

RELIGION & LIBERTY

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A Revolution of Compassion

Interview: Marvin Olasky

Dr. Marvin Olasky is Associate Professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. He is also the editor of *World*, a weekly news magazine from a Christian perspective and author of *The Tragedy of American Compassion* and *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America*. Dr. Olasky was interviewed from his home in Austin.

R&L: *You are viewed by many as one of the architects of the “Welfare Revolution”. Many believe that this revolution is motivated solely by financial concerns, but in your work *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, you speak of other dimensions and motivations. What do you believe are the strongest reasons for welfare reform?*

Olasky: I am glad to be viewed as an architect, but there are others who have done far more than me. I think of people like Bob Woodson, Charles Murray, Robert Rector — and your work at the Acton Institute.

There are three strong reasons for reforming welfare: the first is biblical. The current welfare system takes men and women cre-

ated in God’s image and dehumanizes them. Most programs treat people like animals; merely placing food in front of people can be akin to putting food in dog bowls.

The second reason for reform is historical. We have a long record of what works and what doesn’t work. Charity is a biblical notion, but people who do not have a biblical worldview at least should be willing to look at history. To put it simply, successful anti-poverty programs emphasize challenge, personal help and, whether people like it or not, some level of spiritual involvement.

Programs which emphasize entitlements, bureaucracy, and the marginalization of God, do not work. American history and the

history of England, as Gertrude Himmelfarb has demonstrated, offers a strictly pragmatic basis for church and private charity as more effective than government sponsored programs.

A third reason comes out of the American dream. My grandparents came to this country penniless. They were able, through a system that emphasized liberty and hard work, to make a better life for themselves and future generations. If you talk with the recipients of welfare, a lot of them would like to become independent and self-supporting. But they enter into the welfare system, sometimes with the expectations that it will be short term, and very easily get used to it. Over time their dreams die.

R&L: *Do you have any evidence that this analysis is also shared by many employed by the system?*

The same applies to the dreams of those who want to help. The general frustration with the current welfare system is not primarily about the money that is spent on welfare, but grows out of the sense that the money is not per-

INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview: Marvin Olasky © Article: “The Effectiveness of the Private Sector” by Arianna Huffington © Article: “The Folly of Participating in Government Welfare” by Paul A. Cleveland © Review Essay: “Welfare: Separating Fact from Rhetoric” by Doug Bandow © In the Liberal Tradition: Booker T. Washington © Column: “Reforming our Attitudes” by Robert A. Sirico, C.S.P. © Plus Book News.

forming any useful function. Since I have gained some degree of notoriety, I have received letters and calls from people in government offices and private charities who are enormously frustrated, they wanted to help, they went into social work to help, and all they are doing now is shuffling paper and barely helping people stay alive. Their dreams die.

Welfare reform is not so much about money, as it is about dreams and aspirations and hope. Reform is not a question of cost-effectiveness as much as it is a question of human dignity and truly helping the poor.

R&L: In your opinion, how did we, as a nation, get to the point where we are now? Was it the failure of private charities which justified this type of government intervention?

Olasky: There are many reasons for the development of the current welfare state, but it was often the success, and not the failure, of the private and church based welfare system, that led to government action. Private sector welfare was successful in that many people were helped out of poverty. Especially in the early

twentieth century, people looked at that success and asked: Why can't we do more? Why can't we rescue every person? Many thought the way to do this was to have a universal system where everyone will be covered. People thought that the government would learn from what the pri-

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ivate sector had accomplished.

There were other contributing factors, including an anti-biblical bias on the part of some of those who designed the current system. Empire building and the feathering of personal nests certainly played a part in the increase in government programs. Many politicians desired to have a strong central government, and the creation of a welfare state was one instrument to that end.

R&L: Do you believe that this debate is fundamentally a matter of private versus public charity? Are there other dimensions to this debate?

Olasky: In terms of the public versus private debate, the government sector is virtually doomed to failure as much as government programs turn welfare into an entitlement, centralized through preservation of a vast impersonal bureaucracy, and continue, through a mistaken interpretation of the First Amendment, to marginalize God.

Private bureaucracies are not necessarily any better, but at least they have more opportunity and possibility. There is no inevitability of success; there is nothing magical about the private

sector, or about being church based. Private charities can make as many mistakes as those in the public sector. But inherent to the private sector are options not possible for government structures.

Government bureaucracies are not capable of really understanding the poor as individuals; of being able to understand the character of those they try to help. Governments cannot challenge, give personal hope, and keep a spiritual focus.

R&L: You have spoken of a particular experience which sparked your interest in the topic of welfare reform: you lived as a street

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person for a few days in Washington D.C. Would you share a bit of this experience with us and tell us what lessons you learned concerning Washington's social services?

Olasky: I had been conducting research in the bowels of the library of Congress for over six months and wanting to get out in the Spring and see for myself what was going on in Washington. It was not an attempt to attain the consciousness of a homeless person.

It was an attempt to see who was telling the truth about the services available to homeless people in Washington D.C. Some homeless advocates were saying that basic needs were not being met. I had also talked with a friend of mine, a professor in Tennessee named Dan McMurray, who had actually gone out to a number of cities as a homeless person, and he had a different story.

In March of 1990 I didn't take a shower for several days, dressed in old clothes, and just

walked around with Dan. We started out at the largest homeless shelter in the country, the Center for Creative Non-Violence, and through word of mouth would ask people where to go for lunch or clothes. We had not planned it beyond the first stop at CCNV. After that it was where people directed us.

What did I learn in just a couple of days on the streets? I was given lots of food, lots of offers of clothing and shelter, lots of offers of free medicine — *lots of stuff*. I was never asked to do

Booker T. Washington 1856-1915

“More and more thoughtful students of the race problem are beginning to see that business and industry constitute what we may call the strategic points in its solution.”

