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*Renewing American Compassion*

by MARVIN OLASKY

FOREWORD BY NEWT GINGRICH



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*For Susan*

THE FREE PRESS

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## *Foreword: A Citizen's Guide for Helping the Poor*

*by Newt Gingrich*

As Americans we can no longer escape this reality: three decades of social welfare policies have failed, condemning too many of our fellow citizens to lives of despair. Nevertheless, Americans want a compassionate society that will help the truly needy. In the mid-1960s the prevailing view was that this goal could be accomplished through high-rise bureaucracies in Washington. Unfortunately, that Great Society view set us on a track that has been an unmitigated disaster, a disaster more harmful to more Americans than the Vietnam war itself.

When we look at the murder rate among young black men, at the cocaine and heroin and crack addiction among young Americans of all races, at the illiteracy rate, at the number of children who have never known their father or had any father figure, at the devastation of our inner cities, we can see clearly that America's approach to helping the poor is doing great damage and that it is in urgent need of replacement. This means replacing a culture of poverty and violence with a wholly different culture of productivity and safety—not just helping the poor or focusing on the inner cities, but actually replacing one culture with another.

Efforts to repair or improve the current welfare system are

doomed to fail because they sidestep the holistic nature of the problem. In a holistic model, *everything* has to be taken into account—unlike a reductionist model, which breaks a problem down into a series of building blocks and decides which piece to deal with first. There's a very big difference between the two. In the holistic model, every piece depends on every other piece—deal with the totality or it does not work.

Piecemeal efforts to repair our system and its culture of poverty and violence are doomed to fail. We ask the poor, "Why don't you go to work?" And they say, "Fine." But if they do go to work, they lose Medicaid. If one of their children gets sick, they promptly lose all the money they just worked for. If they receive food stamps or Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the government will actually punish them if they try to save any money. They may not join Amway or Mary Kay or indeed do anything that would allow them to improve their lives. We have an interlocking system, in which change to any one piece without thinking through the change of the whole is pointless.

We must find a way to address the problems of the whole person. This is what Marvin Olasky explains so well: that to be effective, charity must be personal, challenging, and spiritual—requirements government cannot meet. To replace the whole culture of violence and poverty in this manner, we must address four key realities.

The first reality is that when individuals are caught within a dysfunctional culture they must transfer their loyalties, beliefs, and practices to another culture if they are truly to change their behavior. For instance, if you were a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, you would have to undergo a conversion experience. You would say, yesterday I was an active alcoholic; today, I am a recovering alcoholic. Yesterday, when I felt anxiety-ridden, I took a drink; today, when I feel anxiety-ridden, I go to my AA

meeting and talk to my friends, or I pray. In AA there is a conscious effort to rebuild the entire person and to make the transition to this system from another system a decisive moment. In addition, there is constant support; if you don't have a support structure, something that helps you when you start to slide back, you are going to break down.

Part of the reason it is hard for us to really change things is that we underestimate the second reality, which is that cultural change is very hard. It requires tremendous persistence over a long period of time, and it can often only be achieved one person at a time. We tend to be impatient—we say, "Okay, I'm willing to do this for up to a year and a half." That is a little bit like the farmer who says, "I'll grow corn provided it's ready to eat in three weeks. If this seedling doesn't make it in three weeks, I'm throwing the sucker out and replanting." But important things do not happen overnight. To achieve breakthrough in a culture that needs a dramatic change of behavior means starting with one person, then going on to two and three, and then gradually beginning to peel away the whole culture, revealing a better one.

The third reality is that this kind of cultural change is best done outside government. I would argue that (with the exception of military boot camps) there is virtually no government program capable of producing such change—for the very reason that governments are not set up as agencies of acculturation. Moreover, as Americans we would be justifiably furious if bureaucrats tried to acculturate us. Who are they to tell us whether we ought to be in the circle or the square? They work for us—we don't work for them. We would strongly resist any call for cultural change delivered by government.

Such changes call for a kind of action that cannot be legislated. To truly help people requires discernment among their different needs. For some people poverty is a definable problem, such as

occurs when they lose their job. But for many others poverty is only a symptom; if poverty is caused by alcohol or drug addiction, lack of education or mental illness, giving money will not help but will only facilitate escape from the real problem. True charity must understand each person's unique needs and target those needs—something government cannot do.

The kind of cultural change we are talking about requires missionaries. It requires the kind of person who will sit steadfastly at three o'clock in the morning holding the hand of someone who is about to commit suicide. Bureaucracy cannot do that. Yes, there are some wonderful government employees; you do find people who are individually fabulous. But you cannot recruit people to a bureaucracy on the premise that they will stay there as long as needed. To the contrary, you *can* recruit to a volunteer organization on that premise. The two are very different models. Yet we sometimes get mad at bureaucracy, asking it to do things it cannot do, instead of distinguishing between those things government can do well and those things some other part of society can do better.

To truly make a difference, we must move people out of this culture of violence and poverty and into a better culture. This is the fourth reality: we must actively involve ourselves. We cannot allow individual changes within the old culture to be overwhelmed by other aspects of that culture. We must make clear that a culture of poverty and violence, in which millions of Americans live right now, is not acceptable. What we must say to them is that it is better to work than to be dependent. It is better to be safe than to be in danger.

We are not talking about a small change. If we truly want healthy inner cities, if we truly want healthy Indian reservations, and if we truly want healthy West Virginia Appalachian poor neighborhoods, we are talking about one of the largest changes ever to be contemplated in American history. And we have to

take it seriously—not pay mere lip service to it, not walk off saying, when a kid gets killed, “Gee, that’s sad.”

What I am suggesting is this. If we take that child seriously as an American, then we must decide in our generation that we are fed up with a system that encourages us to regret death or impoverishment but will not change to prevent it. We must do something to replace this failed system. All of us, including the poor, are taking on a big challenge, maybe in some ways one as big as the Cold War. It is not going to be a small challenge, and it is not going to happen overnight, but our goal should be to wake up one morning with the certainty that not one single child died during the night in a government housing project.

The questions each of us must ask are: where do I, as an individual citizen, begin? How can I make a difference in the face of such enormous problems? The answers lie, I think, in the book you are holding. *Renewing American Compassion* is filled with examples of what ordinary Americans are doing to make a difference. Marvin Olasky offers a guide on how we can make our charitable activity effective by focusing on the needs of one person—not the entire world, but just one person. If every American did that, our country would be a greatly different place.

Marvin Olasky unlocked for me the key of how to replace the welfare state. His earlier *Tragedy of American Compassion* was one of the most extraordinary books written in our generation. In it, he went back and looked at 350 years in which Americans dealt with poverty, tragedy, and addiction with much greater success than the current welfare state has done. It was primarily a history book that showed you, chapter by chapter, the consistent way Americans thought about poverty and helped the poor. It concluded that what the traditional reporters warned against is precisely what the welfare state ultimately did.

Now, in *Renewing American Compassion*, Olasky takes a quick look at his earlier arguments and evidence, but he focuses strong-

ly on the future. He shows what mistakes of the welfare state we should give up, what we should pick up from our past that is best, and then how we can create a vision for 21st-century compassion that will truly make a difference in the lives of the poor.

