

## **Christian Charity and the Welfare State**

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### Prefatory Remarks:

Colleagues at Grove City College have advised me that some people might wonder why I, with degrees in economics instead of theology, would write a paper that puts forth a biblical exegesis. To put the shoe on the other foot, how would I like it if a theologian presumed to write an economic tract?

I have a couple of ready responses: First, if it bothered me whenever a theologian expressed an economic opinion, I would be upset quite often, because theologians do, in fact, address economic matters rather frequently. Many a priest (including my cousin Larry) and pastor (including my neighbor Jim) preach and propound economic theories from the pulpit. Theologically-based economic literature is common, with two of the more famous examples being Protestant Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and periodic papal encyclicals from the Roman Catholic church.

I reject the notion that economists have or deserve to have a monopoly on economic commentary, and I reject the notion that we have a monopoly on economic wisdom. Actually, given some of the egregious fallacies entrenched in mainstream economic orthodoxy, I would say my profession suffers from an acute shortage of economic wisdom, so I say "Welcome!" to anyone, regardless of academic credentials, who can bring some common sense to today's vital economic issues.

Now, to put the shoe back on the other foot again, just as I object to professional economists enjoying any sort of exclusive prerogative to address economic matters, I even more strongly protest the assertion that biblical commentary is the exclusive province of those with

academic or ecclesiastical credentials in religion. Maybe it's my Protestant upbringing, but I believe that the Bible is for everyone and that God communicates to each of us directly through His inspired Word. I may not have academic standing as a theological thinker, but I am a thinker who has spent a lot of time pondering the Bible, and I have as much a right to discuss biblical precepts as anyone does.

I am well aware of the innumerable disagreements and disputes about the interpretation of Scripture (How else did we get so many denominations and splinter congregations?) and so, of course, some of you readers will disagree—perhaps quite vehemently—with my present understanding of the meaning of biblical verses. So be it. Let me simply state two facts here: First, I have read the Bible on a daily basis, with few exceptions, for over 35 years, so I am no mere dabbler or glib dilettante. Second, I have formed the opinions contained herein entirely on my own. My opinions about how Christian principles inform economic issues are not taught by any church that I know of; nor can I cite religious scholars as authority for my individual understanding of what the Scriptures say, since I base my arguments directly on biblical verses themselves, and not on what such-and-such a scholar says the Bible says. If I have misunderstood the words of my God and my Savior, then I'm sure that divine wisdom will find a way to correct me.

I invite you to explore the points I raise with an open mind and then decide for yourself if I have made a valid case.

## Introduction

There is near universal agreement among Christians of all political stripes that one of our great privileges and duties is to do charitable deeds. Where we disagree is on the question of whether the secular authority of the state should be an agent of Christian charity. To some, such

an alliance seems logical; to others, it is a *non sequitur* to conclude that, because we are expected to perform acts of charity, we should enlist the state to help us.

This question surfaced in the August 2008 interview that Pastor Rick Warren conducted with the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. When Warren asked Barack Obama to name our nation's greatest moral failing, then-Senator Obama replied that it was insufficient support for the disadvantaged, including the poor. Obama then quoted the Lord Jesus' statement, "Whatsoever you do for the least of my brothers, you do for me" as biblical justification for his plans to have the national government increase economic assistance to the poor.

As president, Obama has continued to cite biblical verses in support of his political agenda. For example, in August 2009, Obama invoked Scripture during an Internet phone call to several thousand clergy and religious leaders. Urging his listeners to support his goal of moving toward universal health care insurance, the president asserted that "a core ethical and moral obligation... [is] that I am my brother's keeper." Clearly, even in our relatively secular age, political leaders aren't bashful about invoking Holy Scripture in support of their political agenda.

President Obama has raised an important question: Is a government welfare state consistent with Christian principles? If so, then perhaps Christians should support Obama's domestic agenda of spreading the wealth around. On the other hand, if a government-mandated redistribution of wealth conflicts with or compromises Christian principles, then Christians may find that adherence to their religious principles will lead them to withhold their support from, and perhaps even actively oppose, such policies.

