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"Christian Morality and National Politics"

Third in a Series

Welfare: The Candidates' Stands
Compared on the Poverty Problem

By Phil Strickland

How should the nation best respond to the blight of poverty afflicting our country?

And what is the stand of the two candidates for the Presidency on the poverty problem? If elected, what will they do?

Both President Nixon and Senator McGovern have proposed providing a minimum income for those who cannot work.

President Nixon's proposal was first introduced in 1969. It proposes providing a basic support level of up to \$2,400 for a family of four (\$3,000 was considered a bare subsistence level for a family of four 10 years ago). As a part of the same proposal, the food stamp program would be discontinued.

Nixon's proposal is definitely not a step in the direction of more money for the poor. Rather, it would mean a significant cut in welfare for recipients in at least 45 states.

McGovern's proposal, as finally revised the first part of September, proposes the establishment through increased social security, an expanded food stamp program, and increased public-assistance payments, of a basic support level of the equivalent of about \$4,000 a year for a family of four.

With all the proposals being made, it is difficult to know the facts about "welfare." There is much misunderstanding. Perhaps this could be best illustrated by a simple true-false quiz. Look over the following and see how you would answer:

- T F 1. The majority of welfare recipients are black.
- T F 2. At least 50% of welfare children are illegitimate.
- T F 3. At least 5% of welfare recipients in the United States are employable males.
- T F 4. Cheating on eligibility is a major problem.
- T F 5. The majority of welfare recipients have been on welfare less than two years.
- T F 6. Some people become fairly well-to-do on welfare.

Now let's see how you did.

- 1. False. The largest racial group is, of course, white--48.3%. The percentage of black people on welfare does exceed their percentage of the population.
- 2. False. Only about 30% of welfare children are illegitimate. Nor do welfare mothers often have more children in order to get more welfare. Over half of welfare families are one and two child families. Payments for additional children are limited in amount (usually limited to four children.)
- 3. False. Less than 1% of welfare recipients are able-bodied males.

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4. False. It depends, of course, on what one considers "major." The poor sometimes cheat on welfare just as the wealthy sometimes cheat on income tax. However, the early results of a new reporting system showed that only in about .4 of one percent of welfare cases is there any indication of fraud and fraud is not actually established in many of those cases.
5. True. Fifty-six percent have been on welfare less than two years. Then the breakdown is as follows: two to three years, 12.2%; three to five years, 11.6%; five to ten years, 11.6% and ten years or more, 6.1%.
6. False. People do not legally become well-to-do on welfare. Families of four simply do not buy Cadillacs on \$300 a month or less.

A lack of factual information is only one problem related to welfare. There is also need for major reform.

Christians, of all people, should be sensitive to the needs of the poor, because the Bible is so clear on the matter. As a matter of fact, it is emphatic.

"Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." (Proverbs 21:13).

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." (Proverbs 14:21).

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:45).

The Biblical concern for the poor rings loud and clear in these and many other passages. There is, however, one passage of scripture that often provides an excuse for those who do not want to get involved in helping the poor. It is where Jesus says, "...the poor always ye have. But Jesus is not talking about the way things should be. He is talking about the way things are.

We may always have the poor with us, but as Christians we are not to sit around and watch them starve. Jesus knew that men, being a sinner, would continue to be insensitive to the needs of his brother.

As Christians, Jesus calls us to something different--love for our brother. One cannot love and at the same time ignore human hunger and suffering. That genuine Christian love will respond is unquestionable, as unquestionable as the love of a Father who sent His Son to die for us.

Of course, there are many who feel that welfare should not be the responsibility of the federal government. Perhaps, ideally, it should not. But the tragedy is that individuals and social institutions, such as the church, have failed to assume the responsibility.

Perhaps one of the greatest needs is for us, individually, to seek out those who have not been as fortunate as others and begin to learn again what it means to express the love of Christ to such persons.

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Strickland is associate secretary of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission

"Christian Morality and National Politics"
Fourth and Last in a Series

Man and the Earth:
Till Death Do Us Part

By Phil Strickland

"Life on earth is threatened with extinction in the next 15 to 30 years."

Ridiculous? Absurd? The rantings of some ecological maniac?

No. It's the opinion of Harvard's Nobel Prize winning biologist, George Wald. And his opinion becomes even more disturbing when most biologists agree that the earth is in serious trouble.

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Few moral issues facing the world today are as important as the ecological crisis. Most politicians have jumped on the ecological bandwagon, lamenting and decrying the problem, but no comprehensive solutions yet have been adopted by Congress.

The environmental record of the Nixon administration has been mixed: The Environmental protection Agency has been created, but few polluters have actually been prosecuted and fined. President Nixon has opposed legislation that would allow individual citizens to file suit to stop pollution.

Senator McGovern has been a principal sponsor of a number of pieces of environmental legislation, and has supported much of the significant legislation proposed which has come before Congress. He is an advocate of giving citizens the right to sue to stop pollution.

Apparently, the vast majority of the population has not yet grasped the significance of seriousness of the ecology problem.

