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PROCLAIMING CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL OF LIBERTY

The Economy: an Extreme Makeover

Did you know that for 250 years Americans lovingly provided all social welfare, charity and education for the nation with virtually *no taxes or government bureaucracy*? This American miracle was accomplished locally through families, churches and private associations. In sharp contrast, in America today confiscatory, compulsory taxation and overspending by big government are crippling our productivity and debasing our dollar. America's Comptroller General warns that our government programs are on a "burning platform" and unsustainable.

The good news is that there are real lasting solutions. Professor Marvin Olasky, perhaps the foremost social policy expert in America, in his landmark book, *The Tragedy Of American*

Compassion, says "the key to the future, as always, is understanding the past." He shows, using historical documentation, how we can greatly decrease much of our government's bloated welfare budgets, which are our largest expenditures (next to military costs), through privately directed compassion, thereby saving our social welfare net from bankruptcy and collapse.

America, from its inception, was a Christian experiment. Every institution, including charity for the truly needy, for the elderly, the sick and for education was based upon biblical values. From the time of the Pilgrims, the colonies were a shining example to the world, "a City on a Hill." With very little government and very low taxes they managed to create the world's greatest nation out of a barren wilderness in two centuries.

Marvin Olasky says, "By the 1840's and 1850's [private] societies to help the 'worthy poor'...were springing up in every major American city." To this day the best and most effective care comes from America's army of Christian charities, many of which were founded in the 19th century.

Throughout most of the 19th century, 90% of all charity and welfare was Christian and private. This care provided spiritual renewal, teaching in character skills and occupational training needed to promote upward economic mobility for the needy. All this cost the taxpayer little, since it was accomplished on a local, personal level. With a low tax rate and economic freedom, the standard of living increased 900% in the 19th century.

But by the 1850's, an age-old destructive philosophy that promoted a coercive, powerful government began seeping into the American psyche through men like Horace Greeley, the founder of the *New York Tribune*, and a Universalist (one who believes that all men are saved and good). Greeley promoted the idea that private wealth should be divided up by the government to level the playing field (a form of theft). He also believed that government should be entrusted with



One of thousands of church groups voluntarily rebuilding after hurricane Katrina.

"The functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty and property of their constituents."

Thomas Jefferson

caring for the poor. Greeley's ideas were radical socialism, even before Karl Marx came on the scene.

Henry Raymond, a devout Christian and editor of the *New York Times*, challenged Greeley to a debate which lasted 12 weeks on the front pages of their respective newspapers. Raymond argued powerfully that compassionate charity which cared for the truly needy was best accomplished through individuals and private organizations. He documented that the way to fight poverty was through the personal reformation of individuals through God's regenerating power. But he warned that government control of charity would lead to corruption, bureaucracy and the end of liberty for all. Raymond believed, as did our founders, that because of the sin nature of man, large governments always become corrupt and enslave the people. Thomas Jefferson warned us 200 years ago that "The functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty and property of their constituents."

As the debate continued, Greeley countered with the "social gospel" (false gospel) message that government must reorganize and redistribute wealth in the name of God. He said that giving our wealth to the government to distribute and control welfare was "the duty of ever Christian, every philanthropist." Raymond reasoned that by empowering the government to take over charity, the individual would then forget the mandate to "love his neighbor," assuming that the government would take care of those in need. As we know, that was what happened over the next century and a half.

Raymond won the debate. But through this exposure, Greeley was able to take the lies of utopian socialism and social Darwinism out of the back alleys and radical underground newspapers and move them into the mainstream media. By the 1870's, Boss Tweed and his band of elected thieves had robbed the city of New York of \$160 million. They gave a tiny portion to the poor to buy their votes, as corrupt politicians have done since Ancient Rome.

During the 20th century, American universities were tainted with curricula that promoted a "Robin Hood" socialism. Throughout the

century the tragedy of compassion in the hands of big government unfolded. The tragedy continues today as most people see no alternative to giving much of their income to an all-powerful government to meet the welfare needs of our communities. In reality, by nature, government builds its own burgeoning bureaucracy and increases its own power and wealth.

What can we do to reverse the march to cultural bankruptcy that threatens our nation? Conservative, Christian economist R.E. McMaster speaks of the nearly invisible counter-movement to our statist bureaucracy made up of millions of families and entrepreneurs fighting for freedom. He says, "We are moving back toward freedom-oriented horizontal relationships and clearly away from vertical, slave-like, bureaucratic, centralized relationships, such as those dominating our economy." McMaster exposes the fact that "We haven't seen entrepreneurs shine to this extent since the transition from an agriculture society to the industrial society in the late 1700's and early 1800's."

He concludes his analysis of the challenge ahead. "We are in a desperate race. If won by the agents of moral decentralization, we face the prospect of a glorious, free, prosperous, creative, technological new age. If won by the agents of centralization, we face a statist, bureaucratic, miserable tyranny.... This is a race none of us can escape running. It is a race between the frozen old economic order and the fast-growing new one. It is a race between a free market and no market at all. It is a race between vision, self-sacrifice, and a long-term view versus blindness and indulgence, culminating in short-term death."

Millions of us are caring for our own aged and sick and reaching out to others in need. Millions more are adopting children and helping unwed mothers restore their lives. The light coming from a million points, not from Washington D.C., shines ever more brightly in times of terror or tragedy. As thousands, even millions more of us do our part, lives will be transformed, taxes will decrease, and personal prosperity will explode. That will be an "extreme makeover."

Marshall Foster



"The family is a thousand times better charity than all our machinery [of government]."

Charles Brace, welfare expert and missionary



Founded in 1976, the Mayflower Institute is dedicated to proclaiming Christ's Gospel of liberty to the world, and provides seminars, tours and educational resources to prepare Christians to biblically and historically defend the faith in all areas of culture.

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