! You forgot to take the candlesticks I gave you, which are also silver and should fetch you about 200 francs." With no charge to press against him, the authorities release Valjean and leave. The bishop presses the candlesticks into Valjean's hand. In this gift, the bishop's Christian charity is made perfect. When need faces luxury, he renounces luxury, no matter how attached he is to it.

Hearing this story, one might rejoice that poverty is no longer as much a problem now as it was in revolutionary France, and how fortunate that the poor are not so oppressed as they once were. Yet in terms of aggregate numbers there are more poor on Earth now than there has ever been, and we in 21st century America oppress the poor in our own ways: zoning requirements, licensing regulations, unjust labor practices, political exploitation, begging laws, capital flight from exploited lands, and so on. If the cost of charity in revolutionary France was to give away every luxury, trade nice homes for smaller ones, eat simply, and recognize excess as properly claimed by the poor, what is the cost of charity in current day America?

There are deep differences between the Christian charity modeled by the bishop and worldly charity. Where worldly charity requires that we make small sacrifices, Christian charity demands much more painful ones. It requires, not giving a few coins, but giving away sizable chunks of one's bank account. Christian charity means not giving away old jackets but wearing jackets even when they are shabby so that more people can be clothed. It means reconsidering transportation options, sacrificing convenience and comfort to aid those who have no options at all for transportation.

This speaks to the second point of compassion. Where worldly charity doles out compassion in small doses, Christian charity swims in an ocean of compassion that flows from the life of God and floods our lives and choices. The compassion of the bishop so overwhelmed his life that it swept away the bishop's attachment to his silver. And this speaks to a third point about worldly charity. Where worldly charity preserves the shape of one's life, Christian charity, with its outpouring compassion, does not. It will inconvenience your life; it will trouble you. It does not ask what spare change you have, but rather: How have you lived in such a way that you have so much spare change around? What can "spare" mean in a world where 35,000

children die a day from poverty? While some will love you for it, it will make you seem weird to others and annoying to still others. You may seem eccentric, and you will have a hard time fitting in with the world as it currently stands. You, like the bishop, will be shown an early exit from the party.

Why would a person want to live this way? Why did the bishop want to live this way? The bishop was living in response to the common gift of creation, in imitation of the one who gave us that gift. He was striving to be like Jesus, the one who said: Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Like the bishop, Jesus also throws his lot in with the poor. He also gives away the one luxury that he can claim: equality with God. And he has also invited the undeserving to a meal. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus anticipates his second coming, the consummation of all things. He describes the Son of Man sitting on his throne in glory, with all the nations gathered before him. It is time to invite guests to the everlasting banquet, the joyful hospitality of the Father. And he turns to one group and says, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

But these righteous folk do not understand. "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The Son of Man's reply should haunt us. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:37-40). And those

with ears to hear know what words he gives those who did not feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, or attend the prisoners (Matthew 25:41-43). While the bishop is like Jesus in his poverty and his charity, Jean Valjean is like Jesus in his needfulness, in his hunger, his homelessness, and even, let's not forget, his criminal status.

Jesus is the poor whom we are called to serve. He is God who came to us as a poor man, with nowhere to lay his head, in the form of a servant. There is no way to worship this God without serving the poor. And serving the poor, as Jesus makes clear, is a way of caring for God, whether we know it or not. Here we are coming to the fourth point about worldly charity: where worldly char-

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ity assumes God is on the side of rich, Christian charity acknowledges God as the one made poor for our sakes. Jesus is the quintessential poor man, and the needful among us are the poor whom those of us who live in excess and luxury are called to live for. Jesus reveals that God is with the poor, and so the one who wants to be with God should seek God among the poor.

In Christ, God lived with the poor, and God died with the poor. This is where the depth of Christian charity is made known to us: on the Cross with Christ. The Cross, where we crucified Love Incarnate, who came to us as a poor man that we may no longer suffer hunger, thirst, homelessness, and nakedness. For we were hungry, and Jesus gave us his body;

thirsty, and he gave us his blood; homeless, and he gave us the Church; naked, and he clothed us in the Spirit. This is what the church witnesses to when it welcomes the suffering, hungry, thirsty, homeless and naked. This is the way of discipleship: the way of the Cross, the giving of our very selves in imitation of Jesus giving of his very self, so that others may no longer suffer the ravages of poverty. To live this way is not to be more than human or less than human. It is to live into the fullness of our humanity, as that fullness is revealed to us by the Son of Man.

Here is the fifth point about worldly charity. Worldly charity does not indict the systems of the world. Yet Christian charity is born out of the greatest indictment of all worldly systems: the Cross. Against the seductive logic that global capitalism produces "just" winners and losers, the heart of the Christian tradition is God, Love Itself, crucified by a system that claimed worldly justice as the backside of worldly charity. Christians should maintain a healthy skepticism of political and economic systems, especially those that claim to mete out justice, since such claims to justice crucified the one who is truly justice. This does not mean refusing to use worldly systems, but doing so vigilantly, keeping God's ends in view.

What does all this mean for those of us today who live comfortably and well? If God suffered death that we might not be hungry or homeless, what are we called to suffer that others might not have a different kind of hunger and homelessness? As we cannot worship the God made poor without serving the poor, neither can we worship the God who gave everything if we demand to hold on to our things. What does the Gospel require of us, and what would satisfying those requirements resemble? Consider Shelley Douglass of Birmingham, Alabama, Hugo's saint in everyday life:

I live in Ensley, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Birmingham, Alabama. For the last 19 years I've

been hospitaller at Mary's House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality primarily for families. I sleep in what was a sun porch, a small room with lots of windows tacked on to the back to the house... Ensley used to be a bustling little city of its own. Now the brickworks and industrial infrastructure stand idly crumbling, never having recovered from the steel exodus many years ago. The people of Ensley struggle. Young people who have prospered have moved on to better neighborhoods; elders who remain here don't have the money for repairs – or even for bills. Houses deteriorate, and when the elders die their houses sit empty and unclaimed for years, moldering away amidst weeds and trash. Ensley is full of poor and forgotten folks. Our city schools are wretched, our streets are cracking and decaying, we have blocks of boarded-up stores and a church on every block. With the exception of a few revitalization efforts, Ensley has been left to fend for itself. The people of Ensley get ignored or written off in a city short-hand: high-crime district, dangerous neighborhood, wouldn't want to live there. I have known parents who wouldn't allow their children to come for a work-day at Mary's House, fearing for their safety... As a white person born with

the concomitant white-skin privilege, I struggle to see the world through other eyes. As a person convinced that a nonviolent revolution is the only final answer to the questions of war and injustice in our world, I battle my own lethargy and despair to discover new, Gospel ways of living my beliefs. As a follower of Jesus' way, I try to live his simple teachings about loving the enemy and sharing possessions. I fail often. I hope that sharing these struggles might open some questions for all of us, and perhaps help us to see together a new way forward. (<http://paxchristiusa.org/2012/08/11/reflection-in-birmingham-hope-and-poverty-in-the-belly-of-the-beast/>)

Compare the quoted stories of Bethany Jones and Shelley Douglass, and ask yourself, "What is the cost of Christian discipleship?" It is not the worldly charity of the Bethany Jones in all of us, which allows us to live with the grain of the world and receive its praise and adulation—maybe even magazine covers—and so costs very little. Christian charity calls us to live like Catholic Worker Shelley Douglass, not with the grain of the world, but with the grain of the universe—with the grain of the kind of creatures we were made to be: humans divinized into the life of God. And where do we feel the severity of that

grain more deeply than on the Cross of Christ?

Are we haunted by the Cross? When we pass the many crosses most of us encounter in churches and jewelry and home decoration, do they call out to us, "There are poor people! There are poor people!"? If Jesus gave his body and blood, the Church and the Spirit, that we may no longer suffer poverty, what are we called to give? The answer is not as easy as worldly charity. It will cost everything. It will run you against the grain of this world, against that brutal cross. Giving away your last luxury, being counted among the least of these, throwing your lot in with the weakest against the most powerful, all these will run you against the grain of the world. And yet, laid up against the grain of this world, we live with the grain of the universe. For Christ's cross identifies lives poured out as the very grain of the universe, the very meaning and identity and purpose of all things. ■

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The People Vs. The Prophets: What The Presidential Election Told Our Money Culture About Evangelical Christianity

By Gary Moore

“Jesus and Paul spent no energy on trying to clean up the Roman Empire, despite their terrible practices of abandoning infants, pederasty, and gladiator games. Indeed, the people Jesus denounced most harshly, the Pharisees, were some of the most moral people on earth. He did not give us the challenge of imposing our morality on others, but rather of spreading a far more radical message, that God loves sinners. Politics is based on power, and power always causes divisions [while it corrupts what it touches]. It is very difficult indeed to get across a message of love and power at the same time...Sometimes I feel like a liberal among conservatives and sometimes like a conservative among liberals. I have conservative theology--I believe the Bible--but that leads me to ‘progressive’ opinions about politics, because the Bible has much to say about justice and helping the poor.” Evangelical author Philip Yancey

I was recently invited to submit a white paper for an upcoming symposium of evangelical stewardship leaders. I considered the monumental moral and spiritual challenges we face in helping our political-economy more closely reflect the biblical and traditional values of our faith. I decided to write that we can't really lead our nation in that direction if we're following politicians. I had no more submitted the paper than a full page ad in *The Wall Street Journal* told me I had chosen a very timely subject. The ad was placed by no less than the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

It featured a large picture of Rev. Graham, who I have greatly admired for at least fifty of my sixty-two years

on earth. I can think of very, very few people who have stewarded their time, talent and treasure as faithfully as Rev. Graham. Yet I had to wonder if the ad, which I understand is to appear in several other papers, was the best possible use of the donations of Christians. As I told friends who work in the Graham's ministries, the ad was so blatantly partisan I couldn't imagine it being the idea of Rev. Graham. Yet the *Journal* contained another article on October 19th that said Rev. Graham and Franklin had met with Governor Romney the previous Friday and Rev. Graham “all but offered his endorsement.”