Washington was in many ways a distinguished personality, provincially wise, astute, and certainly diplomatic. A tireless educator, masterful orator and advocate of black self-improvement, Booker T. Washington's ideas were as controversial in his day as they are in ours. Born into slavery, he was taken to West Virginia by his mother soon after emancipation. There he went to school at night while he worked in a salt furnace during the day. In May 1881, Washington became the principal of the newly founded Tuskegee Institute, where he taught blacks the technical skills he thought they would need in their newly enfranchised state.

His views on accommodation earned him many enemies in the black community. Accusations of compromise were commonly hurled at him. Booker believed that the now freed black person's best chance at success depended on his or her ability to integrate into white American society. Integration could only occur after education.

Washington thought that inculcating the values of individual responsibility, the dignity of work, and the need for enduring moral and spiritual character were the best means for former slaves to assume their rightful place in America. And the best way to do this, he argued, was to encourage business, industry, and entrepreneurialism, and not through political agitation. He therefore labored incessantly to help blacks become more prosperous through helping them build an economic foundation, most notably through his founding of the National Negro Business League.

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Sources: *Concise Dictionary of American Biography*, Third Edition (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980) and "Booker T. Washington An Uncommon Perspective", *The Boule Journal*, Summer 1993 by Archon Theodore M. Pryor.

anything. Even in McDonald's the custom is to clean up your own tray after you are finished eating. This is not the custom in some homeless shelters. You just sit down, the food is put in front of you, like putting food in a dog's bowl, and when the dog is finished, you just wander off. You do not have to do any work, no cleaning up or helping out.

Since people were ready to provide me with all sorts of material help, I then thought to ask them for spiritual counseling, or some sort of personal direction. I decided to ask for a Bible. I got everything else, but never a Bible. One example: in the basement of a church in downtown Washington, which by the way was founded by General

Olasky: You always want to go to the best immediate source. The way to help children is by helping the parents. Instead of having schools with built-in clinics and free breakfasts and dinners we need to ask: what can we do to strengthen the role of parents, what can you do to build two parent families instead of single parent households? There is a group in Dallas that used to buy toys for children at Christmas; they presented these toys through a Santa Claus at a large group party. This is not very helpful when some parents work hard to scrape together money to buy something, and the toys they buy are not as good as the toys the children get from this group of well-intentioned people. This

R&L: *The gradual dismantling of the present Welfare State will mean that some organizations that are presently concerned with meeting the needs of those on the welfare roles may temporarily find themselves without funding. Your weekly magazine, World, has devoted a great deal of attention to this concern. Do you believe that private initiative can fill the gap left by the government?*

Olasky: People are already filling the gaps left by the government. In *World* we have stories from Detroit, Washington, Birmingham, St. Louis, Dallas, Phoenix, Los Angeles, the list goes on and on. All over the country there are individuals and small organizations serving those in need.

The question I keep asking when I go to these places is whether the people who run and volunteer in these programs are superhuman individuals? Are they extraordinarily talented and charismatic individuals? Are they people without families and other commitments?

I suppose there is a basic assumption that ordinary people could not possibly do this sort of job. What I am seeing so far is ordinary individuals who are dedicated and willing to sacrifice. These programs are not so unusual that they cannot be replicated elsewhere. What I come away with from these stories and visits is the question: Why can't others do the same?

What keeps these sorts of programs from being set-up elsewhere? Government programs often cripple initiative. Many good people, who would otherwise attempt to get involved, look and see various government agencies performing these tasks. They may be doing it poorly, but they are doing it. People walk

If our reform efforts accomplish anything I hope it is this: that we stop the mere giving of material things and try to address the more human needs of the poor.

Howard, after whom Howard University is named (he was known as the Christian general) there was a soup kitchen, but no Bible available, not even a gospel message from the staff.

If our reform efforts accomplish anything I hope it is this: that we stop merely giving material things and try to address all the needs of the poor. The mere giving of food and shelter is not enough.

R&L: *One objection often raised against the centralized welfare system is that it violates the principle of subsidiarity - that the needs of individuals and of groups are met most effectively and efficiently by immediate and local sources, whether that be church or private organizations. In light of this principle what do you see as the role for mediating institutions?*

organization found a better way: it has a thrift shop with new toys that were donated, and poor parents can come in there and pay 10 cents on the dollar. This enables them to present better toys to their children that they themselves have purchased. This is a small point, but it is one example of helping parents.

You have to put yourself in the position of those you are helping. Take a father who has been a deadbeat dad, but he does show up at Christmas time and he should be helped to have a larger role in his children's lives. He shows up at a party with a present, not a great present, but a present, and he sees the child see receive some better present and he slinks out the door. This is discouraging. Events like these require thoughtfulness, sensitivity and putting yourself in the position of the needy.

away saying it is already being done.

People also ask, why should I give money to charity? I am already paying \$3,500 a year (that is the amount that the average household pays in taxes toward social welfare programs) — why do more? Many families pay these higher taxes through a second job. Bad charity drives out good.

R&L: *You have been instrumental in bringing to light the dangers of indiscriminate giving. Could you explain what you mean by this?*

Olasky: Giving is morally neutral; that is something which we often do not understand. There is a tendency to emphasize giving as if giving by itself is a wonderful thing. It depends on what is being given and where the giving is going. For example, there is the famous segment of Matthew 25: Jesus saying on the day of judgment that when I was hungry you gave me food and when thirsty you gave me drink. This is a familiar and terrific passage, which can speak to us today.

Today's poor in the United States are the victims and perpetrators of illegitimacy and abandonment, of family non-formation and malformation, alienation and loneliness; but they are not suffering from thirst, hunger or nakedness, except by choice, or insanity, or parental abuse.

Some will make good use of a helping hand, but if you are an addict any available money you have will go to satisfy your addiction. Christ does not include in his list of commended charitable acts: when I was strung out you gave me dope. Or, in other cases: when I abandoned my family you gave me a place to stay and helped me justify my ac-

tions; when I was in prison you helped me get out quickly so I could commit more crimes. If we take Christ's word seriously, then giving money that goes for drugs is akin to sticking heroin into Jesus's veins.

