Welfare Reform and Private Charity

RELIGION & LIBERTY

May and June • 1997 A Publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty Volume 7 • Number 3

Local Communities Are Charity's Resource of First Resort

Interview: Hon. Rick Santorum

Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum is one of the chief advocates for welfare reform in Congress, especially through his work as a member of the Renewal Alliance—a group of congressmen and senators whose goal is to promote and encourage citizens to become more involved in their local communities and to reduce the dependency on inefficient federal programs.

R&L: What are your views on the nature of the welfare state and the need for its reform?

Santorum: What we have had with our public assistance programs over the past thirty or more years is a system that was very bureaucratic, very clinical. It did not require much, if any, responsibility—in fact, I would argue that it rewarded irresponsibility. And the system did not provide much incentive or opportunity for recipients to escape public assistance programs. In most cases the only contact recipients had with the kind of "help" we were providing was to receive a check—usually from some faceless government worker hiding behind bulletproof glass.

Seeing what these federally run programs have created was evidence enough for me to want to change it. We see teenage girls having children they cannot raise, at alarmingly increasing rates. We see a whole generation of Americans—actually a second generation of Americans—unable to sustain themselves and dependent on the welfare state for very long periods of time. We see crime and drug use pervasive among the very populations we are supposed to be helping. And we see another America, a working and taxpaying America, washing their hands of any concern for these people, frustrated that the money they send to Washington is being wasted. Our welfare system is fracturing what we once considered to be bedrock beliefs in what America is all about. The sense of freedom and opportunity to succeed was simply never instilled in a growing group of Americans. That is why I knew that we had to take this problem on. And we still have a lot more to do.

R&L: Do you think that government and its bureaucratic mentality is a significant part of the problem of the welfare state? And if so, then isn't there a limit to what it can do to reform welfare?

Santorum: Sure, government has been a big part of the problem, but that does not mean it cannot also be part of the solution. There are, however, important and significant limits to what government can do. Government public assistance programs should be the avenue of last resort for people in need—not their primary option. The first place individuals should look to for help is their families, churches, neighborhood groups, and other local solutions because government can never, ever, provide the kind of help that is

INSIDE THIS ISSUE • **Interview:** Hon. Rick Santorum & **Articles:** "Healing Lives, One Person at a Time" by Barbara von der Heydt, and "The New Challenge of Reform" by David Kuo & **Review Essay:** "Learning Charity from an Exemplar" by Amy L. Sherman & **Book Review:** George Grant on Marvin Olasky's *Renewing American Compassion* & **In the Liberal Tradition:** Lyman Beecher & **Column:** "The Only Hope for Civic Renewal" by Rev. Robert A. Sirico & *Plus* **Book News**.

most needed. But government can, and should, be the solution of *last* resort, when help is hard or impossible to find, when there are no other solutions. Encouraging individuals to see the real value in helping themselves first and taking help from people who really care about them is what we should be doing. Government may do a good job of handing out checks or food stamps, but it cannot show the value of faith, of the need for values and self-sufficiency. In many cases government actually discourages these crucial things.

R&L: What is the next step in welfare reform?

Santorum: With the enactment of the new welfare reform law, our challenge lies in providing local communities with the necessary tools to foster the dynamic transition envisioned under the new program. This transition is also dependent upon our capturing the spirit of community involvement, participation, caring, and compassion that will help transcend our old system of welfare. As we seek a greater role by our communities under the new program, we will begin to reshape how our welfare system is viewed. We also will begin to instill greater hope and create opportunities for individuals, touching them more deeply and lifting them higher than any federal program or handout ever could.

R&L: It seems that many people are in favor of eliminating entitlements in general while wanting to retain those government programs that benefit them personally. How do we overcome this powerful disincentive to reform?

Government public assistance programs should be the avenue of last resort for people in need—not their primary option.

Santorum: The key is to clearly show to the people we are supposed to be helping the real deficiencies in government-run public assistance programs. For some people, this is going to be a huge leap of faith, but using the real-life results of many government programs—the loss of dignity, the worsening of social concerns—maybe we can shorten the length of that leap.

R&L: Many say that the drive to reform welfare is more out of a concern for saving money than helping people. How do you respond to this criticism?

Santorum: I know why people would make that charge—but it simply is not true. I wrote the original welfare reform bill and was involved in more meetings, hearings, and floor debate than probably any other member of the House or Senate on this issue over the past four years, and saving money was never a primary factor in this bill. The destruction the previous system caused was all the incentive anyone would ever need in order to want to change it. Speaking for myself, budgetary savings was the last thing on my mind; I was concerned with trying to reform a program that clearly had run amok.

R&L: What are the types of nongovernmental responses to the problems of the welfare state that need to occur in order for welfare reform to be successful?

Santorum: The bulk of public assistance should come primarily from the local level: community efforts, nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, charities, and churches. This

RELIGION & LIBERTY

A Publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty

Volume 7 • Number 3

Publisher: Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Editor: Gregory Dunn

The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty was founded in 1990 to promote Classical Liberal ideas among clergy and individuals who can best effect positive change in the moral climate of our time. The Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, charitable, educational, and literary center. It is supported by donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals and maintains a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Letters and subscription requests should be directed to: Acton Institute, 161 Ottawa St., NW, Suite 301, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 or phone (616) 454-3080.

really gets back to the things that we know work. What works in dealing with the problems of poverty is people who belong to the community and care about those they are serving, not someone hired from the state capital to monitor a caseload, but someone who lives next door, who goes to the same church as the person going through the difficult time in his life. The role of government should be to strengthen these organizations. I am a member of the Renewal Alliance—a group of congressmen and senators—and we are proposing various pieces of legislation to accomplish this.