He apparently did even more. The *Journal* also reported the ministry's website deleted a long-running commentary about Governor Romney's Mormonism being a religious cult. I've often noted the possibly cult-like, and definitely herd-like tendencies of evangelicalism, particularly when it comes to economics. So I'm glad we're finally being more graceful toward others. But the church might have more credibility if such decisions are made on theological grounds rather than political grounds. A key biblical value is that Truth is Truth, whether Pilate gets it or not. Truth is rarely as dependable when spoken by politicians. We should be quite hesitant to tie our faith to such.

For example, the *Journal's* October 12th issue said: “Mitt Romney would likely have raised eyebrows, if not protest, had he said during the Republican primaries that ‘no legislation with regard to abortion’ would be part of his agenda, that federal regulation is ‘essential’ or that young illegal immigrants should be able to keep work permits issued by President Barack Obama. But conservative leaders and activists, some

of whom have worried about the firmness of Mr. Romney's commitment to their causes earlier this year, say they are unconcerned about those and other recent comments that have brought a more centrist cast to the Republican presidential nominee.” Even conservative Christian political strategist Ralph Reed was quoted by the October 9th issue of the *Journal* as observing: “It will be ironic if the first ticket in history without a Protestant got the biggest share of the evangelical vote in history.”

I've long described the ironies in evangelical thinking about political economy. Still, the ad dumbfounded even me. Rev. Graham famously misjudged President Nixon. We might remember that Senator George McGovern, who had studied theology, had been a war hero before denouncing the Vietnam War as immoral. Perhaps reflecting the people's vote for Baal at the foot of Sinai and vote for Barabbas before Pilate, McGovern lost in a landslide to Nixon. Despite Nixon's popularity with the people, which the Gospels remind usually includes a few Pharisees, who the Gospels say “loved money,” history will long remember Nixon as one of the more immoral men who occupied the White House. So I've long believed that Rev. Graham, who no one will ever accuse of loving money, even if many evangelical televangelists do, was very wise since Nixon's demise to carefully explain that he might be conservative and a Christian but was not a member of the religious right. Still, *Journal* surveys often remind our money culture that evangelicals are far more “enthusiastic” about politics than any American voting bloc.

Paradoxically, I believe it has been Dr. Graham's willingness to transcend

politics that has given him such influence with politicians. That parallels my belief that the religious right--which does not include many evangelicals like Yancey, Ron Sider, Tony Campolo and myself--loses considerable political power as conservative politicians can take it for granted. Yes, the religious right greatly influences primaries and local elections. But as indicated by Governor Romney's late move to the center, which is probably his natural home, swing voters who transcend highly partisan positions hold the cards in presidential elections, and therefore in nominating Supreme Court justices, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, and so on. The other irony is therefore that the religious right's partisanship, which will likely only be reinforced by Rev. Graham's ad, is likely the primary reason presidential candidates give little more than lip service to social issues. Perhaps you noticed that during speeches and ads to those beyond the religious right, Governor Romney virtually never mentioned abortion and same sex marriage.

Virtually everything was about economics, and growing the economy in particular. Yet Jesus pointedly asked "What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?" Rev. Graham's ad did not mention that key biblical value. The ad was very emotional in saying Rev. Graham is approaching his ninety-fourth birthday and this might be his last election. It added: "I believe it is vitally important that we cast our ballots for candidates who base their decisions on biblical principles and support the nation of Israel. I urge you to vote for those who protect the sanctity of life and support the biblical definition of marriage between a man and a woman. Vote for biblical values this November 6."

I've now asked several ministers across the theological spectrum where the Bible teaches about abortion or same sex marriage and no one can tell me. The ad did not cite its sources either. That's fairly standard fare within evangelical Christianity.

Christianity Today has published an article about the Bible being "The Greatest Story Never Read." Peter Wehner of the American Enterprise Institute has written about our majoring in cultural minors while neglecting what the Bible put in bright neon lights, much of which is about the dangers of riches. They should make religious leaders quite wary of endorsing a mega-wealthy CEO of a Wall Street private equity firm. They should make us even more wary of a running mate who said he entered public service because of atheistic philosopher Ayn Rand, whose fondest hope was for capitalism to replace Christianity as America's religion.

The Bible is quite clear that God didn't think much of a king as the people would prefer him over God (1 S 8:18-20). It also cautions us against putting our trust in any human leader, presumably of either political party, as no human can save us (Ps 146:3). Yet when the people insisted on a king, God lovingly told us that king should not be rich or he would feel better than the people and grow out of touch, a very common complaint about Washington elites (Dt 17:14-17). That is likely a major reason the prophet Samuel preferred the shepherd boy David to Saul, who the people preferred. Solomon went on to tell us that we'll muddle through when the king is concerned with justice rather than money (Pr 29:4). He also warned that we will be punished if we're in a hurry to grow rich (Pr 28:20).

Few conservative ministers apparently still understand it but revered corporate management consultant Peter Drucker, who once taught theology, once wrote these words. They would have made Rev. Graham's ad far more enriching for *Journal* readers, not to mention voters: "I believe it is socially and morally unforgivable when managers reap huge profits for themselves but fire workers. As societies, we will pay a heavy price for the contempt this generates among middle managers and workers. In short, whole dimensions of what it means to

be a human being and treated as one are not incorporated into the economic calculus of capitalism." The prophet Isaiah cautioned us about such realities regarding some clergy and theologians when he asked: "Is anyone more blind than my servant, more deaf than the messenger I send?" (Is (42:19-20).

The prophet Moses had the owners of fields round the corners so the needy could harvest what grew there. He did the same with the second picking of grapes and olives (Lv 19-9-10). He shut down all economic activity each seventh year for environmental reasons (Ex 23:10) and told people not to work on the Sabbath (Ex 23:12). You couldn't permanently sell property as it was created by and owned by God, not you (Lv 25:13-23 and Dt 8:17). If you made a loan, you had to forgive it each seventh year as bondage can political and economic (Dt 15:1). None of that falls within the efficiency-driven logic of capitalism. It teaches us that we are free to do with our wealth what we want as we "made it" and own it. Note those teachings were Law, not moral suggestions. Of course, Jesus spiritualized such teachings when he told the rich young ruler he had to sell what he had and give it to the poor before he could follow the Spirit. Jesus also said it would be very, very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God on his own merit, which would presumably be true for those following a rich leader.

I've learned such biblical values sound like "socialism" to conservative Christians, which is why most conservative ministers talk about abortion and marriage. One ministry that is particularly influential with conservative Christian foundations even reviewed a new book recently that is entitled *Defending The Free Market*. It was written by Father Robert Sirico, founder of The Acton Institute, which recently prepared a stewardship study Bible that was published by the evangelical publishing house Zondervan. I've had the privilege of teaching with Father Sirico and saw him again recently. He's a graceful and

honorable man. But he's so politically conservative his work has often been published on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal*, a fact that irritates many of his fellow Catholic theologians as much as Paul Ryan's insensitivity in seeing soup kitchens as photo ops. So it didn't surprise me that the review of Father Sirico's book began: "Socialism has been discredited."

Again, Peter Drucker would be amused by that proclamation. In his book *The Pension Fund*, Drucker wrote: "If socialism is defined as 'ownership of the means of production'--and this is both the orthodox and rigorous definition--then the United States is the first truly 'Socialist' country [as workers owned most of America's stock through their pension funds]." Drucker clearly understood why Reinhold Niebuhr thought biblical values insist any serious Christian must be a socialist, though not necessarily a statist, or one who believes that secular government alone, rather than God and Godly government, must equitably share the wealth.

Such highly debatable economic teachings by many conservative Christian leaders appeal to our politicized culture. They're why I constantly receive emails from conservative Christians like the one I got last week. It was a newspaper article headlined: "Destroying America from Within." It began: "President Barack Obama has been trying to transform America to become more like a European nation, to be another socialist state. Obama's 'transformation' to socialism is a serious matter, and could very well be the end for America as a free nation and super power." All that might be worth the divisiveness it causes in both church and culture, perhaps even Christian, if it was grounded in reality. But even the pro-Romney forces unwittingly acknowledged it is nonsense. One anti-Obama ad by a super-PAC that ran over and over in my neck of the woods decried the fact that under Obama, the US economy is

now ranked seventh in the Global Competitiveness Survey.

What the ad conveniently failed to mention, in the half-truth fashion that has become habit on both sides of American politics, was that five of the six nations ranked ahead of us *are* the European nations that the president is supposedly trying to emulate. It also failed to mention federal taxes have declined in Obama's first term until they are the lowest since WWII, at 15% of GDP. Those nations, and the non-European exception, are, in order: Switzerland, Singapore, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany. Even Singapore is noted for having a government that is quite active in the economic sphere, as is the government of China, which seems to frighten most conservatives who believe in an omnipotent God. The nations just under the US include: the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Belgium, France and Luxembourg. We just associate Europe and socialism with decay as our media always focuses on the negatives, which are primarily in southern Europe these days.

Even the ultra-conservative *Forbes* magazine has published an article that there is much we might learn from Denmark. It has the happiest people in the world, lower unemployment with more retraining for the unemployed, a higher economic growth rate, a more dynamic business climate for small businesses, higher per capita wealth and much less federal debt related to GDP. Yet its government takes about 50% in taxes of what the average Dane makes while our governments take about 30%. Even evangelical theologian friends have estimated that Moses dictated 23% or more social spending after the needy were provided access to the fields belonging to others (Dt 23:24). President Obama's friend Oprah Winfrey once did a special on Denmark, probably as he and she value gross domestic happiness as much as gross domestic product. If asked where he would like to see our federal taxes in four years, I can

imagine Obama saying 18 to 20%, which is where they've been since WWII. But I can't imagine him publicly stating anything as radical as the 8% that anti-taxer Grover Norquist openly seeks when having the GOP sign his famous pledge. That's truly "right wing social engineering" of the experimental and utopian sort.