Our earth is limited in resources and its capacity to support life. As with a space ship, there is no way to bring new resources into our closed system. The crucial question is, according to Senator Gaylord Nelson, whether we have to destroy tomorrow in order to live today.

It is difficult to convey the immensity of the problem. But perhaps it is possible to begin to understand what we face.

One must begin with the continuing world-wide population explosion. In 1798, Thomas Malthus wrote an "Essay on Population" in which he reasoned that man multiplies by geometrical progression while food multiplies only by arithmetical progression. He predicted that man would ultimately increase himself beyond his ability to feed himself.

Faults have been found with the Malthus theory. Nevertheless his prediction is rapidly coming true. World population is growing at the rate of 2.1 per cent a year, a rate which will double our present population in 33 years.

What will be the results of this kind of population explosion? The first will inevitably be widespread hunger. Half the world is already hungry. George Borgstrom points out that if we could use all the rain that now falls on the earth, we could feed only about 2.7 billion people at present United States standards. We presently have 3.6 billion people in the world and if we were able to use a fourth of our precipitation for agriculture, it would be a major accomplishment.

Another part of the problem is the pollution of our land, water, and air. Here the problems are acute and complicated. Pesticides, for example, are poured on our land by millions of tons, and the results in the food chain are becoming increasingly obvious. We are, for example, finding "unallowable" concentrations of DDT in some mothers' milk. Leading agronomists point out, however, that without the use of agricultural chemicals, the world will grow far less food and there will be increasing hunger.

Or, consider animal life. Dillion Ribley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute, has predicted that in 25 years, between 75 per cent and 80 per cent of all animals will be extinct. Pesticides are one of the major reasons. But if we stop using pesticides, we immediately have to double our farm land to get the same yield, thus eliminating animal habitat and crowding many species into extinction.

Air pollution continues, threatening to affect our weather as well as our health. In Los Angeles, air pollution has become so severe that there are now special alert days when restrictions are placed on strenuous activity by school children. Now, almost every other day is an alert day. The day of the gas mask may be fast approaching.

Water problems are equally severe. People were shocked not long ago when a cross section of 969 of U.S. city systems showed drinking water in 40 per cent of the cities to be inferior in quality, and 9 per cent downright dangerous.

We have for too long interpreted our "dominion over the earth" to mean that this round ball, so small a part of God's creation, is ours rather than His. We need to remember that it was with a voice of condemnation that Jeremiah said: "And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination." (Jeremiah 2:7)

Responding to the Bible's teaching (Colossian 1:15-16) that all things in heaven and earth were created by and for Christ, Christians must be caretakers, not undertakers of God's world.

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I N S E R T

NOTE TO EDITORS: Please insert the following after the last graph of the story mailed 9/28/72, headlined, "CBS Vice President Assures Baptist : No X-Rated TV Movies." Insert follows:

In Nashville, the executive secretary of the SBC Christian Life Commission, Foy D. Valentine, responded to the CBS-TV official's statements by taking a "wait and see" attitude. The Christian Life Commission is the agency of the convention assigned by the SBC Executive Committee to communicate Baptists' concern about morally offensive movies to the networks.

Valentine commended Swafford's statements "that we are guests in people's homes and we try to conduct ourselves accordingly." Valentine added that "we will be watching carefully to see if future programming reflects such policy."

"We are encouraged that the efforts of multitudes of morally sensitive people, including many Southern Baptists, seem to have made some impression on the Columbia Broadcasting System. The issue last winter was the showing of morally offensive movies on television; and that is still the issue today," said Valentine.

"At the time when CBS chose to break a barrier by releasing for the first time for showing on television their edited version of a previously X-rated movie, the Christian Life Commission expressed its concern that there was "imminent danger that offensive movies may now be channeled more frequently into American homes."

"That concern expressed last March was repeated by the Southern Baptist Convention in June when it adopted a resolution opposing television programs which degrade sex, glorify violence, and deny moral decency," explained Valentine.

"What we feared then," said Valentine, "as imminent danger now seems to be coming to pass." He observed that a Nashville newspaper had quoted a top executive of American Broadcasting Co., Elton Rule, as saying that "today there is virtually no subject that is taboo on network television... Television has not only reflected a liberalizing trend at work within our society, but has given it acceleration."

Valentine pointed out that ABC-TV led off its new fall Sunday night movie program with Goldfinger, which he said was "hardly a welcome guest in our Christian homes." Soon to come is the movie, Patton, notable for its vulgarity, indiscriminate use of four-letter words, and its glorification of violence, Valentine added. The television industry is also offering such films as Valley of the Dolls, a movie about drug addiction and prostitution, and Love Story, which also is sprinkled throughout with four-letter words.

"In the words of the resolution passed by the Southern Baptist Convention in Philadelphia, 'We view this issue with so much seriousness that we pledge ourselves to work,' to keep from being inundated by this flood of moral sewerage. The flood threat has not subsided," stressed Valentine.

"Morally offensive movies on television still have no place on the airwaves which belong to the people or in our homes, which belong to God," concluded Valentine.



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