The Volunteer Protection Act, which I introduced with Senator Coverdell, and my Charity Empowerment package of legislation both seek to reduce the burdens of excessive liability that prevent individuals and businesses from doing the most they can do to help local charities. Also, charity tax credit legislation sponsored by Senator Coats and me will help to free up significant resources to these charities, These are nuts-and-bolts efforts we are taking to give local organizations and churches added strength to combat the problems of the poor. Finally—and this is probably the most important thing—we can lead by example, by going out into the communities and working with individuals, churches, and other organizations at the local level to show what can really be accomplished when people care enough to feed not just stomachs, but souls.

In The Liberal Tradition

Lyman Beecher (1775-1863)

"There is no substitute but the voluntary energies of the nation itself, in associations for charitable contributions and efforts, patronized by all denominations of Christians, and by all classes of the community."

In the early 1800s, Presbyterian divine Lyman Beecher faced a culture in crisis: Alcoholism, poverty, illiteracy, and other social ills were on the rise, and church attendance was in decline. Furthermore, the policy of state-funded, state-established churches was fading. How, then, was the United States—with a republican form of government that requires a virtuous society and a strong private sector—to respond to these challenges?

Lyman Beecher is remembered today primarily through the accomplishments of his children, among whom was abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher, and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe. But in his day, Lyman Beecher, a prominent pastor and latter president of Lane Seminary, was a powerful proponent of moral reform and chief architect of what has been called America's "voluntary establishment" of religion.

Like many of the Founders, Beecher argued that civic morality was indispensable for the preservation of republican government. Furthermore, civic morality could not be maintained without the Christian religion. In his words, "We may form free constitutions, but our vices will destroy them; we may enact laws, but they will not protect us."

But instead of entreating for governmental intervention in the solving of social problems and encouraging morality, Beecher, through his widely circulated sermons and tracts, helped inspire the organization of scores of religious voluntary associations for evangelism and moral reform throughout the towns and cities of the new nation. These groups set out to address those social problems in their own backyards by alleviating poverty, teaching reading and writing to the poor, and preventing alcohol abuse. This project was ultimately so successful that the resulting explosion of such groups caused Alexis de Toqueville to make his often-quoted remark that Americans are "forever forming associations." *A*

Sources: "Church Without State," *Policy Review*, March/April 1996 by John G. West, Jr.; and *The Politics of Reason and Revelation* by John G. West, Jr. (University Press of Kansas, 1996).

R&L: What role can faith-based charities play in all this?

Santorum: Faith-based charities have a vital role to play in lifting people out of poverty, but more important, they have a vital role in lifting people out of their poverty of spirit. I have had the opportunity to visit and work with faith-based charities all across my state and they are truly performing miracles. The success rate of these charities is unparalleled by anything the state has ever run. What we are doing with the Renewal Alliance is highlighting faith-based groups and giving them what support we can to help them accomplish their missions. Faith is the most powerful weapon we have to combat the needs of Americans.

R&L: In a recent speech to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, you expressed concern about Catholic Charities USA's dependency on government funding. That proved to be a somewhat controversial position; could you comment on the reaction your speech received?

Santorum: In that speech, I expressed my concerns about Catholic Charities USA and its loss of a distinctively Catholic identity and mission. From some quarters, the response to my speech was angry, but I hope it will lead to reflection on this issue.

I also hope that this can be an opportunity for a discussion about how to best help the poor and about the role of the nonprofit community in such an effort. We need to have an intellectually honest debate about the unique role that religious charities can play in communities and about how to maximize their special identity within a secular society.

My critique of Catholic Charities started with the facts. Depending on who is talking, it receives sixty-two to sixty-five percent of its budget from government funds. I argued that this reliance on public funds tends to limit their ability to offer the fullness of the Catholic vision to those who seek their help.

From a Catholic point of view, I understand our obligation to the poor to be nonnegotiable. It is my support of this commitment that prompted my concern about government funding to Catholic Charities. I believe that our charities should begin at the humblest level; our charitable duty should be to those closest to us, which allows us to achieve a solidarity with the poor. This suffering with the poor is a critical and effective component of charity. And it is this ennobling part of charity that can be tragically lost when nonprofit activity becomes too sterilized by bureaucracy.

R&L: Do you think that Americans are properly equipped to respond to the human need around them after decades of expecting the state to take care of it? In other words, have the American people lost the habit of charity, and if so, what must we do to restore it?

Santorum: Washington does not have a monopoly on caring. I believe that as caring individuals concerned for the well-being of all Americans, we will end the cycle of dependency caused by the growth of the welfare state. Although our faith in each other may have taken a beating over the years, I still believe that there is a well of compassion that maybe has been dormant for a while, but can be tapped into again. I am very optimistic about what we can accomplish because I meet so many people from all walks of life who are making things happen today. And I also meet so many people who want to help and only need to be pointed in the right direction.

R&L: Finally, do you think our current efforts at welfare reform will be successful?

Santorum: Yes, I think it will. The welfare reform legislation we passed fundamentally redirects the way the federal government provides assistance to children and families in poverty. I was honored to serve on the House-Senate conference committee for the welfare reform bill, and as a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, to have worked with the child nutrition and food stamps programs. The new welfare reform law takes decisive steps in helping those living in cycles of dependency to find the road to a better life. The bill requires work, strengthens families, discourages illegitimacy, demands accountability from parents, and stresses personal responsibility.

The bottom line is that welfare can no longer be a maintenance system where the federal government becomes the caretaker of the poor for years on end, but rather a dynamic personal transition program that prepares individuals who are not working, or not prepared to work, so that they can and will. The new system calls for decentralization and an end to the welfare bureaucracy by empowering local communities and state governors to better respond to specific problems that affect their communities. Is there more to do? Sure. And we are going to continue to monitor how this system works, but there is no question that we are taking public assistance in the right direction. *A*

Healing Lives, One Person at a Time

Barbara von der Heydt

Her name was Anna. Her mother was an alcoholic, and she and her live-in boyfriend were unemployed. Looking for an apartment and a job was overwhelming, because she had never done so before. She had no savings, no furniture, and few clothes. Anna was estranged from her older daughter and her husband. She was cynical and believed in nothing because she had seen little in life to trust. Truth was a matter of expediency to her—she did and said what she needed to, in order to get along, get a check, and keep her subsidized apartment. No, Anna is not an American welfare mother. She came from East Berlin just as the Berlin Wall fell, but she suffers from the same malady as her counterparts in the inner cities of Washington, D.C., New York, and Los Angeles today. The victims of socialism have the same sickness as the victims of the welfare state. Its symptoms are souls atrophied in dependence and decayed in a moral vacuum.