R&L: *Do the Scriptures have anything else to say concerning prudent giving?*

Olasky: There is also Paul's first letter to Timothy. In chapter five Paul gives advice concerning charity to widows and orphans — who are the people most worthy of help in the Bible. Paul presents guidelines for such charity. He stresses giving only to those who are really in need. Really in need means lacking family. If a widow has children or grandchildren, then these must learn to put their religion into practice by caring for their family. When widows have no family they are eligible for aid, but there are further considerations — no widow may be put on a list of widows unless she is over 60, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds. As for younger widows, Paul says do not put them on such a list; Paul's fear is that they will grow idle and get used to going from house to house and engaging in gossip. Younger widows should try to remarry and cultivate virtue. What strikes me about this advice is that Paul is counseling about those poor who are closest to God's heart — and look at how many precautions he takes. How careful should we be before we put someone on a government list? What are we really doing to people when we extend our lists?

R&L: *We often hear about our responsibilities to the poor and needy. The notion of discriminate giving implies that those*

who receive aid also have responsibilities and duties. Can you elaborate on this?

Olasky: The poor have duties like the rest of us. If widows have duties, then how much more so do people who are able-bodied and young? Not to recognize the responsibilities of the poor is to fail to treat them as persons. Just because someone is in need of money or some other service does not mean that he is completely incapable of any productive behavior.

There are things which can be done in the way of reciprocal relationships. We have a church here in Austin, it meets in a rented space, a large empty hall. Typically, on Sunday morning we have to place several hundred folding chairs. If a homeless man calls us and wants a hand-out, we tell him the most important thing we can give him is the gospel, and we want him to come and be part of our church. We explain to him that as he gets to meet people he will get to know their needs and they his. These are the types of things that will develop. If he is serious about needing material help he will come in an hour early and help us put up chairs. In this manner the person preserves his self-esteem and develops relationships that provide the context for true compassion. A

The Acton Institute is honored to have Marvin Olasky present a commentary on welfare reform at its Fifth Anniversary Dinner, on October 2, 1995. For information please call (616)454-3080.

The Effectiveness of the Private Sector

Arianna Huffington



The American public is still being cheated out of a welfare debate that will address in fundamental ways the disintegration of our neighborhoods and of our country. So far the debate has been dominated by two choruses: the Great Society chorus that keeps insisting that with a little more money (a few billion here and there) and a little more imagination (reinventing a program here and cutting a few bureaucrats there), we will solve the intransigent social problems facing us; and the limited government chorus that assumes that once government is out of the way, once taxes have been cut and the budget balanced, all will be well, not only on Main Street, but on the increasingly mean streets in our inner cities. I am singing as loudly as the next person in the second chorus, but I also know that our song is only part of the story and only half of the truth.

The other half is what the *Acton Institute* is doing with its *Samaritan Awards Project*, what the *Bradley Foundation* is doing, what the *New Citizenship Project* is doing, what we, at the *Center for Effective Compassion*, are doing: helping lead the transformation of America's efforts to provide help for those in need from the government-centered, bureaucratic, impersonal regime created by the Great Society to a community-oriented, decentralized, people-focused approach grounded in the historic principles of America's founding. And the most important part of the transformation are the thousands of extraordinary Americans who provide the flesh and blood evidence of effective compassion.

Across the political spectrum there is broad consensus that the very programs intended to help the poor have had the opposite effect, creating a "culture of poverty" in which crime, drug abuse, child neglect and violence are commonplace. The compassionate intentions of the Great Society have resulted in any-

Across the political spectrum there is a broad consensus that the very programs intended to help the poor have the opposite effect.

thing but compassionate results.

But the deadliest form of wishful thinking is to assume that the alternative to the Great Society is a cheap trimmed down welfare state, as if the elimination of federal programs coupled with tax reform were sufficient to halt the disintegration of civil society. Marvin Olasky, who is co-founder of the Center for Effective Compassion, has written brilliantly that the help needed to turn around lives is "the help that only a person can give: love, time, care and hope." Most poverty, and certainly most dysfunctional behavior, is not a matter of economics. Breaking the cycle of poverty is breaking the cycle of human pathology. And this will take nothing less than a crusade. Shutting down the entrance ramp to welfare by ending benefits and programs that encourage and subsidize pathology will certainly help — but to pretend that it will be enough is

to once again abdicate our responsibility and reduce it to a position on public policy.

The alternative is personal involvement. The national campaign we are planning to launch at the Center for Effective Compassion will aim to mobilize citizens to get involved - to give some time each month and some of their income to those in need. We will encourage people to give according to the principles of effective compassion developed by Marvin Olasky: for compassion to be effective it has to be personal, challenging and spiritual. Through public service announcements, op-eds, speeches, talk shows, the Internet, as well as through a newsletter and the development of a national database, we will spotlight charities that practice effective compassion.

If building character is at the heart of renewing American civilization, then we need to seize every opportunity to build our moral muscle by exercising it. As James Q. Wilson has argued, we become virtuous by the practice of virtue, responsible by the practice of responsibility, generous by the practice of generosity. Clearly, the modern welfare state has deprived us of a fundamental opportunity to practice virtue, responsibility, generosity and compassion by usurping these functions to itself - and then failing to fulfill them.

Those who do volunteer are all too often discouraged or treated as marginal do-gooders by a system that simply wants them out of the way so that altruism can be left to the experts. And the government is often openly hostile to privately funded programs that work without its help

- especially if they are faith-based.

This past June, the State of Texas motioned to suspend the license of one of the most successful faith-based substance abuse treatment programs in the country, Teen Challenge, just because its staff lacked what the state deemed to be appropriate professional degrees.

“Why don’t they look at our success rate?” asked the Reverend James Heurich, who is fighting for the life of Teen Challenge of San Antonio. There are 130 Teen Challenge chapters around the country and studies have shown success rates of 70 to 86 percent, compared to the single-digit rates of government programs. “That’s fine”, replies John D. Cooke of the Texas Commission of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. “But if they want to call it treatment, then state law says they must be licensed. Outcomes and outputs are not an issue for us.”