Olasky teaches us simply but powerfully to move from entitlement to challenge, from bureaucracy to personal help, and from the naked public square to faith in God. He challenges Congress and state governments to develop ways for individuals and community institutions to take over poverty-fighting responsibility from the bureaucrats. He even discusses the provocative notion of completely doing away with the federal safety net. Olasky has traveled across America and seen firsthand what works and what does not work in helping the poor, and he shows us clearly what they are.

*Renewing American Compassion* should be read by all thoughtful and busy citizens. It is a book about America's future, one in which we need not dread turning on the local news every night for fear of hearing about ever more horrific tragedies that have befallen our children. Marvin Olasky points to victory in the 21st century rather than continued despair. If we believe in our Declaration of Independence, that all of our children hold certain unalienable rights, "among these Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," then we must decide in our generation that we are fed up with a failed federal War on Poverty and that we as citizens are going to take up and shoulder our responsibility to one another.

## Acknowledgments

This book arises from my education on the streets concerning the potential of community-based organizations. My first teacher in this regard was Bob Woodson, president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. Since then, I've learned much from leaders of community-based organizations in many cities, including Bob Cote, Virgil Gulker, John Woods, Hannah Hawkins, Marsh Ward, Robin MacDonald, German Cruz, Kathy Dudley, Freddie Garcia, David Perez, Jim Heurich, Deborah Darden, Lessie Handy, Noemi Motessi, George McKinney, Connie Driscoll, Wayne Gordon, Lee Earl, Eddie Edwards, Toni McIlwain, and Shelby Smith.

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In closing, I am grateful to the Progress & Freedom Foundation for its financial support during 1995 and 1996.

## *Introduction*

# *The Need for Renewal*

My youngest son is five. A year ago he and two friends slithered below the supposedly childproof iron fence surrounding a swimming pool. One of the three fell in and, unable to swim, sank to the bottom and stayed there. The pool owner looked out, saw two boys who didn't belong there by the pool, and yelled at them to get out. They knew they had done something wrong by going where they did not belong and, like Adam and Eve in the garden, went and hid.

Providentially, the owner came after them and Benjamin blurted out to her the grave situation: a boy was still in the pool. She screamed. One neighbor—a hospital worker who teaches others how to perform CPR on children—came running, dove into the pool, retrieved the boy, who at that point had been underwater for at least three minutes, and started breathing into his mouth. I got there some seconds later and helped out a slight bit by doing finger compressions on the four-year-old's chest. For at least the first minute, there was no reaction at all: the boy's eyes seemed dilated in death, his soul hovered between this world and the next, and the neighbor and I prayed between CPR puffing and compressing.

Only after what seemed an eternity did there come the

faintest of fluttering breaths, followed two minutes later by the slightest of coughs, and two minutes after that by the arrival of an EMS team, which took over and applied oxygen. This was on a Friday afternoon, and we worried about brain damage; amazingly, on Sunday the boy who seemed dead was running around in church, completely healed physically, and happy to be alive.

I thought about that boy's narrow escape as I read shortly afterwards a headline in the June 4, 1995, *New York Times*: "Gingrich's Vision of Welfare Ignores Reality, Charities Say." The story mirrored what became in 1995 the conventional way of dealing with the unconventional goal of replacing the welfare system over the next generation with one based in private, church, and community involvement. *Impossible . . . inconceivable . . . preposterous . . . ignores reality*. With words of that sort, ideas that could renew a nearly dead system of compassion were shunted aside, as many pretended that the situation was not so grave after all.

The goal of this brief book is not to prove that American compassion is now at the bottom of the pool, soon to be wrapped in a body bag unless someone intervenes. Many others have shown that, and I myself have written a history of the tragedy.\* What I hope to suggest, to begin our discussion, is that dismissive words are not new in this century's welfare debate. More than seventy years ago, some leading social thinkers concluded that government should take from churches and community groups the prime responsibility for poverty fighting. Frank Dekker Watson, director of the Pennsylvania School for Social Service and professor of sociology and social work at Haverford College, argued in 1922 that local groups helped

\*See *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1992).

individuals, but the central government could raise up the masses. "No person who is interested in social progress can long be content to raise here and there an individual," he wrote.

The idea of massive federal action, at a time when Washington's spending (except in wartime) was small, seemed ludicrous. But Watson and others argued that if private agencies continued to care for families, "it would be easy for the state to evade the responsibility." Watson praised one Philadelphia group for announcing that it would no longer help widows—for, only when private groups went on strike, would "public funds ever be wholly adequate for the legitimate demands made upon them."

Watson and other liberal visionaries, in short, were ready to force the issue, even if it meant eliminating immediate support not only for those who could fend for themselves, but for widows. How cruel! How mean-spirited! And in what a cause: to have the federal government, which then had only a small percentage of the resources necessary to meet needs, take away the leading role from big and powerful philanthropies. *Impossible . . . inconceivable . . . preposterous . . . ignores reality*. But conceive the new plan they did, and fight for it over a generation they did, and the result was, first (in the 1930s, helped along by the Great Depression), an enormous expansion of Washington's grasp and, second, in the 1960s, the reach for a Great Society.

We know now that the vision, even if noble to start with, was founded on tragic miscomprehension. Private charities had succeeded in helping many individuals because they offered compassion that was challenging, personal, and spiritually based. Government over time proved itself incapable of doing the same; instead, governmental charity emphasized entitlement rather than challenge, bureaucracy rather than personal help, and a reduction of man to material being only. Is it any wonder that we witness welfare failure?

In the same June 4, 1995, *New York Times* article, one official,



John Thomas of the American Red Cross, was quoted as saying, "This has been a 50-year history of government taking on added responsibilities. To try to undo that in a year or two is unrealistic." Mr. Thomas was exactly right about the lack of realism inherent in a year or two of undoing, but that was not the plan of those who want compassion to be effective once again: four-year-olds can recover quickly, but replacing a failed system will take longer. Frank Dekker Watson in 1922 did not say the government could immediately take over; welfare reformers now do not say that charities can immediately take over. The question in both cases was and is direction of movement, and ways to speed up the process of change.

Our situation in some ways is more troubled than that of 1922. Watson was confronted with a much smaller number of unmarried teenaged girls having babies or abortions, and their male counterparts shooting up or shooting each other, than we have today. Even so, he was willing to see widows lose every cent of their private pensions to force a crisis in order to build up the government's role in poverty fighting. Republicans in Congress have shown considerably more concern for individuals as they attempt to begin replacing the welfare state. They have in many instances increased spending, but to a lower level than Democrats wanted, and for their pains have been called pain inflictors. Never have so many accusations of meanness been thrown around with so little cause.

This book began as a response to requests for a quick display of the major themes of *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, and then grew into an attempt to present, in a nontechnical way, some still germinating ideas about replacing the welfare system. Chapter 1 opens the discussion by describing what has been widely regarded as the best welfare reform program in the most innovative welfare reform state, and then examines some of the other state-level reforms of 1995. Chapter 2 contrasts those gov-

ernment projects with community-based, nonprofit, and private alternatives. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 highlight themes and evidence from *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, setting the stage for chapter 6, which shows how ordinary people are becoming heroes once again in the 1990s, as their predecessors did in the 1890s.