Those who have lived in dependency for three generations have had their substance sucked out of them. As communism did in Central and Eastern Europe, three generations of government dependency in America has destroyed millions of lives, devastating minds and souls. Just as the fall of the Berlin Wall freed millions who were charges of the "nanny state," millions of Americans are now being liberated from the welfare state. With freedom, however, comes responsibility, and many people are terrified. In both the East and the West, they have never had to care for themselves, and do not know how. Far more than material help, they need someone to help them in their job search, tutor their children, and encourage them through the transition. Just as West Germany was unprepared to meet the needs of its East German brothers and sisters, the suburbs are unprepared to meet the needs of the American inner city. The wall is down—will there be cries to erect it again? Both there and here, government cannot provide sufficiently for the millions who have been crippled for three generations. Only individuals with vision can give them what they need most: the love to plant a seed that God will grow.

As communism did in Central and Eastern Europe, three generations of government dependency in America has destroyed millions of lives, devastating minds and souls.

It will take much more than legislation and longer than a few years to reverse the damage both in former communist nations and in the United States. The devastation runs deep. To truly change lives, we must acknowledge that spiritual needs are even more important than material ones. To undo the damage of the welfare state, we must heal the inner lives of its victims, restoring their dignity. But the habits of the heart and mind change slowly, and there is much work to do. To revive these devastated communities, we must heal one person at a time.

Some suggest that shifting responsibility to the private sector will allow greater flexibility in responding to individual needs. Not all private-sector efforts, however, change lives. Some—including a number of mainline, well-funded ones—offer handouts that perpetuate dependency. Private organizations that provide services "no questions asked" and allow people to continue destructive life patterns are just as harmful as government programs that do the same. No number of shelters and free hot meals will change the alcoholic, the drug addict, or the chronically jobless, regardless of who provides them. The only kind of help that will bring about lasting change addresses the root causes of misery.

Life Skills Needed

Welfare recipients need more than an incentive to get a job; they need life skills to be genuinely self-sufficient. What we see in the inner cities are many people who not only have never had a real job but would have trouble keeping one because they have not learned the work ethic, habits of punctuality, and how to follow instructions. If they earn money, few know how to budget or save. Few have had models of how

to live responsibly or how to plan for the future. Their schools are criminalized and indifferent. Teenagers have not been shaped by responsible adults at home. Many children have been physically or sexually abused and have lasting inner damage that makes it hard for them to trust others. Their self-respect is nonexistent. Very few have experienced genuine love. Many welfare mothers are unmarried, not only because there was a financial incentive to remain single but because they have never seen a stable marriage.

This bleak litany is the result of the complete breakdown of the family in the inner city. Families have always been the transmitters of virtue, of vision, and of civilization. There is no adequate substitute. Utter despair drives increasing numbers of even grade school children to commit suicide. Without a family to show children what is good, how can they know it? This void is not something a government agency can, or should, attempt to fill. It can, however, be filled by patient mentors over time. If one responsible adult commits to love one child, it is enough to change both their lives. If parents do not, then others must.

Beyond Good Intentions

One wry observer remarked that the opposite of good is good intentions. Wrong-headed policies will never produce good, regardless of our best intentions. Worse yet, they may actually do harm. Bob Coté, who runs Denver's Step 13, a shelter for homeless men, indicts SSI payments to alcoholics as "suicide on the installment plan." He has documented deaths resulting from drinking binges on the day the checks arrive.

If we are to practice compassion effectively, we need to follow the examples of what works. Marvin Olasky's work blazed a revolutionary trail through the thickets of modern sentimentalism. His ABCs of effective compassion have become watchwords for innovative thinkers.

> External restraints cannot create inner order by imposing it. No laws can make people motivated, responsible, and virtuous, only the law written in the heart.

The questions we need to ask of programs replacing the welfare state now are these:

Affiliation: Does the program build relational bridges from the recipient to family, friends, and community?

Bonding: Is there a direct relationship between the giver and the receiver? Is there a mentor to walk with the recipient over time?

Character: Does the group build good character in the recipients, fostering the virtues of self-restraint, honesty, and reliability?

Discernment: Does the program distinguish between those looking for a handout and those who need a hand up—temporary help to get on their feet? Are solutions tailored to fit the individual?

Employment: Do recipients receive help finding a job and learn an ethic that will enable them to keep it?

Freedom: Do recipients learn to use freedom to make good choices and take responsibility for their actions?

God: Do recipients come closer to knowing their Creator, loving and serving Him? Is this work building His kingdom?

With these criteria in mind, for nearly three years the Acton Institute has been on a nationwide search for what works. It sponsors the annual competition called the Samaritan Awards, which honor the nation's most effective and innovative nonprofits helping the poor. In the course of evaluating more than one thousand four hundred groups that have applied, we have had the opportunity to gain an insight into the nation's best: vibrant, effective, and for the most part small organizations doing remarkable work. Here is what we have found.

Caring Enough to Confront

Faith-based programs have an astonishing success rate in changing lives. Drug and alcohol treatment programs like Teen Challenge and Victory Fellowship can document a success rate of sixty to seventy percent—unheard of in government-run programs. Their "tough love" approach transforms, although it is much harder to challenge an addict to change than it is to give a handout to assuage one's own conscience.

Ben Beltzer, the founder of Interfaith Housing Coalition, a Dallas employment and housing program, is one who cares enough to confront. Jay and his eight-months pregnant wife, Connie, both former crack users, had been at Interfaith only one week when Jay was caught using drugs. Ben helped him into a drug rehabilitation program, allowing Connie and their five-year-old son to stay through the delivery of the baby, free of charge. Within two weeks of Jay's return, he was caught using drugs again. Jay came to Beltzer with his newborn daughter, thrusting her forward and pleading, "You're not going to put her out on the streets, are you?"