I obviously don't care for the secularization of Europe, anymore than the secularization of America. As a Lutheran, I understand that Northern Europe is increasingly secular as it prospers. But I also see remnants of the Protestant ethos regarding charity toward neighbor at work. For example, Christian micro-enterprise ministries, like Opportunity International on whose board I served, who are engaged in work among the third world poor know the Scandinavians give multiples of what the US does as official foreign aid. Religious sociologists, like the evangelical Barna Group and Robert Wuthnow who study the mainline at Princeton, know Americans may go to church a lot more than Europeans do but we also compartmentalize our faith from our daily lives, and particularly our economic lives, just as faithfully.

Peter Drucker might therefore suggest it's time all we Christians grow more humble, as well as less parochial and politicized, so that we might consider the "best practices" of our neighbors around our Creator's world. The Graham ad likely suggests that will probably have to wait until this generation of evangelical leaders die off and the next generation of evangelicals enters the promised land. Until then, we might seriously consider the social exhortations of the ad while balancing them with these two economic quotes. The first is from Peggy Noonan, President Reagan's favorite speech writer who is now a featured writer at *The Wall Street Journal*: "The other day I met with a Chinese dissident who has served time in jail, and whose husband is in jail in Beijing. I asked her if the longing for democratic principles that has swept the gener-

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A Way to Resolve Doubts about God—Today

By John Scott

After reading countless arguments on both sides of the God debate -- and finding many almost incomprehensible -- I decided that just seven plain truths were enough to settle the issue.

1. Atheists have doubts, too. The world's leading atheist, Richard Dawkins, has acknowledged that atheism is an "assumption" that cannot be proved. When asked if that leaves open the possibility that God *does* exist, he said, "Any scientist would leave open that possibility; we can't be dogmatic and say it is certain that God doesn't exist."

Therefore, to be an atheist is a choice—but we could call it a bet.

2. Doubts are only natural. As Thomas Edison said, "We don't know a millionth of one percent about anything." So we must make choices without being certain of all the facts—as when we marry, have children, or eat at a restaurant without knowing what goes on in the kitchen. If we waited on absolute certainty we might never make a decision about God or anything else.

Therefore, to believe in God can also be a choice—but we call it faith.

3. Faith leads to proof. Francis Bacon formulated the scientific method, but said the best proof is *experience*. William James observed that we gain experience by acting as if something is true *before* we know it is. William Ralph Inge said, "Faith begins as an experiment and ends as an experience." My faith experiment profoundly improved my life. It also led to moments when I had no doubt that God was there. At other times I trust the memories of those

moments, just as I still believe in the sun at midnight. In short, I found to be true the old saying:

A person with an experience is never at the mercy of someone who has only an argument.

4. Idle belief isn't enough. When a patient puts "faith" in a heart surgeon, that's not just assuming the surgeon is alive and calling him "Doctor." That won't fix the patient's heart. The patient must actually obey and trust the surgeon. Likewise, Jesus said calling him "Lord" isn't enough (Matthew 7:21) and the right way isn't easy (Matthew 7:13-14).

As Billy Graham said, "Faith is a 'total commitment,' not just 'intellectual acceptance.'"

5. One rule speaks volumes. Jesus said one rule "sums up" God's law (Matthew 7:12). Before Jesus, Rabbi Hillel had called that rule "the whole Torah," and said, "All the rest is explanation" (Shab 31a). It often gets buried beneath layers of debated doctrines, but if you drill down to the original bedrock creed of any major religion—including Islam (Hadith of Bukhari 2:6)—you will find some version of this cardinal rule: *Do unto others as you would have others do unto you*. Therefore, those who commit acts of cruelty in the name of religion are way off course.

The Golden Rule is the ultimate moral compass.

6. Helping others is essential. There is no more obvious or urgent application of the Golden Rule than to help others who need food, water, clothes, and shelter, and to help those who are sick or disabled. Jesus placed the highest possible importance on that kind

of down-to-earth charity (Matthew 25:31-46). The Bible also says faith without good works is dead -- not just weak -- *dead* (James 2:14-26). The Quran and Hebrew scriptures contain similar warnings. This doesn't mean we are not saved by grace through faith, but we may be judged by *evidence* of our faith.

Charity may be required proof of faith, not just an option for bonus points.

7. Choosing faith is best. Many studies confirm that those who choose faith -- and pray, worship, and follow the Golden Rule—live healthier and happier lives than those who don't. They also have higher hopes for heaven. Anyone who doesn't choose faith is, by default, making the same bet as an atheist. So I asked myself this question, and gave the obvious answer: Which choice would I rather regret if it turns out to be wrong? ■

References: Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006), 51, paperback (2008), 73-74; Billy Graham, *Peace with God, Revised and Expanded* (Word Books, 1984), 113; Frank Newport, *God is Alive and Well* (Gallup Press, 2012), Chapter III "Religion is Good for Your Health."

*John Scott is a retired lawyer and author of Uncluttered Faith: How a Professional Skeptic Came to Believe in God, a book that received high praise from Foy Valentine and Bill Moyers (www.unclutteredfaith.com), and was "strongly and enthusiastically" recommended by Darold Morgan in *Christian Ethics Today*, Summer 2012, 30.*

When Language Smothers Conversation

By Charles Redfern

The coal mine's canary is hacking, spitting, gasping, and turning blue – so yell at it. Question its motives. Tell it the fumes are imaginary. Drop hints that it's wheezing a heretical wheeze.

Cold reality prompts the canary's cough. Fact: The world's glaciers are shrinking. Fact: the polar ice caps are melting. Fact: 2012 was America's warmest recorded year and the world's ninth hottest.¹ Another fact: Peter Doran and Maggie Kendall Zimmerman discovered that 97% of all active climatologists are agreed: human activity spurs the Earth's rising temperatures and glacial melting.² Then there are the reports: A federal advisory draft released in January, 2013, predicted catastrophe unless policies change,³ as did a World Bank warning in November, 2012.⁴

These facts and reports – as well as droughts and a super storm – resemble that poor canary, whose death signaled dangerous methane levels and the need for action.

This Is Easy

Surely evangelical Christians, my tribe, can explore this dilemma without fear. No historic creed is at stake and Scripture advocates creation care: We're the Lord's designated stewards (Genesis 1:27-30). We were called to "guard" God's sanctuary (a more literal rendering of the wording in Genesis 2:15). Our Earthly rule fits Walter Kaiser's description: "The gift of 'dominion' over nature was not intended to be a license to use or abuse selfishly the created order in any way men and women saw fit. In no sense were humans to be bullies and laws to themselves."⁵ Kaiser is right: God's leadership motif is "help" (Psalm 121:1-2), and service (Matthew 20:28). Psalm 19:1-4 testifies to God's glory in creation and Romans 8:18-22 looks forward to its redemption. Kudos to Francis of

Assisi, who cherished the animals and plants.

And just to make sure everything's on the up-and-up, we've had our inside people: Sir John Houghton, an evangelical, co-chaired the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, one of the important agencies issuing alerts.⁶ Katharine Hayhoe, a Billy Graham fan,⁷ pastor's wife, and Texas Tech university professor, has served as an IPCC reviewer.

The evidence, the Bible, and historic Christianity motivated 280 leaders to sign the petition, "Climate Change, An Evangelical Call to Action."⁸ The names read like an evangelical VIP litany: Andy Crouch of Christianity Today; Jack Hayford of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel; Gordon P. Hugenberger of Parkstreet Church in Boston; Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church; Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College; Gordon MacDonald, editor-at-large for Leadership Magazine; David Neff, editor of Christianity Today; Tri Robinson, pastor of the Boise Vineyard; Berten Waggoner, national director, Vineyard USA; and Rick Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback -- to name a few. What's more, 44 Southern Baptist leaders, including the Convention's current president and two past presidents, signed the initiative, "A Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change."

A Wrench Is Thrown

But something is amiss. In some circles, calling attention to the hacking canary betrays skewed orthodoxy and questionable patriotism, swaying many. I was once blasted as a "liberal" (perish the thought) because I agreed with these assertions: "There is now a broad consensus in this country, and indeed in the world, that global warming is happening, that it is a

serious problem, and that humans are causing it,"⁹ and, "we agree that climate change is real and threatens our economy and national security."¹⁰

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona wrote the first quote in 2007, along with Senator Joe Lieberman. Republican Senator Lindsay Graham wrote the second in 2009 along with Democrat John Kerry. The senators, along with retired generals and admirals alarmed about climate change's potential security concerns,¹¹ implicitly invite us to behold the opportunity. We can shelve annoying labels. Let's brew enough caffeine to spike our blood pressure, roll in the whiteboards, and brainstorm while pacing back and forth with our alpha personalities on full display ...

No. I'm "liberal." I've failed a vague orthodoxy test, which means I'm worse than erroneous -- I'm suspect. Forget evidence, the biblical mandate for stewarding creation, precedent, and recognized authorities. According to a 2007 CNN article, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Institute speculated that climate change is part of a leftist agenda threatening evangelical unity.¹² Jerry Falwell proclaimed this from his pulpit on February 25 of that year: "I am today raising a flag of opposition to this alarmism about global warming and urging all believers to refuse to be duped by these 'earthism' worshippers."¹³ Calvin Beisner, head of the misnamed *Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation*, suggested the worries are "an insult to God."¹⁴ He also insinuated that diminishing our oil dependence aligns us with the unfaithful steward of Matthew 25:14-30.¹⁵ After all, the oil is there; God gave it to us. We should use it. (The same logic would render us fickle if we fail to smoke marijuana as well; after all, it's there for the ask-

ing.) His organization veers close to rendering anthropocentric climate change a theological impossibility in its *Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming*: “We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God’s intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth’s climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history.”¹⁶

That’s naïve. History shows that our species is not immune to world-wide calamity. Nature and human activity wed in a ghoulish marriage during the fourteenth century. Commerce flowed over new trade routes between East and West, conveying flea-bearing rats. The fleas leaped onto humans and infected them with the Black Death. Roughly half of all Europe died.