The belief that Christians should favor government programs for the poor has a long history. Ever since socialism emerged as a political doctrine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various professed Christians, attracted by the vision of a society with a more equal distribution of wealth,

have made common cause with socialistic politics. Christian socialism, the social gospel, liberation theology—these are a few of the more famous intellectual movements that have sought to link, if not equate, Christianity with socialism. While most Christians have not embraced outright socialism, many accept the proposition that some government-directed redistribution of wealth to the poor is consistent with their Christian values and beliefs.

President Obama’s dialogue with Pastor Warren underscores the timeliness of this momentous issue. Should Christians favor government programs that redistribute wealth to the poor? The affirmative case has been set forth many times over the decades. In this paper, I will make the opposite case. I will attempt to show that Christian support of the government redistribution of wealth should be rethought in light of some clear Scriptural texts.

Citing a single scriptural verse, as President Obama did, can be helpful and illuminating, but it also can be problematic, as can be seen in *Matthew 4*, where the tempter quotes Scripture. I invite you to examine Sen. Obama’s statements in the fuller biblical context that I will provide.

### Christ and Government—the Essential Difference

The very natures and methods of government and Christ are diametrically opposed to each other. Government employs force and the threat of force, even violence, to impose its will. Jesus eschewed the ways of this world, especially violence.

The gentle but powerful spirit of Christ moves humans to charitable deeds through *internal impulsion*. Government commands obedience through *external compulsion*. Christian charity is voluntary, rewarding the giver with joy and satisfaction. By contrast, financial support of government programs is not voluntary, but mandatory. Noncompliance is punished by fines and/or imprisonment.

It has become fashionable in recent years to ask, “What would Jesus do?” Did Jesus enlist the help of the state in carrying out his mission? According to the gospel record, Jesus’ only contacts with government were when government sought to deprive him of each individual’s God-given rights—his life (the crucifixion), his liberty (his arrest), or his property (taxes). Given these facts, perhaps we shouldn’t jump to the conclusion that the Lord would choose government as an ally in performing Christian works.

“But things are different today,” some might say. “At the time of Jesus, Roman society was pagan, but today Christian values permeate our society, and so it is only natural to expect government policies to implement Christian values.” Let’s examine this assumption.

Apart from the lengthy historical record showing how Christian rulers have ruined countless lives when resorting to compulsion, Jesus himself cautioned against merging Christian goals into a political agenda. Wiser than the rest of us, the Savior delineated two separate spheres of activity, the sacred and the secular, telling his followers to “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (*Mark* 12:17).

If Jesus had believed in political power as the path to God’s kingdom on earth, might not he have accepted Satan’s offer to receive control over all the kingdoms on earth? Then he could have passed laws and imposed his will on mankind. But we all know how the Lord responded to that temptation: “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (See *Matt.* 4:8-10.)

Where in the Bible is the church of Christ instructed to delegate its charitable mission to civil government, or to seek a “joint custody,” or shared responsibility, for Christian beneficence? Christians may “reprove, rebuke, exhort” (*II Tim.* 4:2) others to increase their

charitable activities, but where in the Bible is it written that we may compel others to act charitably?

### The Master's Way

A Bible passage often cited by those who claim biblical support for the redistribution of wealth is Jesus' encounter with a rich man in *Mark* 10. This unnamed man wanted to know how he might attain eternal life. After hearing that he had faithfully kept the commandments "from [his] youth," Jesus told him what he still needed to do: "Go thy way, sell whatever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me" (v. 21).

This incident lends no support to the argument for government redistribution of property. Instead, the relationship between Jesus and the rich man was entirely voluntary. The kingdom of heaven operates on the basis of contract, not compulsion. The Savior offered the man a *quid pro quo*: You give away your earthly all, and I'll give you everlasting life. The rich man was completely free to accept or refuse the deal and its terms. When, in fact, he declined the offer, Jesus let him depart in peace. If he had said to his disciples, "Let's go to the governor and petition him to redistribute the young man's wealth to the poor," then the Christian redistributionists could cite this incident to substantiate their position. That is not, however, what the Scriptures record.