Ben looked at him clear-eyed. "No. You are."

The whole family had to leave the program. And even though Jay is still using crack, Connie got the message. She has stayed off drugs, has a job, an apartment, and custody of both children. For Ben to kick the family out was an act of compassion, although it would not appear so at first blush.

Compassion does not mean giving indiscriminately. Don Michel, who heads Portland's Union Gospel Mission, leads one of the nation's most effective programs helping the homeless. He says he has learned from his mistakes. "I thought just handing out food and clothes without question was a very compassionate thing to do. But I think now that when you give things away without accountability, you're participating in that person's harm."

Mentors Make the Difference

Many groups have discovered that one of the most effective ways to teach accountability is through mentoring. Interfaith has two pairs of mentors working with each resident on specific issues of employment and budgeting. Providence House in Denver has a similarly high ratio of mentors to homeless residents, and the results are equally spectacular. Philadelphia Futures Adopt-a-Scholar pairs one mentor adult with one child, and the at-risk kids show demonstrable progress academically and in their character. Best Friends links inner-city adolescent girls to mentors in their schools and communities, and their success is documented in the girls who say no to sex, drugs, and alcohol, and successfully finish high school. What all of these award-winning programs have in common is the relationship-building component of mentoring, which changes lives.

The relationship is even more potent if the mentor is someone who has had the same experience as the person they are helping. Jimmy Heurich of Teen Challenge in San Antonio is a self-described "glue-sniffing wino from Washington." When he talks to men with alcohol or drug problems, he does so from experience. So do Freddie Garcia and Juan Rivera of Victory Fellowship, both reformed heroin addicts. Step 13's founder Bob Coté is a former homeless alcoholic who now reaches men in the same place he was. Former business executive Ben Beltzer was once homeless, an experience he says helps him understand the residents at Interfaith. These people can say " I know exactly what you are going through. I've been there. There is a way out."

Poverty is more than a material condition, it is also a condition of the spirit. No programs to help welfare recipients will do lasting, life-changing work unless they take into account spiritual as well as material needs. Assistance must build the person from the inside out, not from the outside in. External restraints cannot create inner order by imposing it, nor can gifts create it. No laws can make people motivated, responsible, and virtuous, only the law written in the heart.

Who Can Do More? Who Should?

We are obligated to care for those in need, not because we are forced to, but out of obedience to Christ. Our motivation matters. Frank Meyer made the point in *In Defense of Freedom* that coerced actions do not have the same moral value as those freely undertaken. Because jail is our only alternative to paying taxes, writing the check to the IRS is more an act of self-preservation than virtue. Assuaging one's impulse for compassion at the expense of other taxpayers is also not an act of virtue. However, for those who freely choose to give of their own resources to a worthy group, there is the reward of doing good for the right reasons and with the right means. Reducing charity to merely social service is spiritually bankrupt.

The Church is the one institution charged with loving people. With welfare reform, there is now a clarion call for the faith community to put its beliefs into action. The responsibility for caring for the poor has not been, and cannot be, fulfilled by the government. Now the question is, "Can the private sector meet the needs? Can churches do more?"

The answer is yes. But is the church prepared? Virgil Gulker of Kids Hope USA, who has spent a lifetime designing and launching min-

continued on page 10

"We are obligated to care for those in need, not because we are forced to, but out of obedience to Christ. Our motivation matters."

—Barbara von der Heydt

The New Challenge of Reform

David Kuo

The news from the front is encouraging. "Welfare reform working," shouts one *USA Today* headline. "Welfare rolls falling," another paper declares. The bold new course of reform charted by the 1996 welfare reform act appears to be on a path to success. In Arizona, there is a surge of married men looking for, and finding, jobs. In Florida, welfare rolls have fallen seventeen percent in just seven months. Nationwide, states are reveling in the additional 1.5 billion dollars in welfare money they have this year. Set against the declining rolls, states are having to work to figure out how to spend all the extra money they have, and all of this has occurred before the welfare laws are officially enacted. There is a temptation to look at facts and figures like these and say contentedly that our work is done. In reality, our work has not even begun.

The road to reform was rocky; well-intentioned people on both sides of the political aisle engaged in passionate debates about what sort of reform would be the best kind. Some believed that de-entitling welfare would be akin to allowing states to have a "race to the bottom"—a contest to see who could lower their benefits packages the fastest. Others believed that all we really needed to do was lower the governmental barriers and suddenly, almost magically, the private sector would kick in and all would be right with the world.

Frankly, it is far too early to make either judgment, for this round of reform is unlike any other the welfare system has experienced. Prior reform consisted of Washington-led efforts at tinkering with the system. While there were certainly genuine changes made in the reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, those changes were managed by government. For instance, in 1988, under the Family Support Act, new laws for work provisions were put into place. To the "extent resources permit[ted]" states were to require participation in education, work, and training programs by all welfare mothers with no child under three. In addition, states were required to "enroll in work-related activity at least eleven percent of 'employable' adult recipients." These provisions, of course, were all executed, managed, and monitored by the government—little was required of the private sector.

This round of reform is unlike any other the welfare system has experienced.

Promise and Peril

While there is still an enormous governmental role in this round of reform, there is a qualitative difference between it and past reforms. With the de-entitlement of welfare, states and communities are now the ones "on point," not Washington. More importantly, there is the growing sense across the land that if this attempt at reform is going to result in real change, it is going to have to be led by families, churches, neighborhoods, and communities—not the government.

This reality is full of both promise and peril. The promise lies in the reality that much of the private sector does tremendous work meeting the needs and problems of the poor and addicted. The peril is that the same kind of hardheaded scrutiny that has been applied to government-run welfare will not be applied to private-sector efforts.