Historically proven principles will achieve full effectiveness today, however, only if greater numbers of compassionate individuals and groups are able and willing to put them to work. Chapter 7 shows how government officials can play a useful support role by removing barriers to compassionate action; furthermore, legislators can develop practical plans to ensure that organizations with good reputations receive the material support they need. Chapter 8 then examines the opportunities to do what it takes to aid those in need, and looks particularly at the role of religion as motivator among both helpers and helped. The concluding chapter summarizes the essential principles; finally, four appendixes offer a pledge to action, an overview of biblical mandates concerning poverty fighting, additional information on a tax credit approach to replacing welfare, and an examination of how problems in education, crime prevention, and other areas relate to the poverty debate.

Overall, this book is closer to a first word than to a last. Some thoughts have been presented in a deliberately sketchy way, rather than with a specificity that would be arrogant at this point. What was missed in 1922 was a major debate on the vision of how best to make war on poverty, and as a result some legislation that emerged years later was not well thought out. My goal in this book is not to close discussion but to push open a debate on how all of us can help to renew American compassion, before all we are left with is a corpse on the swimming pool floor.

## Chapter 1

*Conventional Welfare Reform*

The Kenosha County Job Center, located in the southeast corner of Wisconsin, with Lake Michigan to the east and the Illinois state line to the south, is the shiny face of state-level welfare reform, and its presence has launched a thousand trips. Twelve state delegations, dozens of reporting teams from networks and national magazines, and welfare managers from all over have come and marveled at 54,000 square feet of calibrated administration in color-coordinated offices.

Operations Manager Larry Jankowski notes that the *Washington Post* has come once, the *Los Angeles Times* twice, and Dayton, Ohio, officials four times. Even bureaucrats from Tanzania have taken the tour. Kenosha is important because it is said to be The Future: a successful attempt to provide social services with a human face. It is now widely understood that the primary problem of the modern welfare state is not its cost, but its tendency to treat people as cows whose feeding troughs need periodic refilling. Wisconsin, seeing human beings on the welfare rolls, has instituted a twenty-hour-per-week work requirement for many AFDC recipients, a two-year time limit on many welfare benefits, and a plan to eliminate cash benefits before the third millennium begins.

Those steps sound promising to conservatives—but Wisconsin has coupled them with a package of social worker-intensive programs that will continue to keep the welfare world safe for bureaucracy. Other states are doing the same: Michigan and New Jersey have Wisconsin-style programs and Massachusetts even hired Wisconsin's social services director to head its Department of Health and Human Services. Since Wisconsin's welfare reform generally, and the Kenosha County Job Center in particular, have become such popular poster children, Kenosha deserves a closer look; we'll then check on the progress and prospects of welfare reform plans in several other states.

Kenosha County itself is an hour's freeway drive from notorious Chicago slum high-rises like Cabrini Green, and a semi-bucolic world away. The county's population of 130,000 is 90 percent white and the unemployment rate is at about 3 percent. On the way from the interstate to the job center, drive-by shootings are not a concern, and drive-through fast-fooders are easy to find. Past Ponderosa Steakhouse, past the Big Buck Building Center, past the Stars-N-Stripes Restaurant and a home with a Jesus is Lord yard sign, the job center emerges, dominating a neighborhood of modest but tidy homes with well-kept yards and trimmed hedges. The center itself anchors a small shopping mall that includes a software store, a hobby shop, and a cinema fourplex. The parking area next to the center's main entrance has a few old cars on a Monday morning, but lots of clean Plymouth Voyagers and Ford Aerostars. This is the land of minivans, not clunkers leaking oil.

Next to the center is Aladdin's Castle Family Entertainment Center, and the facility itself has a Disneyland feel. On the way from the parking lot to the reception area, a sign on one wall promotes a workshop on self-esteem: "You are scheduled to begin an exciting adventure next week." For those used to welfare offices with bulletproof glass, scarred linoleum, and

cramped cubicles, the reception area is a revelation: light wood, bright walls with prints of water lilies, purplish heather carpeting, circular wooden tables with padded blue seats, and an 18-foot ceiling with an overhead fan to complement the air conditioning. Next to the reception area is a bright and spacious children's playroom that has lots of toys and good books such as *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Further in, the adventure continues. Light blue-gray panels distinguish modular office areas in wide open spaces. Few welfare clients—no, they are called “participants”—need to wait for meetings with caseworkers; asked about the absence of lines, Program Director George Leutermann observes, “We’re not into crowds.” Posted newspaper headlines inform participants that they are visiting a site that will be historic: “Country looks to Kenosha for welfare reform ideas.” Caseworkers convey to participants the sense that they are beneficiaries of an experiment that could change the nation, and the state employees themselves are encouraged to think of themselves as heroes.

Leutermann, receiving recognition at age forty-eight after a career in social services, recalls, “I told our people that their kids will be reading about them in the newspaper. They said, ‘Sure. That’s crap.’ But they are getting what we promised.” Jankowski, at fifty-one also a veteran manager of employment programs and welfare systems, tells employees, “If we can be successful here, that is your ticket to a job anywhere.” Staffers know that the good press their program receives can translate into advancement in other states, should they choose to become evangelists for the Wisconsin welfare gospel.

That gospel is a crowd pleaser so far because it has three sides: liberal, conservative, and feminist. The liberal side of the equilateral triangle proposes big government programs, but with an awareness that bureaucratic hauteur is out, provision of services is in: “We treat our participants like kings and queens,” Leuter-

mann says, and he makes sure that the monarchs have a panoply of valets. “If they have a remediation problem, they can go to that instructor. If they have a training problem, they go to that person. We have a brokering process whereby the case manager helps participants access services.” The Kenosha goal is not to bond the needy with caseworkers, who average 150 participants under their care and see each participant an average of once every three months; the goal is to place participants under the care of government-paid specialists, who at the job center are conveniently housed under one roof.

The conservative-sounding side of the triangle is the work emphasis. Participants quickly go through vocational assessment and receive information about careers, labor markets, job retention, and financial planning. They are required to develop a job-finding plan, and after an initial four-week module designed to build motivation and “self-esteem,” to get on with the task of finding a job. Instructors stress, Jankowski says, that “there’s a place in the job market for everyone. The unemployment rate is not the issue. The issue is motivating people to take the jobs that are available.” Participants are required either to find a job or to put in a “simulated thirty-two-hour work week” of job readiness courses, practice interviews, etc.; the mushiness is evident, but at least participants are supposed to report on time. Those who do not cooperate lose \$90 per month in benefits; that sanction pushes three-fourths of AFDC recipients to come to class regularly, and 90 percent of that final quarter to show up following sanction, according to Leutermann.