The gospels contain other clear accounts of Jesus approving of spiritually impelled (voluntary) charity, and rejecting materially compelled (involuntary) redistribution of wealth. When the diminutive tax collector Zacchaeus voluntarily announced, "The half of my goods I give to the poor" (*Luke* 19:8), he received the Savior's unequivocal benediction, "This day is salvation come to this house" (v. 9).

By contrast, when a man asked Jesus to tell his brother to share his inheritance with him in *Luke* 12, the Lord emphatically declined, pointedly asking, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you” (v. 14)? The import of this response is momentous: If the only begotten Son of God did not feel qualified or justified to determine, much less command, how much of one person’s property should be transferred to another, then what should we, who profess to be his followers, believe: that we have the right, the wisdom, or the moral authority to advocate, approve of, or participate in government’s massive, complex, forced redistribution of trillions of dollars among millions of people?

### Biblical Communism?

Many Christians who claim that socialism is compatible with Christianity have cited *Acts* 4:32-37, 5:1-10. This is the account of the apostle Peter’s Christian community sharing a common purse after Jesus’ ascension. There is a crucial difference, however, between the apostles’ arrangement and communism, which the Christian socialists overlook. The apostles practiced *communalism*, not communism. Communalism is entirely consensual. It includes only those members of the larger community who voluntarily decide to participate. The apostles’ communalism was radically different from socialism, fascism, or the democratic welfare state, in which membership is not optional, but compulsory, and everyone living within that political jurisdiction must pay into the common treasury.

The most vivid part of this passage is that a married couple, Ananias and Sapphira, fell dead after it was found that they had withheld part of their financial assets from the common purse. Some Christians construe this as a condemnation of private property. It is not. Far from denying the right of private property, Peter explicitly reaffirmed it, stating, “While it [your land] remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power” (*Acts* 5:4).

The couple would have been entitled to keep their property if they had not voluntarily contracted to exchange it for full membership in the society of believers. By conniving to receive the benefits of membership without honestly paying for them, they had attempted to defraud the community. Peter clearly explained that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was their dishonesty. They lied to the Holy Spirit, and this sin killed them.

Another important aspect of the communalism described in *Acts* 4 and 5 is that the experiment of communal ownership of property apparently did not last long. We can only surmise that the temptation to be a free-loader was too much for unredeemed human nature to handle, and the early church leaders found communal property not to be viable. Thus, the apostle Paul wrote, "...If any would not work, neither should he eat" (*II Thess.* 3:10). It should be added that Paul practiced what he preached. As he reminded the Thessalonians in his first letter to them, "We worked at our trade [tent-making] night and day, when we preached the gospel to you, so as not to be a burden to any of you" (*I Thess.* 2:9, James Moffatt translation).

### Gospel, Law, and Legislation.

Just as Christian redistributionists mistake communism for communalism, so they confuse law and gospel. God's law, given in the Old Testament, is essentially negative, *e.g.*, Thou shalt not kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, covet, blaspheme, *etc.* The gospel of Jesus Christ, given in the New Testament, is essentially positive. It urges us to go beyond the commandment not to kill, but to actively forgive and love, not only not to steal, but to give to others.

The difference between negative law and positive gospel is profound, and the corresponding implications for human government are momentous. Human legislation based on the moral law of the Old Testament is liberating. When government confines itself to protecting each individual's God-given right to be safe in his or her own person and property, then people

are free to go about their business as long as they don't trespass on the rights of others to do the same. By contrast, when man-made legislation takes on a positive character and commands people to take specified actions, then a person may be deemed guilty of a crime just for sitting at home and minding his own business. Once the principle is established that government has the power to dictate what citizens must do in some cases, a society has started down the proverbial slippery slope toward tyranny.