Outcomes and outputs— rather than good intentions— are exactly what charitable, as well as government, projects should be about. And we need to have the American public meet, recognize, and join the remarkable people who are in the trenches helping turn lives around one at a time, and reclaiming our neighborhoods. We want to spotlight them, replicate them, and encourage millions of Americans to get involved - with these groups or with others they themselves discover or create.

Beacons of hope exist throughout the country. Bob Cote is responsible for one such beacon. He runs Step 13 in Denver. He calls many of the government rehabilitation programs “suicide on the installment plan.” These programs that have categorized addicts as “disabled”, enabling them to pull a social security check— often mailed directly to the local liquor store— in order to feed their addiction. By contrast, Bob’s program houses 100 men a night; they can

stay as long as they need to - provided they follow the rules, which, in addition to going to work each day, include passing breathalyzer and urine tests. If they fail, they’re out.

The price tag for the operation— \$300,000 a year— no government money. In fact, Bob has said that if he took funding, he would have to comply with various government regulations that would end up costing him \$2 million a year. Who is

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Bob’s main competition in providing this service? The government run shelters surrounding his building that act as a magnet for many of his clients, drawing them away from his life-affirming routine and back to the world of no rules, no responsibility and no hope.

And there are many remarkable clergymen around the country, like the Reverend Freddie Garcia in Texas. Thirty years ago, he was a heroin addict. After he found God, he enrolled in the Latin American Bible Institute in California. Following his graduation he returned to San Antonio to open a combination church and live-in halfway house for addicts. He called his program Victory Outreach and it has now spread to more than 60 churches in Texas and New Mexico. Reverend Garcia’s record for getting people cleaned up (and staying that way) is nearly 60 percent. Of course, the government

couldn’t let a record like that go undisturbed. So the Texas Drug and Alcohol Commission asked Reverend Garcia to stop referring to what he was doing as “drug rehabilitation” because he wasn’t conforming to their regulations. Once again results did not matter, bureaucratic compliance did.

All these places challenge people to be the best they can be. Those who run them, and the many who volunteer there, resuscitate lives by providing help that is challenging, personal, and spiritual. It is the polar opposite of the attitude that governs many non-profits according to which the best way to help the needy is not to help them, but to lobby the government to help them. This is the delusion that has dominated public policy over the last 30 years and has led many charitable organizations to cease being agents of compassion and become mere pressure groups.

Advocacy of public policies that expand governmental anti-poverty efforts is assumed to be the best thing a charitable organization can do to help the poor. For those in the trenches confronting the seemingly intractable problems of poverty, homelessness, and addiction, this is a laughable assumption.

Lobbying Capitol Hill is worlds apart from the real work of healing broken lives. Those in the non-profit world need to stop walking the corridors of Congress, quit hiding behind their desks filling out grant applications in triplicate, and get out in the streets, in the neighborhoods, in the shelters, where the real work is being done. A

Arianna Huffington is a senior fellow at the Progress and Freedom Foundation, where she directs the Center for Effective Compassion.

The Folly of Participating in Government Welfare

Paul A. Cleveland

Willie Sutton, the famous bank robber, was once asked why he robbed banks. He responded by saying, "Because that's where they keep the money." Perhaps we can learn something from Mr. Sutton's response. In one short statement he pinpointed the cause of the national debt and continuing deficits. The popular wisdom today assumes that the federal government can provide an overflowing abundance of goods and services in place of the scarcity that people face in reality. As a result, government solutions are sought for problems ranging from the elimination of poverty to funding of the arts to money for the exploration of space.

The result of the ever increasing lines of people seeking government favors has been the escalating national debt through an endless stream of yearly budget deficits. The problem has become so bad that politicians don't even discuss debt reduction. Instead, they quibble over various programs to raise tax revenues or to slow certain spending increases in order to reduce the size of the expected deficits over the near future. The average citizen is now aware of the adverse impact of such spending because of the enormity of the debt, yet feels helpless to do anything positive about eliminating, or even reducing, the problem.

In his book, *The Flight From Reality*, Clarence Carson grants insight into why the myth of government-provided welfare was originally promoted and why it has been embraced. He argues that social reformers have abandoned sound

reason and logic by denying the very nature of man in order to pursue some fictional utopia. The reformer's aim is to recreate man through some modification of the politico-economic system. However, these alterations always fail because they fail to recognize that human nature itself cannot be changed in this fashion. In the end, the efforts of social reformers have all proved disastrous.

The popular wisdom today assumes that the federal government can provide an overflowing abundance of goods and services in place of the scarcity that people face in reality.

The question remains: why would the average citizen go along with government programs which are essentially a means of legalized theft? It must be due to some rationalization. In particular, it must stem from the false belief that these programs promote compassion and lead to the development of the good society. Regrettably, the government can never create utopia on earth through its efforts to be philanthropic. This follows since the government, in and of itself, has no resource from which to be generous. The government is funded through taxation which involves the use of force. As such, if the government should attempt to become philanthropic, it can do so only by forc-

ibly taking property from some in order to give to others. This would violate a fundamental prerequisite to all generosity: namely that it is a voluntary choice on the part of the giver.

Over time, as the reform movement gained acceptance in the United States, the government drifted further and further away from its original moorings. This occurred because unprincipled individuals sought political power for selfish ends and because misguided individuals pursued well-meaning but destructive governmental programs. To further complicate matters, the U.S. government has never fully protected the life, liberty, and property of all citizens. Slavery is an example of our government's failure to protect the liberty of all people. Or, for a later example, consider segregation laws which undermined the liberty of people to associate freely with one another. In all such cases of injustice there is pressure in society for a remedy. The logical solution is to simply eliminate the law creating the injustice. The complicating feature occurs when those who have suffered under an unjust law seek to use the law for their own unjust purposes. French economist Frederic Bastiat provided a chillingly accurate statement of what happens in society when this occurs. In his book, *The Law*, he writes, "Woe to the nation when this latter purpose prevails among the mass victims of lawful plunder when they, in turn, seize power to make laws!...Instead of rooting out the injustices found in society, they

make these injustices general.”