For the past several decades conservative lawmakers in particular have been fixated on removing some of the enormous barriers put in place by the overly intrusive federal government. As such, conservatives have become experts at exposing the flaws of the governmental system. They know what is working and what is not. They know about abuse, fraud, and cost overruns. And more important, they know about the horror the current system has produced in the lives of this nation's now-permanent underclass.

As responsibility for social programs begins to shift to the private sector, the conservatives who have so masterfully dissected government must turn their attention to the problems of the private sector. Unless they do, they will fall into the same trap liberals have fallen into with government: They have been so reluctant to criticize for so long

that they have compromised themselves.

Conservatives cannot fall into this trap. Rhetorically, they have used to their great advantage anecdotes from private sector efforts at reform. Stories about the transformational impact of faith-based charities in particular have been particularly effective, for they not only reveal the hope of nongovernmental reform but also stand in stark contrast to what the impersonal, bureaucratic, government programs had become. Their stories are powerful and moving but incomplete.

Now that reform is a reality, conservatives must be at the leading edge of the movement that helps distinguish between the parts of the private sector that are truly private, effective, and transformational and those parts of the private sector that are little different in mission, means, or orientation from the kind of governmental approach to charity that has come to define the past thirty years. Failure to do so will result in a failure of reform.

Simple, Successful

As others like Marvin Olasky and Barbara von der Heydt have written, the characteristics of successful groups are quite simple. First, they are challenging. They make moral demands of those who want to give help and to those who want to receive it. Second, they are personal. They are defined by close relationships among those who help and those who are being helped. And third, they are spiritual. They recognize that those in need of help are fundamentally spiritual creations and need to be treated as such. Though simple, these few characteristics go a long way in separating the wheat from the chaff, and if we would apply these principles and others like them to the private sector, we would very quickly be able to make important distinctions about the best and worst in private-sector charitable efforts.

For the past several generations we have grown accustomed to hearing about and supporting those big charitable organizations that take out television or magazine ads. Though many of these groups are indeed impressive, the most impressive are ones few have likely heard about, like the He Is Pleased program run out of Wilmington, Delaware.

He Is Pleased—brainchild of Foster Friess, head of Brandywine Mutual Fund—helps transition the homeless from the streets to paying, private sector jobs. A regular on the Metroliner trains that run between Washington, D.C., and New York, Friess was bothered by two problems: the hopelessness and despair on the faces of the homeless men and women he passed on a daily basis, and the trash that lined the highways and railroad tracks he traveled. As one who had taken to the highways himself with a trash bag and a poker to clean things up, Friess thought it would be interesting to see if the homeless would be willing to be paid to spend ninety days beautifying the surroundings. In return, they would be paid a wage above minimum, be subject to drug tests, and be required to be diligent about both their work schedules and work habits. If they made it through the ninety-day program without using drugs and with a positive attitude, he would commit to giving them a bonus to help find them a new apartment and a full-time job with one of the Wilmington-area firms that needed help.

Several years and about a hundred formerly homeless later, the program is a bona fide success. Led by a compassionately tough man named Tom Weller, the program operates on a shoestring; there are no offices, no business cards, and no fancy letterhead. All the money goes to the program—to paying Weller's salary and the workers' wages, and to helping the homeless find a way off the streets.

This is not the kind of program we regularly read about. It is not the type highlighted by newspapers or in celebrity-rich United Way ads. But it is exactly the kind of community-based, community-led, faith-oriented program that needs to be supported if the hope of reform is to become the reality of reform.

"With the de-entitlement of welfare, states and communities are the now ones 'on point,' not Washington."

—David Kuo

Positive Externalities

One important and telling characteristic of reform not widely touted is the sociological phenom-

enon called "positive externality." Simply put, successful groups are not successful only because they do a good job meeting the needs of the population they serve but also because they have a positive impact on people they do not serve directly.

For instance, in northeast Washington, D.C., Washington Redskins cornerback Darrell Green runs a small learning center for the kids in the Franklin Commons Housing Project. Its simple mission is to provide a place where these at-risk kids can go after school to get love, help with their school work, and moral guidance to get them through the tough choices they face. Early evidence is that the kids in the center are being turned around—in some cases, dramatically.

But the real story may be found in the changed lives of some of those kids' parents. Donnell Jones, the learning center's executive director tells the story of one father who, at first, rarely showed up to drop off, pick up, or help his child. Whenever he did come, however he tended to hang around a few extra minutes, looking at what the kids were doing or talking to one of the mentors or one of the teachers. Over time, the father's participation became more regular and the visits a little longer. Eventually, the father took Donnell aside and said, "You know, I was an addict, I abused my kids, but thanks to the example of kindness and love I've seen here, I've turned my life around. I'm not saying I'm healed; I'm saying I'm trying to get better." That kind of positive yet thoroughly unintended consequence is the type of thing to look for in organizations that work.

For years, congressmen and senators passed welfare bills and then sat back to see if their rhetoric and theories were confirmed by reality. This time, with this bill, however, members of Congress have a new opportunity and new responsibility not to sit back and watch but to step up and act.

At a meeting of congressmen and senators, jointly sponsored by the Heritage Foundation and Empower America, Bradley Foundation President Michael Joyce challenged members to go back to their districts and do what they could do to help those small, anonymous faith-based efforts that were making such an extraordinary difference in the lives of so many.

To date, not many members have taken up this challenge, but hopefully, more will. For example, The American Compass is starting to work with Congress to highlight and help local charities that are making the biggest difference at the margin in the lives of those they are trying to serve. These are not grand steps, but they are the kind of small acts of community that will help determine whether the potential for success we have will be a reality we see. *A*

David Kuo *is executive director of The American Compass, which helps private organizations find funding for their charitable efforts.*

continued from page 7

istries, says "clearly, no." He contends that strategic planning and training are needed to empower the church to accept this responsibility. Without it, he fears a disaster. Responsibility for "the poor" is too big, too nebulous. But specific responsibility for a particular child or one welfare family is a project church members can put their arms around. Taking the huge task and breaking it into accessible pieces, then structuring trained teams is his strategy. Many good-hearted people are willing to help but need someone with a vision to show them how.