I long to ask: Who defines unity? Is assessing evidence and asking questions inherently disruptive? Is it wrong to seek solutions to a potentially grave problem—especially since there are virtually no doctrinal risks (Beisner notwithstanding)? Apparently, yes. I’m a pagan “earthism worshipper.” I’m divisive and part of a leftist plot—never mind that Perkins was flourishing a rhetorical ploy with a one-two punch: Levy a nebulous charge no one can disprove; then, as the opponent reels, accuse him of divisiveness. Any challenge fulfills the charge. Few can stay calm and ask: Who is calling whom names? Who flings the accusations and mows down the straw men? Who is really divisive?

But none of those questions stem the accusatory tide. Deniers of climate change grab any real or imagined flaw. I’ve been warned, over coffee and doughnuts, that I’m falling prey to Al Gore, who, apparently, is evil incarnate and wields hypnotic power. The ice caps will recover if he vanishes just like the Vietnam War

would have evaporated if Dan Rather fell into quicksand.

I try to tell people I’ve never seen *An Inconvenient Truth*, but no one believes me.

Gotcha ... Maybe Not

For a brief moment in 2009, it looked like the climate change deniers were onto something. Computer hackers stole more than 1,000 e-mails from a research unit at Great Britain’s University of East Anglia. The e-mails, dating back some 13 years, held reams of information, “everything from the mundanities of climate-data collection to comments on international scientific politics to strongly worded criticisms by climate-change doubters,” to quote Bryan Walsh of *Time*.¹⁷ There seemed to be references to oppressing opposition, withholding information, pressuring editorial boards of academic journals, and skewing research. Besides, the e-mails weren’t nice.

The unit’s head, Phil Jones, took a leave of absence pending an investigation.

As it turns out, parliamentary and university investigations exonerated Jones. Perhaps he could have been more forthcoming and more couth, but, in the words of the parliamentary committee: “In the context of sharing data and methodologies, we consider Professor Jones’s actions were in line with common practice in the climate science community.”¹⁸ References to performing research “tricks” were in-house slang for legitimate scientific procedures—and yes, Jones and his e-mail partners were a little rough. In other words, boys will be boys—especially when they don’t anticipate the theft of their private e-mails. What a scandal!

Who Made Me An Expert?

I hear the cry: “You’re not a scientist!” How true—and I would love to be proven wrong. Scramble up some eggs and smear them on my face—but do it with firm evidence, not with conspiracy theory and hints and allegations. And remember, Perkins is no scientist either; nor was Falwell before he left us,

bless him; nor is Beisner. Their dark suspicions about doctrinal error and earth worship and leftist plots involve character assassination, not genuine argument. Christopher Monckton, a British climate change denier, is no scientist either—although he’s been hailed by the *Wall Street Journal*, the *National Review*, and Rush Limbaugh—and he’s often quoted to counter-balance the climatologist majority. Johann Hari adds this: “When challenged, Monckton has admitted to a weakness for ‘telling stories that aren’t actually true.’”¹⁹

Facing Ourselves

Evangelicals such as I can be prim, irritating finger-waggers. My forbears in the faith frowned on alcohol, cigars, cigarettes, and carousing. We lectured theological liberals because, in our view, they wandered from the Bible. We cried out against immorality and we were the anti-materialists. I’m sure many folded their I-told-you-so arms when the US Surgeon General first warned of smoking—and again when the secular world began preaching on alcohol’s hazards. We were sometimes overbearing and silly, but—after apologizing—we can at least feel moral vindication.

Not now. Beisner, Perkins, and others still hold influence. They would have us believe in the same type of propaganda that the tobacco companies preached in the 1950’s. We’re ignoring God’s first commandment to humanity as long as we remain in their pail. To put it bluntly, we’re in a state of disobedience; we’re no different from the theological “liberals” we’ve decried. It’s time we stop judging and start repenting—before the canary breathes its last. ■

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Bid for State Religion Fails

by Nathan C. Walker

According to a lawsuit filed last month by the American Civil Liberties Union, the commissioners of North Carolina's Rowan County have, over the past five years, opened 97 percent of County Board meetings with explicitly Christian prayers. Professor Gary Freeze of Catawba College characterized these meetings as "religious revivals," designed for the commissioners and residents to give a "shout-out for Jesus."

Former Rowan County Board commissioner, Carl Ford, runs a local Baptist radio station and is a member of the Rowan Tea Party Patriots. In January, 2013, he began his first term as a state representative in North Carolina's General Assembly. By his thirteenth week, he received national scrutiny for attempting to subvert the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution when he and fellow Representative Harry Warren (R-Rowan), a Methodist, filed the Defense of Religion Act of 2013. This Act asserts that the U.S. Constitution does not prohibit states from making laws with regard to established religion. Twelve additional representatives co-sponsored the resolution, including House Majority Leader, Edgar Starnes (R-Caldwell).

The ideology expressed in North Carolina's Defense of Religion Act is typical of the Tenth movement. This movement, launched by Tea Party Patriots across the country, includes a series of legislative initiatives invoking the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Bill of Rights, which grants powers to state governments when these are not explicitly assigned to the federal government. Tenthers claim that the Tenth Amendment allows them to reject national regulations on guns and health care and, apparently now, to establish a state religion.

Though a Baptist like Ford, min-

ister C. Welton Gaddy finds the Defense of Religion Act "comical," saying that Ford and Warren "claim the First Amendment only applies to the federal government and the Tenth Amendment empowers them to ignore it."

History reveals additional ironies. In 1776, in its first constitution, North Carolina formally disestablished the Church of England as its colonial state religion. It did so fifteen years before the states ratified the U.S. Bill of Rights ensuring that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Put simply, North Carolina was far more progressive in its disestablishment of religion than Congress.

After the Civil War, the states ratified the U.S. Constitution again in 1868 with the passage of the 14th Amendment, whose due process clause brought the states under the umbrella of the national Bill of Rights. The U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed this principle in 1947 by ruling that "neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions or prefer one religion over another." North Carolina's 2013 Defense of Religion Act, however, declares that this state "does not recognize the authority of federal judicial opinions."

By declaring North Carolina exempt from federal judicial opinions, Ford and Warren are at odds with their own state constitution, which reads, "every citizen of this State owes paramount allegiance to the Constitution and government of the United States, and no law or ordinance of the State in contravention or subversion thereof can have any binding force" (Article I §5). They have also broken their swearing-in oath to "support and maintain the Constitution

of the laws of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of North Carolina . . ." (Article VI §7).

Even if Ford and Warren succeeded in laying the legal framework for establishing a state religion, which one would they choose? In the county of Rowan alone, there are fourteen different Christian denominations and one Reform Jewish community. Would Ford and Warren re-establish the Church of England or legally elevate the members of their own religious traditions—the Baptists or Methodists? What status would they grant other Rowan residents, such as Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Catholics, or Jehovah's Witnesses. What about the Reform Jews?

Though Ford and Warren were willing to ignore the North Carolina constitution which guarantees that "no person shall be denied the equal protection of the laws; nor shall any person be subjected to discrimination by the State because of... religion..." (Article I §19), House Speaker Thom Tillis (R-Mecklenburg) was not. Aware that preferential treatment for a particular religion is illegal under the U.S. and North Carolina constitutions, Speaker Tillis announced on April 4, 2013, that the Act would never come to a vote, effectively killing it. By doing so, Ford and Warren were prevented from eroding the wall of separation that has stood in North Carolina for 237 years. ■

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A Trojan Horse: Religious Opposition to the Contraception Mandate

By Aaron Weaver

The Obama Administration recently unveiled new rules to resolve the controversy over the Affordable Care Act's "contraception mandate." Churches and church-related groups such as associations and denominations continue to be fully exempt from the requirement to provide contraception coverage on their health insurance plans. However, a new proposed rule will grant an accommodation to a non-profit religious employer with a moral objection to providing contraception coverage. This accommodation would direct the health insurance company that the employer contracts with to provide separate coverage to an employee on the insurer's dime.

Not surprisingly, this accommodation did not satisfy the Obama Administration's many critics who have loudly insisted that the president is waging a "war on religion." Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, called these new proposed rules "minor modifications" that are "a distinction without a difference, a work-around that doesn't work." Anderson declared that the new changes are "bad news for all who love religious freedom." The Catholic Church did not welcome and affirm the new proposal either. David Gibson of Religion News Service captured Cardinal Timothy Dolan's response with a report titled "Catholic Bishops Rebuff Modified Contraception Mandate."

Just three days after these new rules were announced, the Southern Baptist Convention's ethics agency signed an *amicus* brief filed with the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals which concluded that the new rules continue to violate both religion clauses of the First Amendment. Denny Burk, a professor at Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary and popular bombastic blogger, declared that the Obama Administration's original rule proposal "was a shell-game, and this latest 'change' is only more of the same." Burk continued, "Obamacare's abortion mandate is the most egregious violation of religious liberty that I have ever seen. It must not stand. Let's hope and pray that it doesn't."

Samuel "Dub" Oliver, president of East Texas Baptist University, also voiced his displeasure with the new proposed rules. When his school filed a federal lawsuit alongside Houston Baptist University last year, Oliver claimed that the Obama Administration had offered "the narrowest definition of a religious institution ever propagated by the federal government." In response to the new proposal, Oliver told a local reporter, "People say you won because the government has said you don't have to provide [contraception] as part of your health plan. That's what they're saying, but they've created this separate thing that we're going to have to indirectly fund or attach ourselves to."

There is something incredibly ironic about a university president complaining about having to "indirectly fund" something deemed morally objectionable. Baptist schools like East Texas Baptist might not be able to survive in the absence of indirect (and direct) funding from the government. When state legislators were considering cuts to the taxpayer-funded Tuition Equalization Grant scholarship program, Oliver and every other president from a private Christian college and university in the state of Texas banded together and started shouting from the rooftops.