Therefore, as a result of the greed of unscrupulous individuals, the push for a false philanthropy, and the reprises resulting from our past sins, America’s government has been substantially diverted from its just purpose to pursue a multitude of unjust ends. What can be done? One option is that the American people could refuse to accept government largess. Every citizen who is truly concerned about the nation’s descent should first carefully examine their own situation and ask themselves whether or not they are lined up for illicit government hand-outs. If one finds that he is, then he could simply refuse to accept any more government favors.

What kinds of government largess do people accept? There are many types. First there are the entitlement programs. These programs offer subsidization of medical care, education, food, housing, social security, and a host of other items. In addition to these, our government has also created numerous direct monetary subsidies for business. In this age of ethical crisis in the business world, the principled businessman should reject such offers of largess if he wants to set a proper example for his employees. After all, why tell your employees that it is wrong for them to steal from the company if the company is stealing from the American people? In addition to the direct monetary transfer programs, the citizenry can also disassociate themselves from the special interest lobbying groups which seek to gain some larger piece of the political pie. Finally, if the opportunity arises, voters can support true statesmen who will take seriously their oaths of office and refuse to support government programs which violate the individual’s right to property. A

concerted effort even by a relatively small group would not go unnoticed and could very well set the stage for a growing effort to reestablish just government in the United

Every citizen who is truly concerned about the nation’s descent should first carefully examine their own situation and ask themselves whether or not they are lined up for illicit government hand-outs.

States. There are in fact many potential groups of people who should be willing to take such a course of action if they behave in a fashion consistent with their professed beliefs. Individuals in these groups are characterized by a fundamental belief that it is wrong to use force to take what they want from other people. The Christian community is one such group and perhaps the largest of all such classifications.

Consider for a moment what the Bible says a Christian should be like. In his letter to the Philippians the apostle Paul wrote, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only at your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Thus we see that Paul admonishes Christians to behave in ways consistent with what is needed today. In another letter to the Christians at Ephesus he wrote, “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” In this statement Paul calls Christians to pursue an appropri-

ate form of philanthropy. He calls for generosity that is not brought about by theft, but by hard work and volition. Finally, the author of Proverbs warns, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, ‘Come along with us; let’s lie in wait for someone’s blood, let’s waylay some harmless soul; let’s swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse’—my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, and they are swift to shed blood.”

If Christians are interested in living in conformity with their beliefs, then they must begin the process of self-examination. Furthermore, all other men and women of principle who believe that it is wrong to steal, must give up government favors if they wish to live consistently with what they profess to believe. If they would do so, then perhaps there is hope for our economic future. However, if they will not do so, then the outlook is bleak. This pessimistic forecast follows when we examine the very nature of theft itself. Suppose for the moment that you are the only thief in town and everyone else is hard at work producing things of value. In this case you will have many potential things to steal. However, as others decide to leave their productive jobs to join you, there will be more thieves competing to steal fewer available items. In the limit, when everyone becomes a thief, everyone will starve for there will be nothing to steal. **A**

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Welfare Gone Awry

Rev. John Michael
Beers

In the movie "Schindler's List", Oskar Schindler, a Catholic, quotes an expression his father had often used; and I could imagine my own father saying something rather similar. He would say: "There are really only three people in life that you need depend on: a good doctor, a forgiving priest and a clever accountant."

The posters advertising "Schindler's List" have a simple design: they show the hand of one person in that of another; they clearly intend to portray this as the helping hand of Oskar Schindler leading potential victims away from sure death. As such, Schindler's hand is at odds with the fist of the supporters of totalitarian states who would raise their right hand in the Nazi salute. At the time that Oskar Schindler extended his hand to assure life for his workers, others took in hand those victims who were to be handed over to the ovens of their death. How did Schindler manage to provide *true welfare* for these people? Very simply, he was able to do this because he was a shrewd and accomplished businessman, a capitalist who used his capital to develop a thriving business that provided not only a workplace but a refuge, a sanctuary, where people could not only realize their livelihood, but also keep their lives. One does not often speak of capitalism and welfare in the same breath, much less to speak of both in a positive way, but that man was able to make of an ordinary business venture an extraordinary opportunity of providing for the welfare of his workers and of preserving their lives.

The etymology of the word *welfare* is quite revealing: it means to do good for someone. In a similar way, a successful businessman is said to do well for himself. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus engages in wordplay with the title of his book, *Doing Well and Doing Good:*

The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist (1992). The challenge here is for the capitalist to do well in business without neglecting the welfare of others, primarily his own workers.

Fr. Neuhaus is primarily concerned with an analysis of the 1991 encyclical of Pope John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus* analyzes the moral and social issues of economics, providing a synthesis of the Church's social teaching of the past hundred years. For the first time, formal and explicit papal affirmation was given to capitalism, while being quite specific as to what is meant by capitalism. For example, the secular press has made much of a 1993 papal interview where John Paul was decidedly critical of capitalism, but of only one kind of capitalism; he used

Rooted in our human vocation and dignity is the ennobling vocation to work with God in creation; as co-workers with Him, we not merely enjoy creation, we do something with it.

the term five times, but always qualified his remarks with either "savage capitalism" or "abusive capitalism". This is not to be confused with the form of capitalism commended by the pope only two years earlier where, as Fr. Neuhaus observes, the pope in fact affirms that particular kind of capitalism which is "the most expedient manner of exercising the divine mandate of stewardship with an equal balance of justice and compassion". If the movie had been released at the time, or if he had read Keneally's book, John Paul II could well have given Oscar Schindler as the model capitalist.

Although much attention is given to the papal approval, we cannot ignore John Paul's concern that there be a preferential option for the poor, that rare common ground that he shares with the so-called liberation theologians. However, he argues strongly against the notion that this preferential option be the object of legislation, for to be an option it must be freely chosen, nor should it be made so difficult by state interference or regulation that an individual employer be unable to exercise this option.