There are two temptations: The first is to try to impose a solution from outside rather than taking the time to find the agents of healing in a community and coming alongside to empower them; this is the same intellectual error that spawned socialism and the Great Society. The second is to act to make ourselves feel better rather than wanting to actually know and love the person we want to help. Unless the work is relational, it will not be life-changing. And the point is that if our motive is genuinely to love, rather than to "do a good work," we will be changed.

Instead, the reason we should help those in need is that Christ commanded us to do so. In Matthew 25, Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of my brethren, you did for me." Mother Teresa, in her book *The Simple Path*, defines the "least of my brethren" as those who are hungry, not only for food, but for the word of God. Those who thirst not only for water, but for knowledge and vision. Those who lack not only clothes, but human dignity. Those who need not only a house of bricks, but a heart that understands and covers.

These are the people Christ calls us to serve. In serving them, we serve Christ himself in what Mother Teresa calls "the distressing disguise of the poor." He does not want our bread and soup. He wants our hearts. *A*

Barbara von der Heydt *is a senior fellow of the Acton Institute.*

Learning Charity from an Exemplar

A Review Essay by Amy L. Sherman

In the past three years on visits to church-based urban ministries nationwide, I have interviewed dozens of down-and-outers who have become up-and-comers: ex-welfare recipients, victims of domestic violence, former drug addicts, ex-cons. When I asked them what helped them turn their lives around, almost all responded, "A friend who cared." Effective ministries know that friendship is a powerful poverty-fighting tool. Tragically, though, many church benevolence programs emphasize commodities—cash, clothing, and groceries—over relationships. In today's welfare reform climate, as greater responsibility for needy families shifts from the public to the private sector, churches need to reassess their own outreach strategy. They can learn much from a recently published collection of short essays by Octavia Hill, a nineteenth century social worker who spent her life befriending poor people in London's slum districts.

Editor James L. Payne calls Hill "the J. S. Bach of social work." In 1865, she began a system of providing housing for the poor in which civic-minded investors bought apartments run on a business-like basis under her supervision as a social worker-manager. She evicted ne'er-do-wells, oversaw rehabilitation efforts, insisted on personal responsibility, provided employment to out-of-work fathers, counseled young girls, and organized savings clubs and field trips. Her efforts transformed numerous troubled communities and her model was replicated throughout Britain, on the Continent, and in America. Her life influenced not only the have-nots but also the haves, for Hill attempted to redirect the misguided and indiscriminate charity of the middle and upper classes.

The Befriending Leader:
Social Assistance Without Dependency
by Octavia Hill
editied by James L. Payne

Lytton Publishing Co.
1997. 88 pp. Paper: $9.95

Hill's essays reveal the balance of tough-mindedness and tender-heartedness that best serves the poor. Hill always insisted that the residents pay their rent in full and on time. If the head of the household was short of cash but willing to work, she would employ him in making repairs. Believing that people "are ashamed to abuse a place they find cared for," she would start with clean-up efforts in the common areas of the housing complex. This example was then gradually imitated by the tenants in their own apartments. To reduce vandalism, Hill set aside a small portion of the tenants' rent each month into a repairs and improvements fund. Tenants could decide how such funds were used—and most wanted to purchase additional conveniences rather than pay for repairs brought about by carelessness or negligence. Moreover, they took better care of new purchases, knowing that they were bought with their money.

Circulating daily among the tenants, Hill became intimately familiar with their habits and cares. She first won their respect through her firm management style and then gained their trust as she proved herself faithful. Having become their genuine friend, she could encourage poor people toward a greater appreciation of cleanliness, education, planning, and saving.

Hill "resolutely refused" to provide any help except that which roused self-help. Indiscriminate charity, she argued, demeaned poor people by implicitly suggesting they were not capable of self-management. Genuine compassion should start not with the desire to help the poor but with the desire to *know* them. It was common in Hill's time for volunteers from the local church to go visiting throughout the parish, offering small gifts to needy families. The problem with these well-intentioned but misguided district visitors, Hill believed, was that they did not think of those they helped primarily as people but as poor people. This meant that they did not treat the poor in the same spirit they would have used for their personal friends. Aid to the poor might be "different in amount," Hill acknowl-

edged, but it should not "differ in kind." Moreover, Hill warned, indiscriminate gifts could encourage an unhealthy "gambling spirit" among the poor by raising false hopes: "'Because we went in and gave those boots, because others like us gave coal-tickets and soup-tickets last winter, what may not turn up?' the poor woman asks herself."

Hill was well-aware that it was often easier to give charity than patiently to withhold it when it would, in fact, do harm. "The resolution to watch pain which cannot be radically relieved except by the sufferer himself is most difficult to maintain," she admitted. "Yet it is wholly necessary in certain cases not to help." Such a principle, of course, did not excuse hard-heartedness on the part of the better-off. In fact, Hill argued for a more sacrificial mercy than the relatively painless act of alms-giving. She challenged the haves to invest in face-to-face relationships with the have-nots, to befriend a few individuals and be their encourager and advocate. Hill appreciated the non-monetary assistance such friends could offer: They could serve as references for poor individuals seeking better employment. Indiscriminate charity, she lamented, made impossible a true friendship through which gifts superior to cash—counsel, teaching, and exposure to beauty, art, and culture—could be shared. Moreover, when alms-giving kept the poor at arm's length, donors did not learn from the poor lessons of "patience, vigor, and content" which Hill asserted were "of great value" to the non-poor. She exhorted the rich: "See…that you do not put your lives so far from those great companies of the poor which stretch for acres in the south and east of London, that you fail to hear each other speak. See that you do not count your work among them by tangible result, but believe that healthy human intercourse with them will be helpful to you and them."