The base of the equilateral triangle is feminism, with chunks of New Age subjectivism thrown into the broth. Computer-printed signs dominate the walls of two large Kenosha training rooms: “A family doesn’t need a man to be whole.” “Stop waiting for Prince Charming, his horse broke down.” Asked about the usefulness of dumping the Prince Charming goal—yes, AFDC moms should not be passively waiting, but marriage is

the most-used exit from the welfare rolls—Jankowski says, “We tell them straight out that marriage is not the answer.” Other signs suggest the answer: “I have the power within me. What I focus on expands.” “You’re a one-of-a-kind design.”

Since that last exhortation seems to suggest the existence of a designer, a question logically follows: is something like the Alcoholics Anonymous concept of a “higher power” acceptable? “There’s absolutely no reference to a higher power at this center,” Jankowski insists. “This is a self-actualization technique.” But one problem with a poster that says “If you think you’re someone special, then you are” is that it implies a second message: if you don’t think you are, then you’re not.

Does the Kenosha triangle work? Or is its assumption that a huge investment in state-funded education and job training programs will reduce the welfare load fallacious? Fans and critics throw around statistics: yes, the Kenosha center has placed more clients in jobs than the typical welfare office, but it still has placed fewer than half of its participants, some of whom would have found jobs anyway. Yes, those leaving welfare in Kenosha are taking jobs at wages considerably above the minimum, but the county’s booming local economy (with one of the nation’s highest rates of job creation) and minority-rare ethnic composition makes its experience atypical.

Beneath those issues lie deeper questions. Governmental programs or incentives have not succeeded in reducing the number of children conceived out of wedlock, and extramarital pregnancy is now the leading cause of poverty. Over half of AFDC mothers have never been married, and raising children without a father, even with governmental economic support, is very hard: how will Kenosha help them? And how does Kenosha get at key questions of values among those who have grown up in a culture that already confuses liberty and license, and suggests that all “lifestyle choices” are created equal?

What if some participants are in not just economic trouble but spiritual bondage? The Kenosha goal is to change some habits; if effective, it may change a person on the outside, but it does not try to touch the inside—nor, perhaps, would we want a governmental program to so do. But is wiping the outside of the glass sufficient?

Whether or not the Kenosha model meets the needs of those on welfare, it certainly meets the needs of welfare careerists, while satisfying (for the moment) the public push for reform. The Kenosha model has now spread to Milwaukee, which has 36,000 AFDC cases to Kenosha’s 2,000. The North Milwaukee Job Center opened in January with 56,000 well-organized square feet: Program Manager William Martin points out that there are “two chairs and two data lines at every work station.”

Other bureaucrats are also turned on by the new center. Employment Training Manager Ruth Schmidt is “analyzing how units interface with other units so we can better integrate funding sources into service delivery output.” Units can readily be moved around and recombined because, as Martin emphasizes, “everyone has the same kind of work station, and each work station is exactly the same.” There has been lots of money spent in the pursuit of fraternity and equality; asked how much the desk and chairs and related furnishings cost, one staffer responded offhandedly, “Oh, a few hundred thousand dollars.”

The only drawback evident at the North Milwaukee center is that it was built in the expectation that people would come, but several times on a May 1995 Monday afternoon only one of the two chairs at each of several dozen work stations was occupied, and that by a staffer. At 3 p.m., there were two child care workers but no children in the bright child care facility that is a clone of Kenosha’s. At 3:15, one manager was talking excitedly about how the new computers at the center “are used constantly,” but Classroom 27 had thirty-one new Omni-Tech comput-

ers with CD-Rom drives and “Intel inside” labels, and not a single person using them.

Different explanations were offered for the lack of warm, job-seeking bodies at the job center. Manager Schmidt said that clients were “out interfacing with job opportunities.” One Milwaukee AFDC mom, Michelle Dudley, when asked about the job center’s reputation in the community, said, “They want me to care about getting a job, but they’re just trying to keep their own jobs.” One director of a small inner-city business in Milwaukee, Jo Henderson, said, “They built a building. I haven’t heard of their building relationships.” Kenosha manager Leuter-mann said, “In Milwaukee they absolutely refuse to employ sanctions if people don’t show up. They don’t want to do it. Anything you can mention, they have an excuse.”

Even with the apparent absence of clients, staffers on that Monday afternoon seemed busy. One was reading a manual, a second was checking computer files, and a third settled for low-tech paper shuffling. For the welfare system veterans, the line from an Old Milwaukee beer commercial is a good summation of life on the job in Kenosha or North Milwaukee: “It doesn’t get any better than this.”

For clients also, the decor and the decorum at such centers are far above the typical. It’s no wonder that tourists from state bureaucracies are coming, because the Wisconsin experiment can satisfy their desires while placating conservatives who have forgotten what Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation points out: “The bulk of the nation’s welfare bureaucracy resides not in Washington but in the nation’s [state] capitals. From Tallahassee to Juneau, these welfare bureaucracies are voluminous, left wing, and autonomous.” A new “Welfare Works” program, announced in August 1995, may help the Wisconsin welfare system earn the praise it already has received, but so far it is less than meets the eye.

After Wisconsin, the three states often cited as welfare reform leaders are Michigan, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Michigan took good first steps in 1991 by eliminating its state “general assistance” program, thus forcing some able-bodied males who did not qualify for any other program to look for work, and in 1992 by pushing the idea of a “social contract” within which AFDCers had to expend “productive effort” (besides that involved with their own children) in return for funding.

One concern, though, is that although one-fourth of AFDCers in Michigan now are listed as effort producers, compared to fewer than one in ten nationwide, most are taking courses or undergoing job preparation assessment by government caseworkers, not actually working. It is still early for a full assessment, but Michigan reforms have failed to shrink significantly the number of families on AFDC, and Governor John Engler is looking for ways to promote deeper change. *The New Republic*, in February 1995, noted in its catty way that most Michigan projects so far “have been pushed by state welfare directors for years. . . . Like most states, Michigan has adopted the ‘human capital development’ approach of the left.”

Massachusetts’ changes, often hailed in the press as the nation’s most sweeping, went into effect on July 1, 1995, with the Welfare Department changing its name to the Department of Transitional Assistance. The goal is to make that change more than cosmetic by moving nearly a third of the welfare population from dole to job. About 20,000 able-bodied AFDCers with school-age children will be required to find work or take twenty-hour-a-week “community service” positions with agencies that will have them; the AFDC moms will not be paid, but they will continue to receive welfare checks for up to two years if they show up at their stations often enough to avoid complaints.

The change may provide justification for managers who house welfarists to hire additional staff, and it will certainly lead

to an increase in government-funded day care slots. The new law also allows able-bodied recipients to receive welfare for only two years in a five-year cycle; officials may grant extensions to the two-year limit if the local job market is poor or if the recipient has hustled to no avail.

New Jersey has made many of the usual changes and is now best known for its "family cap," by which a two-child AFDC mom who has another child does not get a \$67 monthly increase. Several other states also had caps in 1995, but it is too early to evaluate their effect. Quick declarations of victory should be suspect in welfare reform unless there are clear changes in values among recipients, because the main challenge is not placing a client in a job, but keeping him or her there. AFDC moms in particular tend to leave welfare temporarily for work, then cycle right back onto the lists. The critical question is whether internal values have changed sufficiently that the inevitable setbacks will be overcome with not just sporadic effort, but persistence.