To exercise "the divine mandate of stewardship", the worker (as in the poster for "Schindler's List") puts his hand in that of the Creator to cooperate in the work of creation; herein man finds his nobility, in his work, as he seeks to develop and nurture that which God has created and has handed over to man's dominion. To be denied work or to be deluded into thinking that work does not matter ("You would do better to live off welfare."), the ruse of the welfare state, is to deny man his very nobility. If there is abusive capitalism, then very clearly here is an instance of "abusive welfare". In fact, in an address to work-

ers on 19 March 1994, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, John Paul II stated: "through work man gives himself to others and to society as a whole. Thus he establishes his own humanity through work, and becomes in a certain sense a gift for others, totally fulfilling himself."

Speaking ten days later, on 28 March 1994, to executives and employees of Procter and Gamble, John Paul continued along these same lines: "The Lord has blessed man's work, assigning him as its fruit not only the toil and sweat of his face but also happiness and the enjoyment of every kind of good. Man's work is therefore a gift for which he

should be grateful to God.” It is also the result of the efforts of man who, with his enterprise and insight, manages to create work opportunities for his peers. This implies managerial ability and calculated business risks with constant respect for the demands of justice. The State will not fail to support managerial commitment to encouraging production through the appropriate structures. However, if on the one hand, the private and the public businessman must be able to create new markets and new jobs, on the other, the worker cannot fail to feel co-responsible for the firm’s good progress, adopting an attitude of loyal collaboration towards it. It is most significant in this address that the pope echoes not only the thought but the language of Michael Novak, who demonstrates the impact of capitalism in the three distinct yet interrelated spheres of the political, the economic and the moral-cultural: “Solidarity is a basic dimension of humanizing work, for it consciously seeks possible remedies when the capacity to build and act encounters precarious situations or even emergencies. Solidarity ‘helps us to see the other’— whether a person, people or nation—not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our ‘neighbor’, a ‘helper’, to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. On this foundation it will be possible to progress towards building a civilization where man may become the way for any political, cultural or economic activity. Precisely for this reason, the Church continues to defend man, strengthening his value in the light of Christ, who fully reveals his identity and his destiny.”

Pope John Paul II further clarifies the relationship of labor to capital, again in a way that affirms democratic capitalism over savage capitalism in an address given on the centenary of the founding of the Bank of Italy (9 February 1994): “A well-ordered economy is essential and this is precisely why it is vital for the economy to be attentive to the dictates of ethics and the requirements of solidarity; an economy sensi-

tive to the intrinsic priority of labor over capital and the sacrosanct nature of “the right to work” for all human beings. An economy should be developed in response to the growing ‘globalization’ of financial dynamics, never forgetting the rights of the most deprived and still less trampling them, in the name of market laws.” He also offers here a criticism of socialist economy and a defense of free enterprise: “. . . economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum. On the contrary it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labors and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly.”

The major criticism of the welfare state, in the words of Pope John Paul II, stems from the diminished value of work, which thereby denies the very nobility and identity of the human person. Rooted in our human vocation and identity is the ennobling vocation to work with God in creation; as co-workers with Him, we not merely enjoy creation, but we do something with it. Literally, farmers “work” the earth, but all workers bring to bear some creative activity as we perform our work; thus, the nobility of work and the debasing nature of welfare, where the absence of work denies man’s rightful nobility.

The notion of culture itself is rooted etymologically in work. “Culture” comes from a Latin verb which evolved in meaning from “to till the soil”, then “to dwell”, and finally “to worship”, so we have such different concepts as “agriculture”, “cultivation”, “culture”, and “cult” all derived from the same Latin root. I should like to suggest that this linguistic evolution is in no way a mere coincidence; rather, it reflects the actual historical circumstances: where people planted seeds from which they could derive nourishment and a livelihood, there they would be safe to settle and establish a permanent dwelling; with work and home provided for, then they could allow themselves the “luxury” of

religion. Culture, then, embraces where you live, your work ethic, your religion and religious values. The welfare state, it strikes me, lacks much of what constitutes genuine culture; that is tragic for it denies the members of the welfare state a participation in an ennobling culture. They are truly victims of what is ironically called “welfare”.

My basic critique of the welfare state is that it has ceased to do what “welfare” should do, namely to “do well” by the citizenry, to provide for their good. Of itself, welfare is a good thing. As Pope John Paul II makes the distinction between democratic and savage capitalism, perhaps we, too, should distinguish democratic welfare from savage welfare.

The welfare system of today which is not ennobling of humanity is most assuredly not “democratic”; it is an aggressor upon our society and it is a “savage” welfare. This form of “savage” welfare has no regard for the tradition of our Protestant work ethic. It is precisely this “savage welfare” that can find no place in a moral society, a society that finds and defines its moral life in terms of Judeo-Christian values. By “savage” welfare, I mean those programs, initiatives and policies enacted all in the name of “welfare” which deny the nobility of work, which savage life within the womb, and assault even the very lives themselves of those for whom this “welfare” is said to be intended. Our current system, wherein welfare is presumed as an entitlement, not only tolerates but rewards unemployment.

Such is the state of our welfare system today as I see it. I am not a medical doctor, nor am I a clever accountant, but I am a priest. Precisely because I am a priest I feel compelled to join my voice with that of Pope John Paul II in promoting life not death and in stating the dignity of work as ennobling of humanity. I hope that “people of business” can make some change for the better, perhaps only in the individual place of work, perhaps in a very quiet way, with no fanfare, in ways known only to them and God. Oskar Schindler did. **A**

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Welfare: Separating Fact from Rhetoric

A Review Essay by Doug Bandow

American political discourse has coarsened in recent years. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than with the issue of poverty. As Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, both currently serving in the Department of Health and Human Services, put it, “when the topic of welfare comes up, dialogue often turns angry and judgmental; the prose becomes purple.”

Yet purple prose almost seems appropriate when dealing with today’s welfare system. It is, as many contend, overly expensive; the multiplicity of programs offer an open invitation to fraud. The federal benefits discourage work, encourage dependency, and undercut families. Others charge that the current system is patronizing and even dehumanizing. Americans are rightly disappointed with government’s care of the poor.

Into this swamp step Bane and Ellwood. Though hailing from the liberal side of the political spectrum, they’ve produced a book which largely steers clear of ideological shoals. Rather, they focus on presenting the reality behind the rhetoric, on which policy should be based.