Critics of her day complained that Hill's approach of transformation one person at a time was insufficient in light of the vast scope of the problem. But large-scale projects to help poor families worried Hill. She believed that, when helpers tried to deal with a large number of needy people, the helpers became so overwhelmed by the urgency of need that they tended to "pass over" the most difficult questions about how to provide help that would truly help. The helpers' efforts might well be benevolent, Hill admitted, but too often they were not beneficent. To assist those with such charitable inclinations, Hill and her colleagues founded the London Charity Organization Society early on in her career. This agency served as a central clearinghouse where needy people would apply for aid and volunteers could ascertain the validity of the request and formulate a strategic response that would foster self-help rather than dependency.

"Genuine compassion should start not with the desire to help the poor but with the desire to *know* them."

—Amy L. Sherman

Hill's philosophy of compassion derived from her front line's experience of loving poor people. This "thinker/doer" knew firsthand what worked and what didn't. Unfortunately, her wisdom was not applied as thoroughly in her day as it could have been, since some influential people disdained her call to gritty, face-to-face mercy while others cherished big government "solutions." Our current situation is not much different from Hill's. Today we can find churches that ignore the poor, churches that provide clothes and food but not friendship, and churches that define social ministry as political lobbying against cuts in the governmental welfare budget.

Thankfully, though, there are promising signs that an increasing number of churches are willing to engage in the sort of befriending ministry Hill pioneered. All across the country, churches are responding to calls for help from local social services offices and being paired with families seeking to get off welfare. As welfare reforms stir additional churches to greater social outreach, the need for clear "how to" advice grows. If *The Befriending Leader* becomes standard reading for these churches, both the haves and have-nots will benefit. *A*

***Dr. Amy L. Sherman** is Director of Urban Ministry at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville, Virginia. Her book on church-based urban ministries will be published this summer by Crossway Books.*

Renewing American Compassion

by Marvin Olasky

The Free Press, 1996. xvi + 201 pp. Cloth: $21.00

Review by George Grant

We hardly need another polemic about the failure of America's "war on poverty." After decades of bitter wrangling and torpid inaction, there is at last a broad consensus that the welfare system is a cure no less malignant than the disease it was intended to remedy. Liberals and conservatives, politicians and program administrators, social workers and taxpayers have all been forced to acknowledge that the poor are not best served by our current lumbering and impersonal entitlement bureaucracy. They never have been. They never will be. On this, we now all agree.

Thankfully, Marvin Olasky recognizes this remarkable fact and does not belabor the obvious. His book *Renewing American Compassion* is instead a survey and evaluation of contemporary poverty relief efforts—both privately-funded charitable enterprises and state-funded welfare reform programs. With a reporter's eye, an historian's insight, and an advocate's passion, he details precisely what are and what are not viable alternatives to welfare. Given the spate of program recommendations and policy proposals currently crowding state and federal legislative agendas, his evaluation is both timely and perspicacious.

Throughout the history of American compassion, he argues, seven principles have always been central to effective relief efforts. Programs that have been grounded in these common sense principles have had solid success in transforming poverty into productivity. Programs that ignored them failed.

The first principle is what Olasky calls "affiliation." If the poor are to be equipped with the tools of self-reliance and initiative, they must first restore family ties and community connections that have been sundered by privation and irresponsibility. Promiscuous philanthropy does little to solve the long-term dilemmas of social disintegration. It is little surprise then that programs that emphasize personal accountability, family responsibility, and community cooperation are much more likely to succeed than programs that simply dispense aid as sheer entitlements.

The second principle Olasky identifies is "bonding." Effective programs make a conscious effort to maintain personal intimacy. They are programs where help is dispensed one-on-one, and where mentoring, discipleship, and long-term commitment is encouraged. Instead of reducing the recipients of aid to mere numbers or cases, they are treated as individuals.

His third principle is "categorization." According to Olasky, the individualized approach to effective compassion recognizes that different problems need to be treated differently. There are no cookie-cutter programs when it comes to helping people put their lives back together. There are no universal templates and no boiler plates. No single model or initiative or reform is sufficient to tackle the widely varied dilemmas of the poor.

"Discernment" is Olasky's fourth principle. Effective programs of compassion are innately discriminatory. Though they reject subjective and preferential prejudice, they do differentiate between those who really desire to improve their lot in life and those who are simply looking for a free lunch. Barriers against fraud are necessary if resources are to be utilized with any measure of effectiveness. But they are also necessary to ensure that recipients are not forced to trade their dignity for a five pound block of cheese.

"Employment" is the fifth principle. According to Olasky, programs of compassion that demand work and commitment as a prerequisite for assistance are far more effective than those that do not. It seems all too obvious: If individuals are paid not to work, the blight of long-term unemployment and chronic dependence will only intensify. Compassion must never subsidize idleness and irresponsibility.

Olasky's sixth principle of effective compassion is "freedom." Regulations upon free enterprise generally do not protect the poor. Instead, they create barriers to compassion. The harder the government makes it to hire at-risk individuals, the harder it will be for the business community to help the poor. Compassion is most effective when relief programs are afforded flexibility to work with employers to come up with creative ways for the needy to enter the job market.

Finally, Olasky asserts that effective compassion is rooted in "faith." A forthright reliance on the Creator

and His good providence is an essential element in charitable relief. The spiritual dimension is an essential aspect of rebuilding shattered lives, restoring broken homes, and revitalizing devastated communities. There is simply no replacement.

Federal welfare programs were doomed to failure from the start precisely because they ignored the dumb certainties of experience—indeed, they did not merely abandon one or two of these time-tested principles, but *all* of them. Interestingly, it seems that many, if not most, of the current efforts at state-funded welfare reform continue to make the same deleterious mistake. According to Olasky, the only substantial hope for the renewal of American compassion lies in the private sector—where it has historically been most effective anyway.

The real contribution of Olasky's book is not only that he provides a deft evaluation of current poverty-relief efforts and a cogent analysis of the current political climate, but that he effectively encourages ordinary citizens to roll up their sleeves and get to work in their communities. He makes it clear that when they begin to apply the simple principles of compassion he has identified, they can make an enormous difference in the lives of the needy all around them—and in the process, they can make the debate over welfare reform moot.