Many state legislatures watched the Washington, D.C., welfare debates in 1995 and have not yet made significant welfare changes: much more is expected in 1996. The news is mixed from those states that were active. Ohio, for example, ended its "general assistance" plan, and many of the twenty or so similar programs in other states may not have long to live; those elastic clause plans are often the least defensible, since many of the checks go to able-bodied men. In Texas during 1995, the early talk was of "welfare crackdown," but the legislative walk ended up a stagger, with creation of another work force training agency probably the leading product.

Among the state reform efforts that did not garner much publicity, Virginia's was probably the most comprehensive. On July 1, 1995, it rolled many of the Wisconsin, Michigan, and Massachusetts innovations into one package, the "Virginia Independence Program," and added a few twists. For example, a new

program of "diversionary assistance" offers emergency cash grants of up to about \$1,000 to those who would otherwise go onto AFDC, on condition that they relinquish rights to AFDC eligibility for the next six months. Kay James, Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources during 1995, insisted that the state will not be a softy should the \$1,000 recipient come back for more a couple of months later: "We spell it out. People make choices and have to stand by them."

In Virginia and several other states, including Arizona (where Governor Fife Symington is eager for significant change) and California, a push to go deeper is developing. Michigan's Engler, searching for the next step, is among those inviting church involvement in welfare reform. Mississippi has been most explicit along these lines: its Faith and Families Project is designed to enlist churches in antipoverty work by using computers, in Governor Kirk Fordice's words, "to match each Mississippi family receiving public assistance with a participating church in their area. . . . If every church, synagogue, or religious organization in the State of Mississippi would adopt at least one welfare family and bring them to self-sufficiency in one year, we could remove all of Mississippi's families from the welfare rolls in twelve years."

Pushing the desire to go deeper is a growing realization that long-term poverty fighting depends on affecting not just the outside of a person, but the inside as well. Even the government programs that claim the greatest success in scrubbing the outside of the glass have yet to clean the inside, and what we might call "the rule of halves" thereby pertains: half of all AFDCers leave the rolls within a year, but about half of those are back within another year. Half of AFDC recipients have never been married and often continue to act irresponsibly in their personal lives, and half of all recipients thus are on the welfare rolls for a total of at least ten years.

Most people on welfare are white, but the percentage of recipients among blacks is higher, and the causes of problems in both racial groups go well beyond the tensions inherent in governmental programs. Shelby Smith, vice president of Mendenhall Ministries, a black-led, church-based organization south of Jackson, Mississippi, notes that "for a long time social programs were not incentive-based. That killed the desire to be productive. In the 1920s and 1930s we were productive, but now we're consumer-oriented. People don't want to produce, don't want to get a job. It used to be that a person's not working had a direct impact on his ability to eat. Now, folks that don't work are idolized—they're cruising around in a nice car, not having to work. We should be saying, 'We will help you if you help yourself.'"

Smith's organization itself, he noted, "has gone from giving away things to deciding how to charge for things. . . . Just giving to people is no good. At our thrift store it used to be people would come in, give a sob story, and get something. But we realized that it builds pride in individuals when they are able to go in and actually buy something. It takes a while to shift away from the entitlement mentality, and some people are critical: you get labeled Republican when you emphasize accountability. But that's the mentality you need if you're going to do better than the how-do-you-beat-the-system mentality. We need to remember that our problems on this side of the track are not due to the people on the other side of the track."

That type of thinking is becoming more common in poor areas across the country, and it's a different type of thinking than what pervades government offices. It's not necessary to travel from Wisconsin to Mississippi, however, to see what small community groups, often with a religious base, can do. In the shadows of the big government programs in Milwaukee, some innovative private groups are beginning to change lives.

## Chapter 2

### *An Alternative Model*

While the Kenosha model and its North Milwaukee clone garner press attention, several small, community-based Milwaukee groups, off the beaten path of welfare reform tours, change lives. They teach the beliefs and values that animated past generations of Americans to overcome poverty. They teach one-to-one the behaviors needed to keep a job: getting to work on time, dressing appropriately, staying until quitting time, and treating the boss and customers with respect.

In one corner of Milwaukee's Parklawn housing project, for example, an organization called the Right Alternative Family Service Center promotes cultural conservatism under the leadership of Deborah Darden. She is a black former welfare mom who still espouses political liberalism but sees what rot the left has wrought. Ms. Darden's essential message is contained in the lyrics she wrote to a catchy song called *Count Me In*:

I want to go back, count me in, to a future that we left in  
the past.  
Do you remember when everybody in the neighborhood  
looked out for the children running wild?  
Take me back to yesterday when we followed my god's way.



Leave behind these cold hard times and move on to brighter days.

Do you remember when a father could provide and mother did not have those weeping eyes?

I want to go back, count me in, to a future that we left in the past.

Ms. Darden, forty-one, dressed in a suit and big heart earrings, talks of her ideas while sitting in her program's headquarters, an old community hall/gym that still has basketball backboards on the walls. The program plans to move to better quarters within the housing project, but for now there is no need to take a tour of thoroughly scarred linoleum and furniture that cost several hundred dollars rather than several hundred thousand. "We've seen the effects of the free, 1960s lifestyles on our communities," she says. "When I began talking about the need to have some discipline, there was opposition. People said that to make a child say Yes, ma'am is returning us to the times of slavery. But [respect is] one of the habits of the past that really worked, so we need to revisit it."

Early in the 1990s, Ms. Darden worked with welfare moms who live in the 518 units of the housing project to develop a list of thirteen behaviors that mothers should follow as they begin to embrace a culture of responsibility. The behaviors include: "Reteaching our children to use Mr., Mrs., Ms. titles to all adults. . . . Become more conscientious about the social behavior we allow our children to see. . . . Demanding that all guests who visit our homes abide by the same value structure."

Current and recent welfare moms who attend Right Alternative meetings—almost all are black—embrace those behaviors. Donna Harris, wearing a flimsy jacket and a hat folded back, says, "After I been here awhile, there was a big cloud coming over me, telling me I shouldn't be living with a man if I'm

not married." She now is married, and wants law and order in the neighborhood: "When I saw a drug sale to young boys, I called the police." Michelle Dudley rubs her braided hair and says, "I used to drink, smoke weed, do the pipe. I thought it was OK to sit home and watch TV all day. My four kids [ages five, six, seven, and twelve] used to be wild kids, it was because of me. Now I'm getting my GED, and nobody's allowed to do nothing in my house."

Deborah Lee, in T-shirt and sweatpants, says, "I thought it was OK to have a man in my house laying on me. You look at the TV, you think it's OK. But then I think, what will the child think about this? And now I say, Yes, ma'am, no ma'am." Cynthia Wilson, who is now engaged to be married, notes the "no profanity" rule within the thirteen behaviors and explains, "When you change, you'll see a change in your children. Now they say, 'Momma, you cussed,' when I slip." Lorene Lee, thin and quiet, says she now monitors the attention of neighborhood children: "Before, if I saw kids throwing stuff, doing bad, I'd just cuss them. Now, I'll go talk to their parents."