When human legislation goes beyond negative law to positive, it can trample God's laws and usurp His prerogatives. The great 18<sup>th</sup>-century moral philosopher Adam Smith explained in detail why positive legislation such as "compulsory charity" undermines "the good society" by contradicting biblical law.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith propounded three cardinal social virtues that characterize a stable, humane, Christian society. The first social virtue is prudence. By this, Smith meant that each individual's primary responsibility to society was to provide sufficiently for his own needs and the needs of his family so as not to be a burden on others. A society with too many imprudent, unproductive individuals is doomed to collapse. (Example: the fall of Rome.)

The second social virtue is justice. Smith's sense of justice was biblical. He meant that every citizen, regardless of social standing, was entitled to receive the same protection of his life and property (cf. *Lev. 19:15*). Smith understood justice to be the absolutely indispensable social virtue, the difference between civilization and savagery, the *sine qua non* of a stable, viable society.

The third of the three cardinal social virtues is beneficence, the performance of kind and charitable deeds toward others. To Smith's way of thinking, beneficent deeds comprise the

crowning jewel of society, the hallmark of a society's greatness, maturity and, we may say, its Christianity.

Smith warned, however, that it is not possible to legislate beneficence, such as the giving of financial aid to the poor, without violating justice—the right of persons to be secure in their property. For government or anyone else to forcibly seize or confiscate anyone's property for the purpose of giving aid to someone else is to break a moral law, the Commandment proscribing theft. It is irrelevant that the confiscated wealth may be redirected to the poor. The Eighth Commandment does not stipulate exceptions. It does not say, “Thou shalt not steal, except in service to the poor.”

Christians cannot escape the dilemma that one cannot compel the implementation of gospel principles via legislation, even for worthy causes such as aid to the poor, without violating the moral law given in the Ten Commandments. For the practicing Christian, God's commandments remain inviolable. Jesus never abrogated the Ten Commandments, but reaffirmed them, stating plainly, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (*Matthew: 5:17*).

The legitimate limit, then, to the use of force by any mortal authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is the enforcement of obedience to the Mosaic law. Jurisdiction and judgment over how well an individual lives up to the standards of the gospel of Jesus does not belong to the state, but is reserved for Him Who sits in ultimate judgment.

### The Democratic Temptation

There are many Christians who go along with the popular belief that if a democratic majority votes for a policy, then that policy must necessarily be legitimate. Majority actions are not *a priori* morally right. If that were so, then we would have to endorse the democratic

majority that voted for Pilate to release Barabbas instead of Jesus (or, for that matter, the democratic majority that condemned the noble Socrates).

Simply because a majority approves of something doesn't make wrong right. The Eighth Commandment does not say, "Thou shalt not steal except by majority vote." Few Christians would seize the property of another person to give it to a poor person. They would rightly regard such taking as theft. Delegating the task to a democratic government does not sanctify the taking of private property.

The devout Christians who founded the United States of America were also great students of history. Their general opinion of democracy was summarized eloquently by James Madison, the fourth president of the United States and principal writer of our Constitution: "...Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."

It is because the founders understood so well the inherent defects of democracy that they crafted a constitutional republic. The various forms of the word *democracy* do not appear in our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. While not theoretically consistent (e.g., slavery), our Constitution was designed to protect the God-given rights of individuals. A democracy would have the power, through majority vote, of trampling on the rights of any individual(s) targeted by the majority. By contrast, under our Constitution, no majority could deprive an individual of the God-given rights to be secure in one's life, liberty, and property.

Madison's appraisal of democracy is playing out before our eyes today. Our country's social life is becoming radically politicized resulting in the turbulence of hostility and constant

contentiousness. As government launches ever-more spending programs for various constituencies, the grab for property becomes ever-more aggressive. As we careen into national bankruptcy, one shudders to contemplate the attendant angry, violent convulsions that may mark the demise of our democratic republic.

### The Entitlement Trap

Christians emphasize the importance of being loving. This is natural, since the two great commandments given by Jesus were to love God whole-heartedly and to love one's neighbor as oneself (*cf. Matt. 22:37-39, Mark 12:29-31*). Charitable support for those in need is one way to act lovingly. Thus, many Christians support government programs for the poor, believing that this is a loving thing to do. Government programs, however, can be decidedly unloving in their impact, especially the so-called "entitlement" programs.