For the sake of honesty, Oliver

and other outspoken opponents of the contraception mandate ought to acknowledge that indirect funding is not some new heinous crime against religious liberty. Taxpayers across our nation at the local, state, and federal levels have been forced to indirectly (sometimes directly) subsidize something they do not agree with whether it be cervical screenings at Planned Parenthood, a misguided war or military action or a thoroughly sectarian (distinctly evangelical) education offered at Oliver's East Texas Baptist.

I do wonder whether this continued controversy is really about religious liberty. Let's be honest here: Christian conservatives have not done a great job defending the Helwysian vision of universal religious freedom in recent decades. They have, however, done a swell job of advocating for a "religious liberty" that privileges Christians above all. This penchant for privilege is seen in their consistent support for voucher programs in the evangelical-dominated South and no-strings-attached federal aid to Christian churches and organizations to provide social services. So, it is a bit humorous to see the Southern Baptist ethics agency invoke the Establishment Clause in their argument against the contraception mandate. Southern Baptists, like most Christian conservatives, have flippantly disregarded the Establishment Clause for many years now.

Southern Baptist executive O.S. Hawkins, president of Southern Baptist's Guidestone Financial Resources, recently tipped his hat to what I believe is the real motivation of many Christian conservatives in this ongoing controversy. Hawkins said of the new proposed rules: "We recognize, with regret, that these proposed regulations do not achieve the

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A Modest Proposal for an Ideal Social Order

By Roger E. Olson

What a subject! And such a task! The enormity of it is overwhelming, so all I intend to do here is give a bare bones, that is skeletal, outline of what I regard as the ideal social order. It draws on what I understand to be the social principles of the Kingdom of God tempered by present realities. Thus, this vision assumes an “already but not yet” idea of the Kingdom. For example, I assume that in the Kingdom to come, people will not need external incentives to invent, create and work for the common good. Here, under the conditions of sin, we do. However, I do not assume that everyone is totally depraved so that there is no altruism alive in people. And I assume the reality of common grace ameliorating the depravity of humanity and making some measure of civil righteousness possible in the secular order.

I assume that representative democracy is the best form of government with the state being accountable to the people through elected representatives and kept from absolute power by a set of checks and balances. I also assume that the ideal social order is constitutionally based with strong protections of civil rights such as we have in the Bill of Rights. I DON'T assume that our American form of government is necessarily the best possible. I think representative democracy can take several structural forms such as our three branches of government with one person, the chief executive, as head of government and head of state, or a parliamentary system with two separate persons as heads of state and government. A constitutional monarchy can also be an example of representative democracy. The Swiss Federation, the Republic of Switzerland, has a government that looks very little like that of the United States but is neverthe-

less a true democracy.

Where my vision of an ideal social order will probably become controversial, especially with many conservatives in the United States, is my belief in basic human rights beyond those explicitly stated in our Bill of Rights.

What is the basis of my vision of the ideal social order? It is twofold: my understanding of the Kingdom of God (what life in it will look like because of Jesus Christ as its head) and the social contract theory of philosopher John Rawls.

Now, I know some folks will get off board immediately when I mention Rawls—especially some Christians who abhor his secular liberalism. I say we can plunder the Egyptians. That is, the fact that Rawls was a secular humanist (so far as I know) does not invalidate everything he said. In fact, I find some of his ideas (not his secular humanism or overall liberalism) to be something like what missiologist Don Richardson called “created analogies for the gospel” in cultures yet untouched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Another way of putting it is Justin Martyr’s idea of the *logos spermatikos*—the “seed of the logos” in everyone. Yet another way of putting it is Clement of Alexandria’s maxim, “all truth is God’s truth.”

Rawls (in *A Theory of Justice*) argued that justice is fairness and fairness is what most people would decide (as social policy) under the “veil of ignorance.” He asked readers to imagine an “original condition” (like a social convention prior to any actual social order) in which people have opportunity (and necessity, I assume) to decide on the rules under which they will live. In this original condition all the participants decide under the veil of ignorance. That is, they do not know what their

actual “place” in society will be once the veil is lifted and the social order commences. They do not know, for example, whether they will be advantaged or disadvantaged. All they know is that there will be inequalities.

The question is: What would people decide about an ideal social order under the veil of ignorance? Well, who can know for sure? I don’t read Rawls as claiming he knows with certainty. But he put forth suggestions and argued for them. I happen to agree with him. He argues that most people under the veil of ignorance, not knowing their vested interests, would opt for an ideal society ruled by the “maximin principle.” (As a liberal Rawls also argues they would establish maximum individual freedom balanced by the maximin principle.) What is the maximin principle? It is the maximizing of the minimum.

First, Rawls assumes, and I agree, that people generally need incentives to invent, create and produce. Short of the Kingdom, people will not be at their most productive without the promise of the possibility of financial reward. Rawls also assumes, and I agree, that wealth (in the broadest sense, not just money) can be created. Without financial incentives, most people will not contribute to the creation of wealth which is important for the common good.

Second, however, Rawls assumes and I agree, that under the veil of ignorance people will want to protect themselves from destitution *in case* it turns out they are disadvantaged such that they are not in a position to reap the rewards of productivity.

So, third, Rawls argues, and I agree, under the veil of ignorance people will structure their ideal social order so that there are genuine possibilities for financial gain but combined with structures that will automatically raise

the standard of living of the disadvantaged as the advantaged produce and prosper. Rawls rejected the idea that a rising tide automatically raises all the boats. And I agree. “Trickle down economics has not worked.” Since the “Reagan revolution,” the rich have been getting richer and the poor have been getting poorer (in America).

Rawls was clearly seeking to justify redistribution of wealth and I agree that it is necessary. We cannot tolerate a social order in which the rich simply continue to become richer and the poor continue to get poorer and the middle class thins out.

However, what does “redistribution of wealth” mean? In my experience, too many people react to the term in knee jerk fashion assuming it means monetary handouts to the undeserving poor (those who simply refuse to work for a living). That is not what I mean by it and I do not think that is what Rawls or most social liberals want.

I’m going to leave Rawls’ specific proposals behind now and offer my own proposals. I think what most people under the veil of ignorance would want for their ideal social order (out of self-interest if nothing else) is not a “welfare state” where people are rewarded for not working. What they would want, and create, is a social order in which everyone has opportunity to improve their standards of living, a social order in which work and credit are guaranteed, but not without qualifications.

The right to meaningful employment resulting in a living wage was part of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “Second Bill of Rights” (1944). It is also part of modern Catholic social teaching. Some call it socialism. I won’t be deterred by labels. The right to meaningful employment with a living wage is, I believe, as much a basic human right as the right to free speech. It’s the next step in a truly enlightened progressive social order.

Redistribution of wealth, then, would not be “taking from the rich to give to the poor.” It would be taking from the advantaged to give oppor-

tunity to the disadvantaged, opportunity to participate in the economic life of the society (per the U.S. Catholic bishops). Such is for the common good. Without it, eventually, a chronically underemployed class will develop which will result in revolution, violent or otherwise.

So how does this fit with the need for incentives? The jobs offered by the government would be minimal in terms of salaries or wages. People in those jobs would not be as prosperous as they would be working in the private sector. But neither would they be homeless or destitute. Part of their job situation would be training for work in the private sector and/or the offer of low interest loans to start their own businesses and get out of government employment.

This would totally replace “welfare” in any traditional sense. In other words, in this ideal social order, everyone capable of working would be required to work, if nothing else by picking up trash along roadways. If they have children not yet in school, the government would provide child care during the hours they work. They would be required to be seeking employment in the private sector. Anyone who simply refused to work would have their children taken away and put in foster care or humane institutions (with visitation rights). There would be no cash outlays other than temporary emergency assistance (in the form of vouchers) and disability income for the truly disabled.

The only way to make this work would be to have a sufficiently high minimum wage for the private sector to make employment there attractive.

So what about those median situations where persons are in the “working poor” category and need partial assistance such as food stamps? In my ideal social order that would be available but able-bodied people receiving food stamps or any other form of government assistance would be required to do some kind of work to earn it. Work is humanizing; not working and receiving financial assistance (when one is able to work) is dehumanizing.

I truly believe this is what people would decide for their social order under the veil of ignorance. But some people ask “What is the value of this veil of ignorance if such an original situation never actually exists?” They don’t understand social contract theory. The point is to be able to argue to someone who proposes, supports or imposes a different social order, “That is not what you would propose, support or impose under the veil of ignorance—if you did not know your vested interests and advantages or disadvantages.” It’s a critical principle for supporting certain social policies and opposing others as based solely on advantaged persons’ vested interests. In other words, it’s a form of reasoning.

I think such a social order is compatible with the gospel, with the Kingdom of God. It is at least more compatible with that than are other social orders. And it is realistic about humanity. It recognizes (as communism does not) that we are not yet in the Kingdom.

I also happen to think that people in the original condition, under the veil of ignorance, would create a social order with universal health care parallel with universal education -- that is, open to all, funded by taxes, but not guaranteed to do everything possible. That is, free health care would sustain life and relieve pain but not provide elective surgeries (for example). People would be free to purchase supplemental health insurance for things like replacement of teeth (and crowns), reconstructive surgery, etc.

How would all this be funded? Well, for one thing, by spending less (than America does) on “guns” and more on “butter.” America’s “defense” budget is bloated. Reduce it by half and use the billions upon billions of dollars freed up to guarantee full employment. Much of the defense budget and spending is wasteful. Cut down on top level salaries and spending on high tech weapons that are not necessary to defend our own country. Gradually phase out much of the military (as we are in peace time or could be if

we chose to be) and concentrate our national resources on human development.