His is no polemic. Indeed, Olasky has issued a call for a new kind of modern-day grassroots heroism. And it is a call that we should all best hear and heed. *A*

***George Grant** is director of the King's Meadow Study Center and author of* Bringing in the Sheaves: Transforming Poverty into Productivity.

Book News

The End of Welfare
Michael Tanner
Cato Institute, 1996
226 pp. Paper: $10.95

The End of Welfare presents a strong case for not only changing welfare as we know it, but ending government social programs permanently. Michael Tanner provides well-documented evidence about the failure of the American welfare state and proves that privatized charities are far more successful in combating poverty and other social ills.

Tanner is highly critical of present welfare "solutions" from both liberals and conservatives, for he argues that neither approach questions the appropriateness of government involvement in social programs. Tanner pragmatically recognizes the difficulty in jettisoning the entrenched welfare bureaucracy; however, he provides a great deal of historical and contemporary evidence that ending government entitlements is the best solution.

Self-Help
Samuel Smiles
IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1996
250 pp. Paper: $15.95

Samuel Smiles published *Self-Help* in 1859, and it became one of the most successful and influential books in Victorian England. The IEA Health and Welfare Unit has released an unabridged reproduction, except for punctuation changes, of the 1866 reprint of *Self-Help*.

Smiles argues that hard work and self-determination create moral strength and stability, which enable a person to make positive contributions to society. Self-dependence makes for strong citizens, which in turn makes a strong nation; dependence on programs and laws from government creates a weak and corrupt nation.

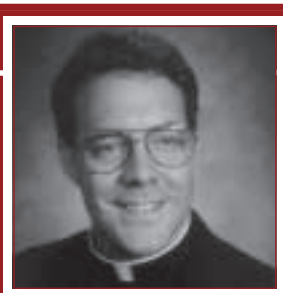
Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis
Stanley W. Carlson-Thies
& James W. Skillen
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996
604 pp. Paper: $24.00

At over six hundred pages long, *Welfare in America* strives to be a comprehensive attempt to develop a Christian perspective on welfare that goes beyond current ideology. The diverse contributors for this book address various aspects of the welfare issue in an attempt to apply the Christian mandate to love others to the welfare-reform debate.

The book succeeds in emphasizing the need to consider the humanity of those involved with welfare and the need to deal with them with honor, dignity, and respect. The authors seek to infuse this moral perspective of helping people into governmental welfare policy.

Sadly, the authors tend to be too undercritical in their analysis of the appropriate extent of government in providing social services and overlook the well-documented tendency of government social programs, no matter how well-intentioned, to foster demoralizing and dehumanizing dependency.

—William M. Hopper



Rev. Robert A. Sirico

The Only Hope for Civic Renewal

In the last few years, there has been a revival in interest in the role that private charity can play in the revitalization of civil society. This renewed interest is partly driven by an overwhelming sense that most of us have, regardless of political and ideological interests, that the modern welfare state has produced less-than-impressive results. I would take this analysis much further: The welfare state has been a complete disaster, in some instances creating, and in others enhancing, a myriad of problems—family disintegration, the loss of respect for the elderly, the moral nihilism of the youth, the loss of a clear sense of right and wrong, and the collapse of community at all levels in society.

> The ability of the church to take care of the poor is directly connected to its confidence in its own mission.

But if we are really entering the post-statist age in which the welfare state is going to continue to disintegrate bit by bit, where do we go from here? A good start would be to build on the substantial pocket of civic virtue that remains despite the tendency of government to destroy and replace it, to build on and extend the sense of responsibility that individuals and families still have to create a viable civic culture.

This is obviously easier said than done. Some concrete steps that could take us very far in the right direction, though, relate directly to the mission of churches in the practice of authentic social work. I am not suggesting that our churches can or should be the only source of charity, and I am especially not arguing that their social mission is limited by their social utility. But from time immemorial, it has been the case that the most difficult work of caring for the least among us has been initiated by them and from the resources that church leaders and members accumulated voluntarily. They must not be overlooked. But there is a preliminary step that must be taken before churches can again become completely viable institutions in this regard. They must regain a sense of their salvific mission, and apart from this theological and soteriological task, I have strong doubts as to whether they can pick up where the state leaves off and become vital instruments of social and cultural healing. The churches must truly believe that the doctrines they preach really are good for others, both in a temporal and an eternal sense. They cannot profess a belief in the truth of faith and then not want to recommend it to others.

The ability of the church to take care of the poor is directly connected to its understanding and confidence in its own mission. Believers must be confident that they are doing more than merely providing for material needs; they must believe that their mission is broader and more important. They must believe they are also meeting spiritual needs, that they are saving souls, that they are preparing people not only to face this world but also the next. This requires, in the first instance, a revitalization of doctrine and faith. If the church does not believe in its primary mission—human redemption—it will not be able sustain enthusiasm and interest in its proximate mission—works of charity. And that means our churches must again seek to convert souls.

All of which goes to say, show me a group of God-fearing people of faith who reject the secular world, who reject the values of the mass media while embracing those beliefs about this world that are shaped by Holy Scripture and other ancient texts, and I will show you people who are capable of providing the greatest service to the poor. *A*

Rev. Robert A. Sirico *is president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. This article is condensed from his recent lecture at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, "Faith, Charity, and Civic Responsibility."*

"The remedy for poverty is not in the material resources of the rich, but in the moral resources of the poor. These, which are lulled and deadened by money-gifts, can be raised and strengthened only by personal influence, sympathy, and charity. Money gifts save the poor man who gets them, but give longer life to pauperism in the country."

—Lord Acton—

RELIGION & LIBERTY
A Publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty
161 Ottawa Ave., NW, Suite 301
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Grand Rapids, MI
PERMIT NO. 986

Forwarding and Address Correction Requested