Establishing a legal entitlement to taxpayer support abuses man's God-given property rights, which is unloving to both God and man. The word "entitlement" denotes a right or claim. To what? In the modern welfare state, it means a right to part of someone else's money. Such a putative "right" nullifies the rights of others to their own property. Through the legerdemain of Orwellian Newspeak, *entitlement* means "no entitlement" and *yours* means "mine."

Secondly, it is economically, socially, and morally corrosive for a society to confer the status of "entitlement" on welfare payments. To confer such a "right" on indolent indigents is to say that they are entitled to the financial support of their industrious fellows. This inverts the values of a healthy, prosperous society, and to grease the slippery slope of social decline and decay. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire had multiple causes, but perhaps none was more crucial than the economic and moral bankruptcy of welfare state policies. As the Roman Senate kept raising taxes on the productive to subsidize the unproductive, more and more Roman

citizens decided to abandon work and let the government support them. Eventually, the whole corrupt system collapsed of its own dead weight. Advocates of increasing the size of the nanny state don't realize the potential disaster that they are courting. Christians who believe in loving one's neighbor shouldn't support policies that can destroy one's society.

Third, entitlements do violence to our Constitution, that magnificent charter that our Founding Fathers designed to protect our divine rights. The Fifth Amendment forbids the taking of private property without just compensation to the person whose property has been appropriated, yet entitlements transfer billions of dollars from some citizens to others with no compensation whatsoever to those taxpayers. The 14th Amendment explicitly guarantees to all "the equal protection of the laws," yet entitlement programs take money from some and give it to others. Furthermore, and most egregiously, if people who don't work are "entitled" to be supported by those who do, then those who are compelled to work for others without compensation are in a state of "involuntary servitude" in violation of the 13th Amendment. Policies that produce economic and legal bondage are not loving, and Christians ought not to support them.

Fourthly, an entitlement can be counterproductive and unloving to the person receiving it. In Jesus' famous parable of the prodigal son (*Luke 15*), the prodigal didn't begin to discover what was truly important until he had hit rock bottom and nobody helped him. One wonders whether he would have turned his life around if he had lived in a welfare state where he was entitled to regular handouts. He almost assuredly wouldn't have taken the menial job of tending swine, and so might never have awakened to his need for reform and repentance. Instead, he might have remained in a state of infantile dependency on the welfare narcotic indefinitely, never finding meaning and purpose in his life.

## The Biblical Model for Charity

Nothing written herein should be interpreted as minimizing the obligation of Christians to perform charitable deeds. In his parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus clearly shows the two proper ways for Christians to practice charity. The first option is to minister directly and personally to those who need help, as the Samaritan did when he spotted the wounded traveler. The second option is to make a donation (a voluntary contribution, not a tax) to help others care for those in need (*Luke 10:33-35*) as the Samaritan did when he had to leave to attend to his pre-existing responsibilities.

The welfare state goes beyond this biblical paradigm. As first described by the noted sociologist William Graham Sumner over a century ago, the welfare state paradigm is: A and B decide how much to take from C to give to D. Today, there are many A's and B's calling for higher taxes on C, including many wealthy politicians whose tax returns reveal their personal parsimony in donating to charity.

Jesus understood that no man was morally qualified to dictate to others how much charity they should bestow, or what other good deeds another person should do. He rebuked the temptation to such officious do-goodism by pointedly asking, "...Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye" (*Matt. 7:3*)?

The correct answer for a Christian to give when asked, "Who bears the responsibility for doing charitable deeds?" is "I do." Answers such as "the rich" or "society" are evasions of individual responsibility. It is not a Christian duty or prerogative to force others to join us in charitable endeavors. It is erroneous for us to suppose that we are doing God's will by compelling or trying to compel others to do good deeds. We are accountable to God for what we

do, not what we make others do. Paul teaches each of us to “work out [our] own salvation” (*Phil.* 2:12).