I can, of course, anticipate objections from both social-political conservatives (“socialism!”) and Hauerwasian Christians. To the former I say, labels don’t scare me and I think the present order of things is simply inhumane (millions upon millions of homeless persons including children) and too far from anything even vaguely resembling the Kingdom of God for me to be comfortable with it. And my vision isn’t true socialism which, by definition, means public ownership of the means of production. To the latter I say that I don’t understand how it conflicts with authentic Christianity to propose and support social reforms. The reforms I here propose would take place by public choice through elections of representatives who support and enact them. I’m not advocating violent revolution. Nor am I advocating that Christians “take the reins of power” and use violent means to control or manage history.

Admittedly, what I have offered here is far from comprehensive. And, of course, “the devil is in the details.” But it seems to me every proposed social order arrangement has problems of implementation. It’s a matter of setting forth principles and then, through trial and error, making them work. We do it all the time. My proposal is simply that Christians and others who agree adopt this basic proposal and begin working together toward its implementation fixing problems as we go. The basic outline is similar, of course, to ones already being implemented, in varying ways, in some northern European countries and Canada. I see no reason why the United States of America cannot learn from those social orders and move in their direction in our own way. Ours will be distinctly American just as theirs are distinctly Canadian and Scandinavian, etc.

Someone may ask what’s distinctly *Christian* about this proposal? Well, the motivation--Christian humanism

(as I have described it here at least twice before) -- and our desire to approximate the humane community of the future Kingdom of God as much as possible within history. And, of course, our love for the disadvantaged and for the common well being of the human community because of the grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. ■

Roger E. Olson was recently named to the Foy Valentine Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University.

Bid for State Religion Fails

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The People Vs. The Prophets

(continued from page 15)

ation of Tiananmen Square has been accompanied by a rise in religious feeling--a new interest in Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity. She thought for a moment and looked at me. ‘Among the young, I would say their religion is money,’ she said. I nodded and said, ‘Oh, that’s our religion too.’”

The other quote is from Professor John Schneider of Calvin College, who wrote: “It is possible to envision a time when evangelicals have the ‘consistent Christian perspective tools’ [or holistic economic worldview] they require in this area of life. But it is probably best to expect Christian theology for life under modern high-tech capitalism to come mainly from where it now does--from Jewish, Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran sources, in which traditions exist for relating doctrines of creation to matters of redemption in a modern economic context.” In less academic words, the study of best practices as advocated by management experts like Peter Drucker suggests evangelicals might deepen humanity’s sensitivities to the plight of the unborn and such while the rest of us evangelize the evangelicals before they unwittingly evangelize the world for capitalism with sins of commission and omission. ■

Gary Moore is a Sarasota-based investment counselor who has authored many publications and articles on the morality of political-economy and personal finance. His comments are included in the More Good \$ense newsletter in an effort to expand stewardship leaders’ understanding of broader economic issues.

Poverty in Paradise

By Angela Fields

Most children have grandiose dreams of what they would like to be when they become an adult. For me, I never really had a dream. I mean, I have always wanted to become someone of significance but I had no idea how it would happen. My upbringing, neighborhood and family life, never brought to bear the notion that greater possibilities were obtainable. Therefore, it feels rather surreal that I am writing this essay as a masters-prepared woman. I also never imagined that I would garner a seat at a luncheon for the United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.

At the luncheon held during the Democratic National Convention, Duncan addressed the importance of early childhood education. As it stands, the future of seven and eight year olds is defined by the third grade. According to a study conducted by Professor Donald J. Hernandez of CUNY–Hunter College, the third grade is so critical because it is the first time students make the transition from “learning to read to reading to learn.”² Third graders now have to understand different concepts and dissect the information for themselves.³

Duncan drove home Hernandez’s point that children who do not make the transition fast enough will begin to fall behind. The study conducted by Hernandez also found that “third-graders who lack proficiency in reading are four times more likely to become high school dropouts.”⁴

Now, let us incorporate the element of poverty. Poverty subjugates opportunities for children to develop skills and talents lauded by society.⁵ A “host of social, political, cultural, and economic factors...contribute to a... culture of poverty”⁶ which adds to the devastation the least valued people have to endure. Drugs, gang activity, mass unemployment, abandoned homes and businesses, crowded and

noisy households, synergized with less social support, underfunded schools and lack of access to books and computers make rebounding nearly imperious.⁷

I sat still on the train a few weeks ago listening to a group of women bash public schools who fall behind. She said, “My husband finally has a job at a charter school in Milwaukee, you know... a school where students actually want to learn.” Laughter erupts as her friends clamored in agreement. The phrase “with children who want to learn” bounced from my ear to my heart and made its home there.

The woman on the train continued, “I am so happy he is no longer teaching in public schools. He can actually enjoy his job.” I was speechless.

Having lived through this experience, it saddens me to hear people stereotype students who struggle without a full understanding of the barriers imposed on them. But it is also fair to say, some people just do not care. Researchers have examined many dimensions of poverty and education citing acculturation, traumatic stress, or lack of positive fixtures as being the *real* problem with these students.

Poverty, and its effects, is so multifaceted that each study could be accurate. While not pointing any fingers, as to the cause and effect of this poverty, I ruminate on the tension of the struggle under-developed adolescents face by the time they reach high school. Mental anguish and exhaustion may prove too great and many adapted to the life in view. In other words, many give up as the pull of poverty in ‘paradise’ is much too burdensome to handle.

With a lot of help, I was able to withstand the pull of poverty, but now I faced a new battle. I had to overcome the constant feeling of being left behind. I was woefully unprepared for

life and had to excel with a fractionalized education. For years, I never joined conversations because I felt as if I could not contribute anything meaningful. As a result, my voice, gifts and talents were suppressed.

Again, I am not pointing any fingers for the woes of a fractionalized education. It would just add another finger to the groups of fingers that are already extended at someone or something. However, I am saying that in moving forward, the proverbial “we” should be mindful of the legislative decisions which further negatively impact those living with the effects of poverty and of receiving a substandard education.

It seems as if local and national budget issues almost always affect education and safety net programs. The sequestration affects the two funding area that under-served children need the most. The stability of a student’s home is as equally important as that of a student’s school life.

Legislating budget cuts that would adversely affect the disenfranchised to assist the wealthiest creates an unnecessary crisis. Cutting funding to safety net programs damages students who families are facing economic hardships. Cutting funding to struggling already underfunded schools stretches teachers who are forced to do more with less and makes hiring much-needed social workers for the children impossible. Moreover, with the onset of charter schools, the majority of students who need the focused attention of such a school are exempt from attending.

Everyone has troubles. As long as we are living, this life brings plenty. However, additional problems compounded onto the fragile situation could cripple a class of people for generations.

This is where my divinely appointed calling hit its highest point. I have a Mosaic calling to be a voice for the disadvantaged and marginalized commu-

nity. Moses was the first community advocate according to the dynamics of Exodus 5. Moses, in Exodus 5 could be understood as a freeing agent for a particular group of people who 'utter(ly felt a) sense of helplessness' ⁸ because of an uninformed legislative system." Therefore, Moses was seeking a sociopolitical transformation.

I am called to facilitate complex collaborative conversations between the community and the power source. I am working as someone who has lived among both groups of people. I realize the hurdles involved in first breaking through to stereotype and disclose a person worthy of a conversation.

Exodus 5:15-18, paints a picture of hardened labor as a result of systemic deficiencies; laborers are subsequently stereotyped as lazy. The inherent stereotyping of the people could lead one to believe that their own laziness is the core of their hardship. However, the text depicts hard-working people with little opportunity for upward mobility. The misconception by the entities in power kept the people self-repressed.⁹ Hence, the demoralization is engrafted into the people causing them to lose faith in their voice. Moses' goal as community activist and advocate was to represent the community on key issues and facilitate conversations designed to enlighten powerful groups on how to respond to the plight of the people. Advocates are responsible for improving communities by addressing power issues,

solving conflicts, proposing improvements, setting goals, and creating positive change.

Children who struggle under the pressures of poverty and inadequate educational opportunities through no fault of their own, grow into labels that become indicative of who they are. Dysfunctional, unintelligent and lazy are labels placed on top of hard work and confined effort. I can attest that even if one manages to escape the environment, the labels are championed in larger arenas. The solution is to provide a level of equity for the children through education or teaching them to collect straw. This measure will demonstrate worth and help the people grow out of poverty. In essence, let the people go so that they may celebrate and come to themselves as ordained by the Creator.

Community advocates also mobilize the communities toward conducive efforts with the hope of creating a new community. The new communal atmosphere allows all people to come together around a common cause and act in support of everyone's shared interests. But to further increase the requirements while removing the necessary elements results in divine accountability.

As the narrative ends, Moses learns that liberation is a slow and tireless process. I, too, understand it will take time; dedication and sacrifice to reach this goal. I also understand that it will be hard to achieve without God and

a vision. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8 NIV) ■

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A Trojan Horse

(continued from page 20)

ultimate goal of removing objectionable forms of contraception coverage from the health care arena." Did you get that? Religious liberty is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is not an expansive exemption for those with a conscience claim. The ultimate goal is to deny women access to contraception! Wow. Hawkins should be thanked for his honesty. For the sake of religious liberty, let's hope others will be more honest moving forward. ■

Aaron Weaver is Communications Manager for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Weaver blogs at *The Big Daddy Weave* and is the author of *James M. Dunn and Soul Freedom* (Smyth & Helwys, 2011). This article first appeared at

"In 2007, 10 companies owned 67 percent of the seed market. These corporations control the playing field, because they influence the government regulators. They've been known to snatch up little-known varieties of seeds, patent them, and demand royalties from farmers whose ancestors have grown the crops for centuries. The result is that our seeds are disappearing, and we miss out on the exquisite tastes and smells of an enormous variety of fruits and vegetables."

Rick Burnette, Agri-missionary.

Mainstreaming Homosexuality for Christians?

By Mary Sue Abbott

So many articles in the magazine, which I find very interesting, seem to be taking the view that since so many people are changing their minds and taking an attitude of “times are a-changing” that we must all accept mainstreaming homosexual behavior and “gay” marriage. We risk doing great harm to the family unit that provides the stability and security children need by allowing any alternative “pairings” or other innovations to marriage to compromise our biblical understanding of the honorable estate instituted by God.