A change in values is the way for many moms to leave welfare, Ms. Darden and her disciples say: an honest woman can attract a diligent man, can impress employees through her own diligence and honesty, and can provide a model of good behavior for children to emulate. Ms. Dudley, explaining that traditional values attract men who want to marry, says, "Once I stopped being easy, then I started seeing gentlemen." Deborah Lee adds, "If you expect marriage, then you change the way you act. Now I make it clear: Johnny can't come to the house, get himself a little piece, and leave."

Cynthia Wilson, now engaged, specifies that she does not "want a boyfriend, I want a marriage. I was hard on men, I had to fight them, now I can want to help them be real men. Before, I didn't care about someone respecting me. I didn't mind some-



one laying over me. But I learned that I can't be half a woman and get a whole man." Ms. Wilson adds, "I have five children. The man I'll marry is not the father of any of them, but he loves me. The government says, You ain't gonna get no husband. We don't have to listen to the government. There is someone out there." Lorene Lee says simply but emphatically, "I'm going to get a husband, I'm putting myself into the relationship."

Many women planning to leave welfare do not know as much about the soap operas as they used to, but they almost invariably are thinking more about God. (They may have been in church as children, but they usually had no sense of how to apply biblical principles of work and family.) Donna Harris says, "Used to be, every time I heard the word God, I got mad. I didn't want to hear it, but before you know it, here I am, and I know God is the center of everything." Cynthia Wilson comments, "I didn't want to hear nothing about no God. And now, my friends and I are God-fearing people, and we try to do what is right."

None of these changes surprise Ms. Darden, who notes that a culture of immorality "is something you just buy into, without giving it a lot of thought." She blames societal leaders who "don't want to appear to have made a mistake. We tell the young girls that single parenting is a positive. It's not. We need to learn from our mistakes. We used to think that getting high, free sex, whatever feels good was fine. We said, don't be mean enough to your kids to raise them, just let them run free." That type of thinking is everywhere, including in the welfare system, and it needs to be fought." She concludes, "We're conditioned by something we can't see. People back off when you talk about values, but that's what we need."

In a sense, the Right Alternative could be called a first-stage assault on AFDC: women walk away from the beliefs and attitudes they have imbibed over the years and begin to appraise

soberly the way the world works. (Even the *New York Times* occasionally stumbles across the core of the problem, noting—on October 22, 1984—that three-fourths of welfare recipients who leave the rolls later return, often lamenting "what they called their bad attitudes or insufficient drive.") The second stage, successful in the long term only if it is based on internally changed values, is an external attitude adjustment. The third stage is specific job training.

The Professional Receptionist Institute is one Milwaukee example of a second- and third-stage program. Begun by Lessie Handy, a black woman who is a former receptionist herself, the institute teaches women who want to leave welfare not only the skills to become receptionists, but the workplace culture as well. Ms. Handy, who wears dress-for-success clothes and has permed hair, is decidedly not multicultural in relation to her charges: "If they have a ring in their nose, they got to get it out. If they come in with their hair in braids, I tell them to get it permed. When they answer the phone, they can't say, Hold on; they have to be pleasant and use correct diction so they can gain and retain customers. They can't wear shorts."

Ms. Handy's students are receptive to her demands for change in habits and habit partly because they know she cares, and partly because they realize the financial payoff of being a good receptionist. The institute has 202 graduates and 186 of them are working, according to Ms. Handy, who comes from the same economic and racial background as most of her students and is available twenty-four hours a day for counseling: "People are still crawling when they leave here. They need someone who understands where they're coming from and will hold their hand as long as it takes; most government people can't or won't do that, and the ones that do are just there during office hours." Economically, those who have started to think long-term instead of getting by month-to-month, hand-to-mouth, are

finally ready to turn their backs on the cheap grace of AFDC: student Angela Stearns says, "I'm tired of telling my kids, 'I can't afford that.'"

The differences between Ms. Handy's privately funded institute and the North Milwaukee Job Center are immense. The former uses every available bit of limited floor space; the latter is a vast prairie. The former is crowded with clients, the latter unpacked by participants. Paulette Christian, the institute's business relations manager, speaks readily of how she was called by Jesus Christ to offer a fresh spiritual start as well as training to those who come in; at the job center, God is still officially in exile.

At the institute, students talk of the men in their lives; at the job center, the theme song could well be Helen Reddy's sermon from the seventies: "I am strong, I am invincible, I am woman." The job center has the usual exhortatory signs about how "success comes in cans, not in cannots." At the institute, Ms. Christian says, "We don't sugar-coat anything. We don't tell them it will be easy, because it won't. We do a lot of shaking up around here. We shut the door, we put the mitts on, we let them know we're not from New Berlin [a Milwaukee suburb]. Everything we talk about we've experienced. What we want them to do, we've done."

The governmental job center programs, in comparison, largely operate at stage three, and have a feminist-flawed approach to stage two. They skip the changes in basic beliefs and values that often are needed, because such an emphasis would be politically incorrect. They stress the employment of numerous specialists rather than the one-to-one bonding that has been effective throughout American history. Jankowski of Kenosha, defending the caseworker method of brief appointments followed by referrals, says, "You don't have to sit down for an hour to have a meaningful dialogue with a person." Lessie Handy of

the institute says, "No, you need ten hours"—and that governmental systems cannot afford.

The Right Alternative and the Professional Receptionist Institute are not the only shoestring, community-based operations in Milwaukee that are changing lives rather than bowling for bureaucratic dollars. Bill Lock, a black Korean War veteran, is operations manager of Community Enterprises of Greater Milwaukee, an inner-city organization housed across from a graveyard and designed to give birth to small, low-skill businesses. CEGM now provides space to half a dozen businesses, including a transformer assembly firm and an elderly home care service, and Lock speaks of how there is no reason to give up on low-skilled men: they can feel manly repairing everything from windows to small engines, and can then move on to training in trades like masonry and carpentry, where the demand for help exceeds the supply of competent individuals.

"The problem is not the availability of jobs," Lock notes. "The problem is minds that have been distorted." When those minds have been reconfigured, job training is easy, and for that reason, along with their own personal belief, many of the entrepreneurs with whom Lock works emphasize spiritual change as an underpinning to economic advance. Jo Henderson, director of a nursing concern, says, "When you have Christ, you become a new creation, and if you understand what that means, your work ethic changes."

Lock is a deacon at the Community Baptist Church, pastored by the Reverend Roy Nabors. Nabors dresses dapperly in a double-breasted suit with a pocket handkerchief, but he spits out sentences intensely over lunch at the Q F & H Diner, a black community fixture for thirty years. "It is God's plan that man and woman should live in a state of holy matrimony and then have children, with man as the primary breadwinner and woman as the primary nurturer," Nabors states. "When we

move away from that, we have problems. . . . A lot of men, once they get married, see the need to support their family and start working hard, but the problem now is that many people are in shacking relationships, and the men don't take responsibility.