### The Practical Superiority of Private Charity

From a purely pragmatic point of view, private, voluntary charity is far more efficient than government programs. This is not surprising, since private charities can spend only the funds that they can convince others to give them, whereas public officials have the privileged power of taxation. Legislators are all too willing to spend other people’s money and increase the national debt in order to woo voters by appearing to do good, while the bureaucratic imperative is to spend as much money as possible, since this is what induces Congress to increase an agency’s budget and expand its payroll.

The efficient use of scarce resources should be a primary concern of those who care about their fellow man. There remain countless unmet needs, and for every million dollars squandered through wasteful management, there will be that much less real wealth in society to educate the young, abate pollution, reduce poverty, create jobs, care for the sick, *etc.* The waste in the federal government’s antipoverty programs is mind-boggling. According to economist Edgar K. Browning’s 2008 book *Stealing from Each Other: How the Welfare State Robs Americans of Money and Spirit*, in 2005 total government expenditures (national, state, and local) on 85 welfare programs totaled \$620 billion, which translates to \$67,000 of aid in one year for a low-income family of four. If the poor had actually received that much, obviously they would be far from poor, but the majority of that aid was consumed by bureaucratic overhead.

What makes private, voluntary charity more efficient is that the donors are closer—perhaps face-to-face—with the recipients of aid than is the case with massive government bureaucracies. Just as those who begged for alms in the Bible had direct contact with potential

benefactors, who could judge for themselves whether the beggar was truly unable to provide for himself rather than a free-loader, it is far easier for private charities to screen out the helpless poor from the poor-by-choice.

Charity is abused when those who are capable of working, but prefer to accept a handout than lift a finger in productive labor, divert scarce resources from the minority of truly needy persons who are absolutely incapable of caring for themselves. There are those who assert that there are no “undeserving poor,” but the Bible contradicts this assertion. *Proverbs* 10:4; 13:4; 19:15; 20:13; 23:21; and 28:19, 22 all declare that moral weaknesses, such as laziness and foolishness, may be the cause of poverty.

Jesus himself condemned sloth and lack of productivity. In the parable of the talents, he scolded the passive, unproductive servant and gave the talent that had been entrusted to him to the servant who had been given the most talents, because the latter had shown the initiative to put his talents to productive use. (See *Matt.* 25:14-30.)

### What is to be Done?

The welfare state is massive, entrenched, and growing. The size of the federal government expanded dramatically under President George W. Bush, and it is expanding even more rapidly under President Obama. This isn't, then, a partisan issue. Neither party resists government arrogating to itself Christian responsibilities. Both are willing to let government absorb the church's rightful activities. When it comes to welfare programs, neither party advocates the separation of church and state.

At present, there is no realistic possibility of abolishing the welfare state. I hope, though, that pro-welfare-state Christians will “repent” (literally, “rethink”) their support of government

welfare programs in light of biblical teachings and out of love for their country and their fellow Americans.

For those of you who have read this far and think that I am some sort of grinch with a vendetta against the poor, let me hasten to correct that erroneous notion by stating that a prior political objective for Christians would be to abolish the myriad federal programs that redistribute money to the rich and powerful. Using government force to redistribute wealth is never justifiable on biblical grounds, but the greater moral outrage is the obscene widespread practice of using the power of government to channel wealth to the well-to-do. By all means, let us cut off the flow of money from the federal treasury to the prosperous—bailouts and handouts to corporations, subsidies to wealthy agribusinesses, grants to the politically correct and connected universities and not-for-profit organizations—before we halt transfer payments to the poor.

Many Christians who have thrown their support to the welfare state don't realize that they are unwitting accomplices in a political agenda that goes far beyond sending aid to the poor. Many of the secular social democrats and socialists with whom they make common cause in seeking to expand welfare programs desire to expand the power of government in every sphere of society. Their ideal is an omnipotent state, not the omnipotent God. Their overall goals are secular, materialist, and fundamentally antichristian.

