

Kingdom Congress of Illinois

Position Paper on Minimum Wage: Religion Mandate

The predominant role of religion is two-fold: one, to restore men to God by proclaiming, teaching, and making disciples of men (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16: 15-16) and two, to speak into the policies and practices of men, thus fulfilling the church's role to be the pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim. 3:15). This paper will discuss these roles from three angles: 1) the pillar/prophetic/proclamation role, 2) the charity role, and 3) the history of the church and charity.

The Church's Pillar/Prophetic/Proclamation Role

The Church is the voice from the pulpit to preach the plumb line; which serves a prophetic function by speaking forth the heart of God as evidenced in the scriptures. The Church is to change the hearts of the culture, point out injustice, and issue a call to action to do what is right.

The Church is to pass on to each generation the commandments of God and their application to culture. Regarding the Church's role in pointing out injustice and issuing a call to action to do what is right, that is, preaching the plumb line of God, we can look to the Old Testament prophets who spoke up when society's injustice deepened. Time after time they called the nation to task for not keeping God's commandments.

The scripture has much to say regarding the employer/employee relationship as well as how man is responsible to steward and increase the inheritance God gives. The Church must teach those principles to the body of Christ and encourage Christians to operate according to those principles so that both employer and employee may function as God intends and both may reap blessings. The position paper on the Business Mandate will give more detail on the employer/employee relationship.

An example of this plumb line prophetic preaching in more recent history may be found in the "Black Robed Regiment". In the Revolutionary period in America there were men of God who spoke out concerning the issues of the day, pointing out the injustices of the British crown against the colonists. They were called the Black-Robed Regiment by the British because every Sunday they would mount their pulpits wearing their long black clerical robes and preach the Word of God without fear or favor. These influential clergymen promoted American independence and supported the military struggle against Britain providing sanction for the cause of independence. Colonial religious life was heterogeneous and reflected a diverse set of beliefs; but the support from this influential group of Protestant clergymen who, week after week after week, expounded upon the principles of the proper role of government and the proper role of individuals underneath the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ was viewed by the British as troublesomely effective. (<http://truthinhistory.org/the-black-robed-regiment.html>)

The Church's Charity Role

Injustice takes time to correct even when the Church fulfills its prophetic role. Historically, even while injustice continues, the Church has stepped into the cultural arena during times of oppression, working out its mandate to practice charity.

If there is insufficiency in education and equipping, the Church is to establish training or provide money for training, possibly by opening schools. If medical attention is lacking, the Church serves the physical needs of the community by setting up clinics and hospitals. The word hospitality and hospital obviously come from the same source and, by definition, include the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. The Church has, from the beginning shown hospitality. We read in Acts that in the days of the early Church many sold their belongings and shared with the believers so that none would be without (Acts 4:34, 35). Paul, Peter, and John mention in their letters the necessity of offering hospitality. In Acts 11:27-30, we read about the offerings collected by the various churches and sent by way of Barnabas and Paul to the church at Jerusalem suffering famine. Even earlier than that, we read in Genesis 18 how Abraham showed hospitality to the three men (angels).

Charity is a Christian attribute. The aristocracy of the Roman pagans was big on philanthropy because that was what one did to maintain one's social position. The Christian concept of charity was unique because it promoted the idea that charity was not just limited to one's own family or even one's own social or cultural group (Luke 6:30-36).

Tertullian explained Christian charity thusly: That kind of treasury we have is not filled with any dishonorable sum, as the price of a purchased religion; every one puts a little to the public stock, commonly once a month, or when he pleases, and only upon condition that he is both willing and able; for there is no compulsion upon any: all here is a free-will offering, and all these collections are deposited in a common bank for charitable uses, not for the support of merry meetings, for drinking and gormandizing, but for feeding the poor and burying the dead, and providing for girls and boys who have neither parents nor provisions left to support them, for relieving old people worn out in the service of the saints, or those who have suffered by shipwreck, or are condemned to the mines, or islands, or prisons, only for the faith of Christ. (Tertullian, *Apologetic* 2.39, adapted from the translation by William Reeves in *The Apologies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minutius Felix* [London: W. Churchill, 1716], pp. 308-309).

All charity flows out of free will offerings which is not plunder. In fact, free will offerings are the opposite of plunder, which is the violent and dishonest acquisition of property.

The charity of the Christians in the days of Rome was all the more striking because the need for it was so great. Roman cities were filled with misery; and when a plague came, the wealthy, the physicians, and the pagan priests all fled to the country, leaving most of the rest of the population and the poor to die. But the Christians

remained doing the simplest of things, like bringing water to those too ill to go get it for themselves.

In the 300s, records show that Christians set up hospitals, poorhouses, and every other sort of charity in many locations. In every city and town, the poor could find help from a Christian institution.