"We must face it: 75 percent of the children in this area are living in dysfunctional families," Nabors continues, wiping his face with a handkerchief and smiling wryly. "Here I'm making a moral judgment, but we need to say it straight: parents are raising children alone because of immoral behavior. Some do an excellent job, but it's an extremely difficult thing to do, and not a common occurrence to do it well. . . . I blame most of the churches for this cultural deprivation. What we are preaching is nothing but a watered-down, feel-good, mutual admiration society. African-American churches have been reluctant to confront the immorality, because most preachers depend on the shacking people to get paid. . . . At my church many couples have walked away because I confronted them on living out of wedlock with children, but you can't pussyfoot around that if you're serious about helping people lead godly lives. And no government program will help unless shacking people stop doing it."

The essential defect of the Kenoshalands is that they have as much relevance to the fundamental cultural problems that Nabors sees as Disneyland has to life outside of magic kingdoms. No bureaucracy, and no amount of money, can buy the reformation of morals that is desperately needed. Programs such as the Right Alternative are vital in that effort, yet in many government offices the most-asked question is the plaintive one offered nearly two decades ago at a dramatic moment in the first *Star Wars* movie: "But what will happen to the bureaucracy?" The apostles of Kenosha, going out ostensibly to preach good news to the poor, may make the new welfare world a safe place for themselves, but will the poor be helped?

Down the road, the challenge to Kenosha-style reform is likely to come from those animated by biblical ideas of personal involvement and spiritual challenge. A third element will also play a role: we might call the third factor "Kasich," after Representative John Kasich, energetic chairman of the House Budget Committee. Even if Kenosha were to work, would John Kasich and the new budget hawks in Washington and in state legislatures wish to pay for it, if there is a cheaper way of accomplishing the same objective?

"Even if the welfare system does more good than harm, which is questionable," Kasich asks, "is that good done at a reasonable cost? Can all those dollars be spent more effectively?" What if prospective Kenoshalands in other states have to justify their existence in comparison with church- and community-based programs around the country, such as those in Milwaukee and many other cities that are limited in budget but large of heart?

John Kenneth Galbraith a generation ago gave sound bites comparing private-sector affluence with the government sector's forced cheapness, but a look around today's welfare world shows the opposite. In Washington, the District of Columbia has been spending itself into bankruptcy, but privately funded programs like Children of Mine in southeast Washington or the Darrell Green Learning Center in the northeast are lean. If they had thirty-one new Intel-inside computers, they would not be sitting unused at 3:15 p.m., because children just out of school would be running to them. If far-thinking but frugal programs like the Gospel Mission, the Northwest Center, Clean and Sober Streets, and the Capitol Hill Crisis Pregnancy Center had half the square footage and furniture allowance that the Kenosha model requires, their managers would be shouting, Hallelujah.

Could we have a country animated by compassion and

Kasich? That is a question rarely asked during recent years, because for decades the welfare debate has been the same old-same old. Liberals have emphasized distribution of bread and assumed the poor could live on that alone. Conservatives have complained about the mold on the bread and pointed out the waylaying of funds by “welfare queens” and the empire building of “poverty pimps.”

It is time now, however, to talk not about reforming the welfare system—which often means scraping off a bit of mold—but about replacing it with a truly compassionate approach based in private and religious charity. Such a system was effective in the nineteenth century and will be even more effective in the twenty-first, with the decentralization that new technology makes possible, if we make the right changes in personal goals and public policy.

Why is welfare replacement necessary? Because in America we now face not just concern about poor individuals falling between the cracks, but about the crunch of sidewalks disintegrating. An explosive growth in the number of children born out of wedlock—in 1995, one of every three of our fellow citizens was beginning life hindered by the absence of a father—is one indication of rapid decline.

Why is welfare replacement morally right? Because when we look at the present system we are dealing with not just the dispersal of dollars but the destruction of lives. When William Tecumseh Sherman’s army marched through Georgia in 1864, about 25,000 blacks followed his infantry columns, until Sherman and his soldiers decided to rid themselves of the followers by hurrying across an unfordable stream and then taking up the pontoon bridge, leaving the ex-slaves stranded on the opposite bank. Many tried to swim across but died in the icy water. Similarly today, many of the stranded poor will soon be abandoned by a country that has seen welfare failure and is lapsing into a

skeptical and even cynical “compassion syndrome”—unless we find a way to renew the American dream of compassion.

Why is welfare replacement politically possible? Because there is broad understanding that the system hurts the very people it was designed to help, and that the trillions of dollars spent in the name of compassion over the past three decades have largely been wasted. Conservatives who want an opportunity to recover past wisdom and apply it to future practice should thank liberals for providing a wrecked ship. And liberals should support welfare replacement because, given the mood of the country, the alternative to replacement is not an expanded welfare state, but an extinct one.

Why is welfare replacement practical? Because many specific strategies, projects, and tactics that emerge from an alternative welfare vision are now pushing their way onto the table. For example, not long ago, a tax credit for citizens who hope not to hurl more dollars down the federal Health and Human Services drain was a gleam in the mind’s eyes of a few; now such a proposal is gathering steam. Other ways to get more funds to charitable institutions, both religious and secular, that can fight poverty far more effectively are now being developed.

The destruction of life through the current welfare system is not often so dramatic as that which occurred in 1864, but the death of dreams is evident every day. During the past three decades, we have seen lives destroyed and dreams die among poor individuals who have gradually become used to dependency. Those who stressed independence used to be called the “worthy poor”; now, anyone who will not work is worthy, and mass pauperism is accepted. Now, those who are willing to put off immediate gratification and to sacrifice leisure time in order to remain independent are called chumps rather than champs.

We have also seen dreams die among some social workers who had been in the forefront of change. Their common lament

is, All we have time to do is move paper. Those who really care do not last long, and one who resigned cried out, "I had a calling; it was that simple. I wanted to help." Some social workers take satisfaction in meeting demands, but others, who wanted to change lives, become despondent in their role of enabling destructive behavior.

We have seen dreams die as "compassion fatigue" deepens. Personal involvement is down, cynicism is up. Many Americans would like to be generous at the subway entrance or the street corner, but they know that most homeless recipients will use any available funds for drugs or alcohol. We end up walking by, avoiding eye contact—and a subtle hardening occurs once more. Many Americans who would like to contribute more of their money and time are weighed down by tax burdens. We end up just saying no to involvement, and a sapping of citizenship occurs once more.

We have seen dreams die among children who never knew their fathers. In a very enjoyable movie from the 1980s, *The Princess Bride*, a character named Inigo Montoya has been chasing for over twenty years a six-fingered man who killed his father. Finally he has the six-fingered man at swordpoint, and says in words he has long rehearsed, "My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die." The vile murderer begins to plead for mercy. Inigo Montoya, says, "Offer me money." The six-fingered man says, "Yes." Montoya says, "Power, too, promise me that." "All I have and more." "Offer me everything I ask for." "Anything you want," the six-fingered man says. Inigo Montoya then runs him through with the sword, saying, "I want my father back, you son of a bitch." A six-fingered government's programs have contributed to the removal of fathers, and nothing else can replace them.