Naturally, the secularists welcome support from Christians on the issue of redistributing wealth. They find this support to be fortuitous and expedient, but they do not regard such collaboration as a permanent alliance. In fact, they turn against Christians as soon as it suits them. If pro-redistribution Christians wish to test this assertion, let them try to gain the secular socialists' support for any policy that is traditionally Christian, even something as innocuous as

prayer in schools, and they will quickly see that their erstwhile comrades exalt the state above God.

Whereas Christians acknowledge—as our founding fathers did—that each individual has an inalienable, God-given right to enjoy his life, liberty, and property, secularists and statist seek to abridge those rights. The right to life is abridged when Big Government uses tax dollars to help fund the ongoing abortion holocaust. Making the sacrifice of the young an official policy of the state is a characteristic of a pagan society (*e.g.*, the Aztecs), not of a Christian civilization. Even Christians who believe that abortion is a private choice should balk when government mandates taxpayer funding of this act.

The pro-welfare-state cultists also pose a threat to our liberty and property. The major contemporary threat to our liberty is the desire of President Obama and his allies in Congress to have Washington exert ever-more control over economic activity, ranging from energy to health care. Americans can hardly be said to be free if government regulation dictates energy consumption and health care decisions. The tenuous status of our property rights is evident in the secularists' goal of having government control an ever-greater share of the country's wealth, even though government already consumes over a third of our country's gross domestic product. Such a bloated government is not countenanced by the Word of God. The Bible teaches us that God expects his people to tithe—to pay one-tenth of their income—to serve Him. Should Christians do anything to promote the growth of a secular state that places a greater claim on them than does God Almighty?

Pardon the bluntness, but Paul's strongly worded admonition is pertinent here: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing..." (*II Cor.6:15, 17*).

## Conclusion:

Our Founding Fathers had it right. They understood that government power poses potentially the greatest threat to human rights. Washington likened government to fire—useful when carefully confined and controlled, but fearsomely destructive when it surges out of control. Jefferson said that Americans should diligently use the chains of the Constitution to prevent government from “mischief” (a euphemism for harm and havoc). Our founders would counsel us not to expect government to do good, but rather to keep it small and limited, lest its power be perverted to evil ends, the primary one being infringements on our God-given rights.

The secular socialists embrace the pernicious philosophy of egalitarianism. They want to use government to make people more equal. In doing so, they are warring against nature and nature’s God, since He has given each of us different abilities (remember the parable of the talents). The Bible, by contrast, establishes the sacred principle of equality before the law—“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor” (*Lev. 19:15*; see also *II Sam 14:14*; *II Chron. 19:7*; *Prov. 24:23*; *Rom. 2:11*; *Col. 3:25*; *James 2:9*). Secularists and statists believe in unequal treatment before the law—a system of discrimination and privileges that plunders the property of some to give it to others so that everyone may be equal in what they own. We have a clear choice to make. Either we follow God’s guidance and uphold the rule of law, or we reject Him and enthrone a system of privileges which breeds conflict rather than cooperation and peace.

The good news (in addition to the Good News of the gospel) for American Christians is that there are no laws preventing us, either as individuals, churches, or voluntary organizations, from engaging in charitable activities and helping the poor. Each one of us is free to do Christian

works without hindrance or persecution from the temporal political powers (although we could do so much more if the state were not appropriating and consuming so much of our wealth). Let us go forth and discharge our Christian duties to help the poor. Let us also commit ourselves to the lofty and worthy goal of preserving our republic and defending its inspired Constitution, without which we would be neither as free nor as prosperous as we are. Let us pull back from the precipice over which Rome and other self-bankrupting democracies have plunged.

We have a choice: Put our trust in God's wisdom or man's wisdom; honor and protect man's God-given rights or augment the power of government which jeopardizes those rights; submit to the divine will or exercise human will; serve the creator of all or the prince of this world; to live as free men and women or as wards and minions of the state.

The choice for humans always boils down to the basic choice set forth in the book of *Deuteronomy*:

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days  
(*Deut.* 30:15,16,19,20).

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