Hospitals, orphanages, homes for widows, hostels — many of the earliest charities in Europe — date their foundation to the High Middle Ages. In "Pagans, Christianity, and Charity", Christopher Price enumerates examples of Christian Charity in the Middle Ages, especially after the Protestant Reformation.

(http://www.christiancadre.org/member_contrib/cp_charity.html)

The History of the Church and Charity

Charitable church activity has played an important role throughout much of American history. The philanthropic role of churches was somewhat limited in colonial times but after the Revolutionary War, a large influx of immigrants led to a proliferation of churches that provided social services to their respective ethnic groups. Large revival movements in the early 1800s further increased interactions between religion and the needy. The "Social Gospel" movement, a term first used in 1886, galvanized many church-goers to actively address various social problems so that by the early twentieth century, charitable church activity played a vital role in helping the needy. Church social work included a wide variety of activities, such as employment services, hospital visitation, cooperation with government correctional and medical institutions, other social service agencies, advocacy for social causes, educational services such as job training and basic hygienic instruction, and various programs to aid the poor. Organizations like the Salvation Army, Catholic Social Services, the Pew Charitable Trust, Red Cross, YMCA, YWCA, and the United Way all have explicit Christian origins.

The Christian ethic as interpreted by the puritan middle class called for dedication to work, honesty, thrift and charity. It was fundamentally opposed to the corruption and paternalism associated with the institutionalized church and state. Until the 20th century, welfare continued to be characterized by its focus on the genuinely poor or disadvantaged, the localized system of distribution, and the emphasis on private duty to help one's fellow man. The movement to centralized and generalized welfare drew its main inspiration from the utilitarian philosophy of Bentham, which postulated that the moral worth of an action is determined only by its consequences. However, the two world wars acted as catalysts to this process by making governments feel that, in the situation of war, society needed to be organized and provided for by central management. The socialists who came to power after the Second World War found these arrangements totally conducive to their philosophy and proceeded to entrench the system permanently.

As a result of the Great Depression, several factors contributed to more and more dependence on the government replacing the church's provision. The involvement of unions campaigning for improved working conditions and for better pay for employees increased in the time of the Great Depression. Industry in the cities was growing by leaps and bounds. People desperately needing work migrated to the cities resulting in a surplus of potential workers for employers. Employers could pay low wages and skimp on providing good working conditions. Where was the church in holding Christian

employers accountable to the biblically defined role of the employer? Unionization developed as the people's answer. As the unions became associated with the government, the government became a provider.

With the Depression came increased unemployment and lower wages. Many acts were passed that would protect the rights of the worker. Two of the most significant was the Public Contracts Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which set labor standards including minimum wage, overtime pay, and child labor provisions (Illinois Labor History Society). Along with the depression came Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Many new programs were introduced including the Social Security Act, which is still in place today.

Where were the churches in meting out charity? Jerald C. Bauer, Divinity Dean of the University of Chicago wrote in 1965:

"The depression had a devastating effect on the Churches as well as on the nation. In the optimistic flush of the '20's many congregations had built new edifices far too large and expensive. When the depression hit, they found themselves unable to pay. Most carried their huge debts; a few rejected their obligation, thus bringing shame on the Christian Church. Colleges and publishing houses, missionary enterprises, and the social work of the Churches were all hard hit by the depression."

(<http://www.downshoredrift.com/downshoredrift/2008/10/churches-and-th.html>)

An article from the *Journal of Public Economics* (2007) entitled, "Faith-based Charity and Crowd-out During the Great Depression" states that "Churches in the U.S. were a crucial provider of social services through the early part of the twentieth century, but their role shrank dramatically with the expansion in government spending under the New Deal." Their findings suggest that benevolent church spending fell by 30% in response to the New Deal, and that government relief spending can explain virtually all the decline in charitable church activity observed between 1933 and 1939.

In recent years, church social service provision has been dwarfed by the role of the government in the U.S. The article's research finds that 80% – 90% of churches are actively engaged in providing social services to the community. While churches remain an important source of social services, providing over \$24 billion in philanthropic services annually, church charitable giving is only one element of private charity that might be crowded-out by government intervention. Human services organizations such as food banks and the Red Cross probably respond in similar ways to changes in government spending. (<http://economics.mit.edu/files/6424>)

Nevertheless, a 1990 Gallup Report, "Religion and the Public Interest," revealed the widespread factor of Christianity and religion in charitable giving. "Churches and synagogues contribute to America's social service more than any other non-governmental institution, including corporations."

(http://www.christiancadre.org/member_contrib/cp_charity.html)

In conclusion: God's ways are just and the church's prophetic voice should be calling men to keep the principles and precepts of God's word in every area of life, including the area

of employer/employee relationships. Where injustice occurs, the church not only issues a call to action to do what is right but also actively provides charity for those adversely affected by the injustice.

This position paper was written by Joyce Geiler.