My political views are practically all liberal democrat. I am opposed to abortion on demand but fear any legal interference that would keep a doctor from giving and acting on his or her best medical advice. I fear the idea that a doctor and patient, following good medical judgment, could have that choice criminalized. So I must be pro-choice.

The desire for homosexual activity

has not been and likely never will be scientifically proved to be an immutable trait. Even if it were would participating in these kinds of intimacies be the best decision for a Christian? Even if a beloved friend or family member “came out” I would not endorse or encourage their relationships though my love and respect for them would remain unchanged.

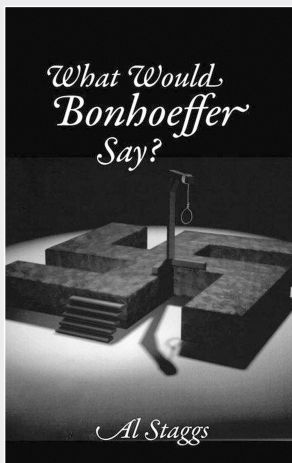
If a daughter should have given birth out of wedlock my support and love would be unwavering but I would have advised against any more sex outside marriage. I sense an attitude of since everybody is accepting lifestyles that reject traditional marriage then those of us who cling to this standard must “get with the program.”

Much strong evidence exists that children have a much better chance to flourish when raised within the corral of a loving, responsible, legal marriage of their biological or adoptive mothers and fathers. In California public

school teachers are being required to present homosexuality in a positive light and incorporate the achievements of “gay” people in their lessons even if some cases these persons never self-identified as “gay.” I can’t imagine a music teacher playing a recording of the “Nutcracker Suite” to a group of fourth graders and then telling those children that Tchaikovsky was probably gay.

Is it not in keeping with Christian ethics for those of us who have the immutable trait of being persuaded that marriage is between a man and a woman and that homosexual activity is unwise, unhealthy and displeasing to God? ■

Mary Sue Abbott is a reader of Christian Ethics Today and is a member of Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. This response to our Special Issue is representative of several we received and expresses the opinion of many readers.



We will send you a copy of Al Staggs' new book,
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Feeding the Homeless as a First Amendment Right

By Carissa Gigliotti, Houston Graduate School of Theology

In recent years, an increasing number of municipalities are enacting laws that restrict individuals' rights to feed the homeless in public places. Many Christians see feeding and caring for the poor and standing up for justice as clear biblical mandates. Christian churches and organizations in many cities have sued the government, claiming that homeless feeding bans violate their First Amendment right to free exercise of religion. This paper will highlight cases in Las Vegas, Orlando, and Philadelphia and the potential impact of their outcomes.

Free Exercise of Religion

Beginning with *Sherbert v. Varner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963), the Supreme Court used a "compelling interest" test to determine whether a law violated the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.¹ This meant that "any law that burdens religion must be subjected to strict scrutiny and can be upheld only if the government has a compelling interest in the law's enforcement."² However, in 1990, in *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990), the Supreme Court rejected the "compelling interest" test and established a new "neutral law" standard.³ This means that "all citizens must obey the law, and neutral laws of general applicability, including those that burden religion."⁴

After outcry from religious groups in response to *Smith*, the United States Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in 1993 to legislatively restore the "compelling interest" test in Free Exercise situations.⁵ But, in 1997, the Supreme Court struck the law down with respect to state and local governments in *City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507 (1997).⁶ As a response to the Court's erosion of First Amendment free exercise protections

in *Smith* and their rejection of RFRA, a number of states enacted their own legislation to re-establish the "compelling interest" test.⁷ Though not all religious advocacy groups support the enactment of a state RFRA, they may help churches combat local "anti-homeless" laws.

Anti-Homeless Laws

In recent years, cities all across the United States, such as Myrtle Beach, Cincinnati, Denver, Fort Lauderdale, Phoenix, San Diego, and Atlanta, have passed municipal ordinances

In some cities, religious groups have successfully worked together with their elected officials to craft laws that both protect the municipality's interests and the homeless' rights.

restricting or prohibiting the sharing of food with homeless persons.⁸ According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), cities have used four main tactics to stifle food sharing in public places, including: permit requirements, imposition of group size limitations, zoning restrictions, and selective statute enforcement.^{9,10}

Matt Pearce, in his *Los Angeles Times* article, "Homeless Feeding Bans: Well-meaning Policy or War on the Poor?" explained the two competing sides of the homeless feeding debate when he said that "city officials usually cite safety and public health when trying to regulate the feeding of homeless people, which is often the province of religious groups

for whom giving alms and comfort to the poor is as much an act of compassion as a part of religious doctrine."¹¹

Homeless advocates like the NLCHP feel that serving food in public parks "not only nourishes people in need, but also may help connect them to services that could help them move off of the street."¹² The NLCHP argues that "the moral imperative to care for the neediest among us and preserve and protect the human dignity of all people is a deeply entrenched American value. It is reflected in the religious beliefs and practices of Americans of diverse faiths and in [the country's] most sacred political writings and foundational documents."¹³

A Biblical Mandate to Feed the Poor

Living justly and showing care for the poor were requirements God placed on the people of Israel.¹⁴ These same principles are reinforced for Christians through the teachings of Jesus. In Lk. 4:18, Jesus tells those he is teaching in the synagogue that he has come "to bring good news to the poor" (NRSV). Many of Jesus' teachings reveal God's care for the poor.¹⁵ Jesus even says that the kingdom is prepared for those who care for the least among them (Mt. 25:34-40). Christians believe this passage requires them to feed the hungry because Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Mt. 25:40).

Since biblical times, Christians have shown care and concern for the needy.¹⁶ Some Christians feel that the best way to demonstrate concern for the poor is reaching people where they already are. This is one of the reasons why individuals and organizations are leaving the walls of their churches and taking food into the streets where the homeless

live, even in the face of persecution under homeless feeding bans.¹⁷ These Christians who are guided by their faith to operate regardless of the potential risks to themselves while fighting against the “criminalization of homelessness” can find plenty of encouragement from Scripture.¹⁸

Churches and Religious Groups Fight Back

In some cities, religious groups have successfully worked together with their elected officials to craft laws that both protect the municipality’s interests and the homeless’ rights.¹⁹ However, other cities have not responded to this method of engagement. On the basis of their biblical mandate to care for the needy and feed the poor, religious organizations in some cities have sued their local governments, challenging anti-feeding statutes on First Amendment grounds and under their states’ RFRA laws. Three such lawsuits, brought in Las Vegas, Orlando, and Philadelphia, are the focus here.²⁰

On July 19, 2006, the Las Vegas City Council approved an ordinance that made it a crime to give out free or low cost meals to homeless persons in city parks.²¹ Proponents of the ordinance, including local residents, claimed that attracting the homeless to parks made them unusable by others.²² The ordinance would have required law enforcement personnel to be able to distinguish a homeless person from a non-homeless person based on who looks like they could receive food stamps or government assistance.²³ Opponents of the ordinance noted that public parks where many homeless persons congregated were often miles from the area of the city where the soup kitchens were located, making travel to them difficult.²⁴ Often, removal of the homeless from areas near soup kitchens was done through police sweeps of the area.²⁵

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Nevada filed a request for preliminary injunction to stop enforcement of the feeding

ban.²⁶ In August 2007, the U.S. District Court granted a permanent injunction on the homeless feeding ban.²⁷ In 2012, the City Council voted to change the rules pertaining to homeless persons in public parks, including removing the 2006 language which had been declared unconstitutional by the district court.²⁸

Just days after Las Vegas approved a homeless feeding ban in public parks, the City of Orlando passed a similar ordinance. The July 24, 2006 law made it illegal to serve food to groups over 25 people on public property within two miles of City Hall without a permit.²⁹ Like in Las Vegas, proponents of the Orlando ban were home and business owners who said the homeless prevented

Perhaps the most encouraging case for the church in the struggle against homeless feeding bans comes from Philadelphia.

them from using the park and made the area less safe.³⁰ Christian opponents of the law said that it was God’s will for them to feed the homeless in this area.³¹

In October 2006, the Florida ACLU sued the City on behalf of two groups, Orlando Food Not Bombs and the First Vagabonds Church of God, claiming the ordinance violated their First Amendment rights.³² Orlando Food Not Bombs is a political group that believes food is an essential human right and feeding the homeless is a form of expression; First Vagabonds Church was started by Pastor Brian Nichols, who was himself formerly homeless, to serve this population.³³ Each Sunday, approximately 40 church members participated in a worship service held in a public park, including partaking of the sacrament of communion,

an important part of their religious tradition.³⁴ Since it is food sharing, communion would also have been prohibited.