They begin by describing the nature of the welfare system itself. In the early 1960’s it relied on what they call the “casework model”, focusing on home visits. Then came several years of “the legal rights movement”, based on the rather curious assumption that grantees had a higher moral claim to benefits than did taxpayers to their

earnings. Then, write Bane and Ellwood, came “bureaucratization” through 1988, when Congress passed the Family Support Act, in an attempt to promote independence and self-sufficiency. Alas, the latter had only limited impact. Conclude the authors: welfare programs aimed at getting the recipient back into the work place, in certain circumstances, can have dramatic results. But dramatic change is the exception, not the rule.

Welfare Realities: From Rhetoric to Reform
by Mary Jo Bane
and David T. Ellwood
Harvard University Press,
1994. 220 pp. Cloth: \$32..00

Bureaucracies and regulations are not neutral, but create incentives. What, then, has been the impact of welfare on program beneficiaries? The answer should determine the direction of reform. As Bane and Ellwood explain: “If welfare is predominantly a short-term aid, with people moving quickly into private sources of support, then welfare is best understood as a transitional program. Dependency becomes less a worry, and policies designed to move people from welfare to work might be unnecessary ... But if welfare lasts a very long time, then the nature and the reasons for long-term use become important, and policy responses more complex.”

Unfortunately, the dynamics of

welfare are extraordinarily complex. Just 14 percent of spells on welfare last ten or more years. Yet 48 percent of current recipients move into and out of the program fairly quickly, a large number of chronic recipients dominate the system. The average number of years a woman will receive AFDC is twelve; more than half the current recipients at any one time will average ten years or more on welfare. The problem is particularly acute for single parents: “most un-

married mothers will eventually have relatively long durations.” Thus, while Bane and Ellwood argue that both liberals and conservatives are wrong about welfare dependency, the facts seem to point more to the right: although welfare does not ensnare the majority of its users, it does encourage dependency by many of the most vulnerable recipients. As Bane and Ellwood acknowledge, “race, education, marital status, work experience, and disability status all have especially strong relationships with welfare dynamics.”

Unfortunately, the middle three are all affected by the existence of welfare, since it enables teenagers to leave school, have children, eschew work, all the while forming separate households. Fully one-third of welfare recipients who were unmarried when they started on AFDC will collect benefits for at least ten years. Similar percentages of those who were under the age of 22, dropped out of high school, and had no recent work experience will also be on welfare for ten or more years.

When these characteristics coincide — a recipient is both unmarried and a high school drop out — the likelihood of dependence rises sharply.

Thus, the authors advocate two basic steps, both “identifying long-term recipients and considering the cost-effectiveness of the proposed intervention.” They emphasize the importance of targeting, since “one size cannot possibly fit all welfare recipients.” They warn policymakers not to wait to see which recipients become long-term recipients. In practice this means directing employment, training, and other programs at young women with young children when they first apply for welfare. Bane and Ellwood also urge working “as hard at keeping people off as one does at getting them off.”

Sensible policies all, yet Bane’s and Ellwood’s research suggests that welfare caseloads are largely impervious to this sort of tinkering. Today, three of ten recipients escape welfare by marriage. Another ten percent exit when their children move beyond eligibility age. Twelve percent leave the rolls because other transfer income, such as disability payments, rise. In contrast, just one-quarter of “exits”, by one reckoning, reflect increased earnings, though Bane and Ellwood cite additional studies that indicate this figure may understate the actual number. So long as welfare’s basic incentive structure remains intact, policymakers are not likely to have a dramatic impact on the basic decisions that give rise to poverty — leaving school, failing to marry, having children out of wedlock, and so on.

Bane and Ellwood similarly dissect the problem of dependency. They review several competing models: rational choice (recipients weigh costs and benefits); expectancy (people’s belief in their con-

trol over their destiny); and culture (personal, family, and community values). They conclude that “of the three models, the choice framework seems most effective in explaining the results, but that there are enough anomalies in the data to warrant looking beyond the pure choice model.” This finding merely reinforces the argument that Congress needs to change the system’s underlying incentives, which currently reward failure to form families, work, and finish school, all the

Earned Income Tax Credit and more effective child support enforcement.

Sensible as such steps might seem — and there is no serious argument against making fathers pay to support their children — they do not address the core problem of the welfare system: perverse incentives. Genuine reform requires more than tinkering; it requires reconsidering who should be eligible for what benefits when. Genuine reform also requires ask-

“So long as welfare’s basic incentive structures remains the same, policymakers are not likely to have a dramatic impact on the basic decisions that give rise to poverty..”

—Doug Badow

while bearing children. The authors warn that past initiatives to promote work have had only a limited nature of reforms: “the results clearly suggest that modest changes in benefit policy (either liberalizing or tightening) in the range countenanced in relevant political debate, are unlikely to have major impacts on work and dependency. Other policy directions may be more fruitful.”

The authors go on to advance their proposals to increase self-sufficiency. Particularly important, in their view, is ensuring that people who work are not poor. As they report: “After government transfers, poor two-parent families with a full-time worker have incomes farther below the poverty line than single parent families on welfare or two parent families with an unemployed worker. The working poor are literally the poorest of the poor.” As a result, they endorse the

ing not just at what level, federal or state, welfare policy should be determined, but whether government should be making policy at all — whether charity should be left to private individuals, families, communities, and institutions.

Bane and Ellwood do not ask, let alone attempt to answer, these questions, so their solutions fall painfully short. Yet their thorough research and analysis will help policymakers who do ask such questions design new policies that might make a difference. In this way *Welfare Realities* should help Americans see through the purple prose that so often characterizes the welfare debate. **A**

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Welfare Reformed: A Compassionate Approach

David W. Hall, ed.
P & R Publishing, 1994.
232 pp. Paper: \$16.00

It has been noted again and again, in the pages of this journal and others, that would-be welfare reformers must do more than simply debunk and dismantle the current system. Real welfare reform and cultural renewal must also present a paradigm of alternative ideas and new structures. This collection of essays by twelve leading Christian thinkers is useful reading for all interested in affecting this change. The book is divided into three sections, each dealing with one aspect of the problem of the welfare state and its potential solutions: an analysis of the present system, a presentation of applicable biblical principles, and a historical overview of possible alternative institutions.