The district court judge ruled against the City, stating that the ordinance did not serve a legitimate governmental interest and “more than incidentally burden[ed]” the congregation’s free exercise of their religion.³⁵ The City was therefore enjoined (stopped) from enforcing the ordinance.³⁶ However, on July 6, 2012, a three-judge panel of the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the district court’s ruling, stating that the ordinance did not violate the church’s First Amendment free exercise rights because the ordinance was neutral, generally applicable, and had a rational basis.³⁷ In protest, members of Orlando Food Not Bombs are still feeding the homeless in public parks in violation of what they consider to be an unconstitutional law.³⁸

Perhaps the most encouraging case for the church in the struggle against homeless feeding bans comes from Philadelphia. On June 1, 2012, the City of Philadelphia passed an ordinance that prohibited feeding more than three people in public parks, making exceptions for family picnics and City-sponsored events.³⁹ Opponents of the ordinance said that this was the Mayor’s attempt to keep the homeless away from tourist attractions, while the Mayor argued that his goal was to move food sharing indoors for the safety and dignity of the homeless.⁴⁰

The ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of four Christian churches and organizations, Chosen 300 Ministries, The Welcome Church, the King’s Jubilee, and Philly Restart, claiming that the feeding ban violated the Pennsylvania Religious Freedom Protection Act (PRFPA) and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.⁴¹ On July 12, 2012, Judge William H. Yohn, Jr. granted a temporary injunction against the City’s enforcement of the feeding ban while the case was being decided.⁴²

Then, on August 9, 2012, Judge Yohn issued his final decision, permanently prohibiting the City from enforcing the feeding ban, but not a requirement to participate in food safety training prior to such public feeding on City property.⁴³

This case included expert testimony and evidence from each of the religious groups stating their conviction that feeding the homeless was a “fundamental tenet” of their faith and a “religious obligation.”⁴⁴ They also believe that part of their mission is to minister to the homeless “where they are found.”⁴⁵ Under the PRFPA, a municipal agency cannot substantially burden a person’s exercise of their religion without the ability to prove that their actions represent a compelling interest and that they are using the least restrictive means of accomplishing the goal.⁴⁶ Since the ordinance prohibits sharing food with the homeless and needy anywhere near where they sleep along Benjamin Franklin Parkway, the ministries that have within their mission to minister to the poor where they are found would no longer be able to do this; therefore, Judge Yohn determined that this prohibition did constitute a “substantial burden” of their free exercise rights under PFRPA.⁴⁷ The City has appealed the decision.

Potential Impact of Philadelphia Decision on Free Exercise

In his opinion in *Chosen 300 Ministries v. Philadelphia*, Judge Yohn

stood up for the protection of various forms of religious expression and against government attempts to define what activities “count” as authentic practices of one’s faith. Mayor Nutter and the City attempted to reason that because the feeding ban did not stop churches or individuals from “praying or preaching or reading the Gospel or engaging with the homeless,” that it was not a violation of their rights of free expression.⁴⁸ Judge Yohn reminded the Mayor and the City that it was neither within their authority nor the court’s to determine the significance of one religious act over another.⁴⁹ Judge Yohn also stated that “there is a strong public interest in protecting the free exercise of religion” and that the “food-sharing programs benefit the public interest.”⁵⁰

Christians have a responsibility to stand up for the rights of those who lack a voice in government.

If Judge Yohn’s opinion holds up through the appeal process, religious groups, particularly those in states with RFRA laws will have a strong precedent to rely on to bring lawsuits to stop anti-homeless laws like feeding bans. This is a pivotal time in First Amendment free exercise law.

Religious people are in a position to be a strong voice for the rights to care for the homeless. As has been seen in cities like Philadelphia, a small group of active, concerned citizens can challenge unjust laws and make a difference to the homeless in their communities. Those already engaged in the fight against criminalization of homelessness will not doubt be watching what unfolds in Philadelphia closely.

Conclusion

Justice, care, and concern for the poor are foundational tenets of the Christian faith that are shared with a number of other religious traditions. Secular poverty and homeless groups and some for-profit companies also share this mission and are allies in the quest to care for the poor. Christians have a responsibility to stand up for the rights of those who lack a voice in government. While the first course of action should be to listen to and openly sit at the table of dialogue with local government officials regarding homelessness issues, if this approach fails, the courts may be an option. If the trend started by Judge Yohn in the Philadelphia case is upheld on appeal and continues in other states, religious groups will have another viable avenue to challenge laws that prevent them from living out the biblical mandate to care for the poor. ■

The full bibliography and footnotes are found on the web version on our website.

"Of making many books there is no end..." Ecclesiastes 12:12 NRSV

Modern Shapers of Baptist Thought in America

by William Powell Tuck (Richmond, Virginia: Center for Baptist Heritage & Studies, 2012. 544 pages. Hardcover, \$45.00. Paperback, \$24.00)

Reviewed by Fisher Humphreys

In the four centuries since the Baptist movement was launched, Baptists have become immensely diverse. President Jimmy Carter is a Baptist; so are the members of Topeka's Westboro Baptist Church which pickets the funerals of American soldiers. Liberal Carlyle Marney was a Baptist, and so was Fundamentalist Jerry Falwell.

The diversity in Baptist life is evident in a splendid new book by William Powell Tuck. It contains essays on the life and work of 24 Baptists who have been influential in America over the past century.

In each essay Tuck explains why the person is important. There are chapters about a musician, a historian, an evangelist, a university chaplain, two political leaders, three African-Americans, four women, and at least six of the best-known preachers in America in the twentieth century.

Those who are remembered as professors include persons who wrote about the Bible, ethics, church history, sociology of religion, pastoral care, and preaching. Those who are remembered as pastors served megachurches and tiny churches, urban churches and country churches, traditional churches and innovative churches.

Tuck gives us more than biographical vignettes of his subjects. He carefully discusses their ethics and theology and how these shaped their lives and their work in the church and the world.

In the chapters about pastors and other preachers, Tuck provides a magisterial review of their sermons. Tuck has taught preaching in several schools, and his studies of these pastors provide multiple insights into some of the great sermons of the twentieth century.

Tuck also provides something I had not anticipated, an assessment of the legacy of each of his subjects. This is an important contribution, and I found the assessments to be judicious.

Baptists' greatest contribution is probably their commitment to religious liberty. Tuck displays this

beautifully in a chapter on a feisty defender of religious liberty, James M. Dunn. The Baptist passion for missions is evident in the chapter about Alma Hunt. Baptists' love for good preaching is evident in several chapters, perhaps especially in the chapter about Gardner Taylor. Baptists' commitment to evangelism is clear in the chapter about Billy Graham. Baptists' love for the Bible and for the study of the Bible is seen in several chapters, too, perhaps most fully in the chapter about Frank Stagg.

There is a great deal of ethical thought in this book. The chapter on Walter Rauschenbusch displays the theological ethics that underlies the social gospel. The chapter on Martin Luther King, Jr., displays the theological ethics that underlies the civil rights movement. There is a chapter on Henlee Barnette who was an influential professor of Christian ethics during the twentieth century.

Tuck is an excellent story-teller. He provides insightful details without losing the big picture. He shows how his subjects lived out their theology and ethics in their lives and work. This book is a joy to read, and I recommend it enthusiastically. ■

"I am outraged at the proposals that say we should both give the richest Americans more tax cuts AND take 70% of the cuts in federal spending from programs that empower poor folk... From 1979-2009, the bottom 20% of American families saw their income drop by 7.4%. For the top 20%, it jumped 49% and for the top 5%, it jumped 73%. In 2010, the top 25 hedge fund managers earned that year a total of 25.3 BILLION dollars – more than a billion per person! And yet some important politicians want to cut even more taxes of these folks...on the backs of poor people."

Ron Sider, president for Evangelicals for Social Action

Through the Year with Jimmy Carter

366 Daily Devotions from the 39th
President by Jimmy Carter; Zondervan,
2011, \$24.00

a book review by Darold Morgan

Most of us have a favorite devotional book for the days of a year, books which have meant much to us spiritually. Browsing recently in a local bookstore, this reviewer found in the new book section this most recent addition from the agile and fertile pen of Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the United States, a book somewhat unlike some of his other volumes.

Forget, if you can, the politi-

cal background of the author, and frankly, rejoice in a day by day awareness that there is an author who has a profound knowledge of the Bible and a remarkable ability to apply biblical truth to everyday life with its endless array of challenges. If you like this day by day guide to your devotional life, this reviewer can guarantee you that this volume will bless and strengthen your quest for personal spiritual insights.

President Carter continues to amaze many of us with his grasp of today's realities and demands, combined with a deep personal faith in God which constitutes the ultimate foundation of his multi-talented life – not far from his ninth decade.

Particularly relevant in his book are the daily prayers which close the comments. Interestingly, these daily guides are excerpts from his Sunday School notes. He has taught -Sunday School in a Baptist church in his hometown of Plains, Georgia for multiple years. These notes form a rich harvest of spiritual commentaries on a wide range of biblical texts. Consider this review also to be a not-so-subtle reminder that most of us would profit from attendance in a good Bible class ourselves – with a good teacher, of course!

This good book deserves a wide circulation. ■

"America has never been an especially capitalist country. The postal system, the land-grant provisions for public education, the national park system, the Homestead Act, the graduated income tax, the Social Security system, Medicare, Medicaid, the G.I. Bill – all of these were and are massive distributions or redistributions of wealth meant to benefit the population at large. The whole point of state universities has been to create an elite so large the name no longer serves, to create a ruling class that is more or less identical with the population."

Marilynn Robinson, quoted by John M. Buchanan in Christian Century, October 3, 2012.

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Christian Ethics Today

A Journal of Christian Ethics

“We need now to recover the prophethood of all believers, matching our zeal for the priesthood of all believers with a passion for the prophethood of all believers.”
—Foy Valentine, Founding Editor

MISSION

The Christian Ethics Today Foundation publishes *Christian Ethics Today* in order to provide laypersons, educators, and ministers with a resource for understanding and responding in a faithful Christian manner to moral and ethical issues that are of concern to contemporary Christians, to the church, and to society.

PURPOSES

- Maintain an independent prophetic voice for Christian social ethics
- Interpret and apply Christian experience, biblical truth, theological insights, historical understanding, and current research to contemporary moral issues
- Support Christian ecumenism by seeking contributors and readers from various denominations and churches
- Work from the deep, broad center of the Christian church
- Address readers at the personal and emotional as well as the intellectual level by including in the Journal narratives, poetry, and cartoons as well as essays
- Strengthen and support the cause of Christian ethics

Christian Ethics Today was born in the mind and heart of Foy Valentine in 1995, as an integral part of his dream for a Center for Christian Ethics. In his words, the purpose of the Journal was “to inform, inspire, and unify a lively company of individuals and organizations interested in working for personal morality and public righteousness.”

When the Center was transferred to Baylor University in June 2000, the disbanding Board voted to continue the publication of *Christian Ethics Today*, appointing a new editor and a new Board. The Journal will continue to be published four times annually.

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