The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly

Ellis W. Hawley
Fordham University Press, 1994.
525 pp. Cloth: \$35.00

During the New Deal era and since, both liberals and conservatives have cited the Roosevelt Administration's policy toward monopoly as an example of logical inconsistency. This superb and scholarly book makes clear that the inconsistency was the result of political haggling rather than the President's muddy thinking. Thoroughly researched, clearly written, thoughtful and focused, this book is a major contribution to the history of economic and political thought.

Loving Your Neighbor: A Principled Guide to Personal Charity

Marvin Olasky, ed.
Capital Research Center, 1995.
146 pp. Paper: \$15.00

In his new book, Dr. Olasky brings together a collection of essays on personal charity utilizing real-life case studies culled from the pages of *Philanthropy, Culture and Society*. He notes that the Christian tradition, and the Scriptures, place emphasis on love and discernment, words not often used in the same sentence today, which must be again if charitable programs are to be effective. Each essay tells the story of a charitable effort, how it succeeded or failed, and why. Great for personal or group study, this excellent little book contains important lessons for any who seek to replace the current welfare morass.

Beyond Politics: Markets, Welfare and the Failure of Bureaucracy

W. C. Mitchell & R. T. Simmons
Westview Press, 1994
224 pp. Paper: \$17.95

As the performance of American political institutions has declined and the domain of government expanded, the political process has witnessed decreased voter turnouts, the call for term limits, and an accelerating cynicism towards politics in general. This book provides a systematic and thorough analysis of the dysfunctions of modern politics. The authors conclude that government failure is not caused primarily by bureaucratic incompetence or political corruption — although these are

symptomatic. Instead, *Beyond Politics* explains that the cause can be located in the destructive battlefield of pressure group welfare in which politicians, interest groups and bureaucrats fight for special privileges. The authors conclude that the Founding Fathers' noble experiment in personal responsibility, limited government and the rule of law has degenerated into political dysfunction and mutual plunder.

On Stone or Sand

Michael Kelley
Pleroma Press, 1993
241 pp. Paper: \$10.95

Mr. Kelley has given us a theological study which makes clear that biblical ethics and law cannot be divorced from each other. The author systematically applies Scripture to our current moral and political scene with faith and intelligence. Kelley concludes that the Scriptures strongly support a free market economy in which virtue, self-responsibility, and concern for others can be best exercised. Especially insightful is his sixth chapter in which he goes to great pains to demonstrate that the generation of wealth is a moral pursuit which has benefits for all of society.

Freedom of Choice

Yves R. Simon
Fordham University Press, 1992.
163 pp. Paper: \$9.00

A reprint of this classic work by Simon which tackles questions concerning the nature of human freedom. Simon analyzes our common-sense experience of freedom of choice and develops a coherent theoretical defense of the reality of human autonomy. A

Reforming our Attitudes

This welfare edition of *Religion & Liberty* has begun to state clearly the argument that the solutions to the current welfare crisis rest not with government but with communities. Government is compassion's least able practitioner.

We have critiqued the welfare state and have gone to great lengths to show its faults. Although criticism is often useful, it is never enough. Those who support welfare reform fail in their mission if they merely criticize the welfare state, dismantle it, and leave it at that. The more difficult part of our journey is mobilizing the thousands of Americans who can give of their time, material resources and love. The private sector needs to be up to the task of replacing the welfare bureaucracy that now exists.

Essential to this welfare revolution is that we first change our thinking about poverty and compassion. A debilitating welfare culture coexists with the welfare state. Many of us have grown accustomed to viewing poverty and compassion narrowly. Eventually, we must face not just minor reform, but the overturning of the old paradigm. Those working in the private sector, to whom new responsibilities will fall, must begin to adopt the following three perspectives:

First, we can no longer believe that the call of compassion is satisfied by simply writing a check. The poor are asking for much more than our money. We must begin to make the more difficult sacrifices of our time, energy and talents. We must go to the poor where they live and enter into their poverty in order to help them rise above it. In our efforts to help those suffering the effects of poverty, dollars may be the least important consideration.

Another attitude that must change is our tendency to believe that as individuals we cannot make a meaningful contribution. When faced with a homeless person, the temptation is to think "What could I, with my limited experience and

resources, do?" We therefore turn to simply giving money. We need to rethink this response and consider other ways we can contribute; perhaps volunteering at a private shelter, or maybe starting a shelter where there is none, or even having a conversation with a homeless person, as a person, and ask them what they truly need. This is the more radical approach because it requires that we listen to the poor and allow them to become part of the solution — not just the target of our pity.

A third attitude we must adopt is that we no longer view the poor as incapable. One of the most egregious faults of current government programs is the hidden assumption that the poor will always remain poor.

While admitting that some people suffer from more than the effects of poverty which prevent them from becoming productive members of society, many of those receiving

government assistance can contribute to the elevation of their standard of living. The poor themselves have to be a part of the solution to their own problems. Requiring some level of participation and responsibility on the part of individuals will offer the opportunity for more than dollars or a job, it will offer the opportunity for self-esteem.

This is the beauty of the principle of subsidiarity: it advises us to start one person at a time, one family at a time, dealing with whoever is nearest to us. The poor will be restored to wholeness only through transforming lives and families, not by temporarily alleviating their material poverty through impersonal government programs. A

Essential to this welfare revolution is the need to first change our way of thinking about poverty and compassion.

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Let's stop somebody from doing something!
Everybody does too much.
People seem to think they've got a right to eat and drink,
Talk and walk and respirate and rink,
Bicycle and bathe and such.
So let's have lots of little regulations,
Let's make laws and jobs for our relations,
There's too much kissing at the railway stations -
Let's find out what everyone is doing,
And then stop everyone from doing it.

—A. P. Herbert
cited in *The British Political Tradition*
W.H. Greenleaf