Some would say that the death of dreams is inevitable. Big business . . . big government . . . big charity. Wake up and smell

the cyanide. Mass civilization requires impersonal welfare. Yes, we lose the personal touch, but there is no alternative if resources are to be efficiently and equitably dispersed. That's the pessimistic position—but is it inevitable for the American dream of compassion to die?

Past performance—under circumstances as materially difficult as those of today—suggests that the answer is no. Today we have lots of theories about fighting poverty, but it is not necessary to be moving in the theoretical plane. Americans know how to fight poverty. We had successful antipoverty programs a century ago, successful because they embodied personal involvement and challenge, both material and spiritual.

This vital story has generally been ignored by liberal historians, but the documented history goes like this: during the nineteenth century a successful war on poverty was waged by tens of thousands of local, private charitable agencies and religious groups around the country. The platoons of the greatest charity army in American history often were small. They were made up of volunteers led by poorly paid but deeply dedicated professional managers. And they were effective.

Thousands of eyewitness accounts and journalistic assessments show that poverty fighters of the nineteenth century did not abolish poverty, but they saw movement out of poverty by millions of people. They saw springs of fresh water flowing among the poor, not just blocks of ice sitting in a perpetual winter of multigenerational welfare dependency. And the optimism prevalent then contrasts sharply with the demoralization among the poor and the cynicism among the better-off that is so common now.

What was their secret? It was not neglect, either benign or malign. It was their understanding of the literal and biblical meaning of compassion, which comes from two Latin words: *com*, with, and *pati*, to suffer. The word points to personal

involvement with the needy, suffering with them, not just giving to them. "Suffering with" means adopting hard-to-place babies, providing shelter to women undergoing crisis pregnancies, becoming a big brother to a fatherless child, working one-on-one with a young single mother. It's not easy—but it is effective.

Our predecessors who helped others to move out of poverty and then turned their attention to the next group of immigrants and impoverished did not have it easy—but they persevered. Theirs were not the good old days. Work days were long and affluence was rare, and homes on the average were much smaller than ours are today. There were severe drug and alcohol problems and many more early deaths from disease. We are more spread out now, but our travel time is not any greater. Overall, most of the problems paralleled our own; the big differences are the increases in illegitimacy and divorce. Most of the opportunities and reasons to help also were similar; a big difference in this regard is that our tax burden is much larger, and many Americans justifiably feel that they are paying for others to take care of problems.

The differences are great, but the parallels make past accomplishments particularly instructive. Volunteers opened their own homes to deserted women and orphaned children. They offered employment to nomadic men who had abandoned hope and most human contact. Most significantly, our predecessors made moral demands on recipients of aid. They saw family, work, freedom, and faith as central to our being, not as lifestyle options. The volunteers gave of their own lives not just so that others might survive, but that they might thrive.

Clearly, Americans a hundred years ago did not have many of the advantages we have today—and yet, we have to be careful not to write off the past by simply claiming that "you can't turn back the clock." It is far better to ask a question similar to the

one Ronald Reagan asked in 1980: *Are you better off now than you were four years ago?* It's instructive to compare the situation of a poor person now and a hundred years ago. The present holds many advantages, including antibiotics, refrigerators, and Power Rangers. But a century ago, poor people had to take responsibility for their actions, and were treated as citizens with souls, not just clients to be tranquilized. They received personal help, and their helpers were able to proceed confidently.

Today, of course, we have improved our poverty fighting. The bottom rungs of the ladder are no longer so low: we've removed the bottom rungs, leaving many people stuck on the ground. Over the past three decades, we have fought a war on poverty that has also struck down three of the best allies against poverty: shame, family, and God. When we take away shame, we take away deterrence. When we take away family, we take away the soil in which compassion best grows. When we kick out religion, we also remove the greatest incentive to help and be helped. *Newsweek* recently had a cover story about the need to bring back shame; maybe we are learning.

Some on the left say that, without welfare, poor folks are forced into "demeaning" jobs. But in the weekly newsmagazine I edit, *World*, we recently put on the cover a photo of a sixty-five-year-old man who has had a shoeshine shop in South-Central Los Angeles for many years, and is revered in the community. Teenagers come to him for counsel, and some use his wisdom to help them gain positions of trust and authority. (One person we quoted, who was full of praise for the "demeaned" shoeshiner, is now a police chief nearby.) We need to reemphasize the fact that it is not demeaning, but noble, to work hard to support a family.

There's a lot we can learn in this regard from a wonderful Western produced in 1961, *The Magnificent Seven*. It tells of how seven Texas gunfighters come to the defense of a village that

previously had succumbed to a bandit gang; its best scene comes toward the end, when a gunfighter played by Charles Bronson is surrounded by a circle of admiring children. "We are ashamed to live here," one boy says. "Our fathers are cowards."

The gunfighter replies, "You think I am brave because I carry a gun, but your fathers are much braver because they carry responsibility for you, your brothers, your sisters, and your mothers, and this responsibility is like a big rock that weighs a ton. It bends and twists them until finally it buries them under the ground. And there's nobody that says they have to do this. They do it because they love you and because they want to. . . . I have never had this kind of courage, running a farm, working like a mule every day with no guarantee what will ever come of it. This is bravery. It's why I never even started anything like that. It's why I never will."

Some supporters of big government snarl about "turning back the clock" to smaller-scale approaches, but it is not bad to turn back the clock to that type of bravery. Besides, we truly turn back the clock when we stay stuck in the centralizing impulses of the 1930s and the 1960s. We need to turn to the future by giving up our twentieth-century mistakes, picking up what was best in nineteenth-century understanding, and making that vision work for tomorrow.

Furthermore, if we fall into the pessimistic view that people are problems, we are also turning back the clock, this time to the 1970s when zero population growth was hot. Population paranoia should have been laid to rest not only by the utter failure of Malthusian predictions, but also by the experience during the 1980s and 1990s of city-states like Hong Kong and Singapore: crowded and without natural resources, they have rapidly ascended in economic potency. Recent Asian experience shows once again that every mouth comes with a brain and a pair of hands, and that each brain and pair of hands, when trained, can

perform wonders. Poor people are assets to be liberated rather than problems to be subsidized. They are resources, not victims.

The vision at its core is simple: people need to be treated as human beings made in God's image, not as animals to be fed, caged, and occasionally petted. The need to replace the welfare system is clear, but we will be able to choose the right means only if we learn from a period when that truth was more widely understood.



## Chapter 3

*From Wilderness to Neighborhood*

When the Pilgrims came to the New World in 1620, they saw before them “a hideous and desolate wilderness,” in the words of William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth colony. The colonial era of American history was a time of journeying into the wilderness and turning that wilderness into neighborhood. Good neighbors not only worked hard and cared for their families but also exercised compassion. Individuals and churches cared for widows, orphans, and others who had suffered destitution by disaster or were unable to help themselves.

The early understanding of compassion is different from what has prevailed in recent American history, however. Most settlers read their King James Bibles, where the word “compassion” appears forty-two times, usually as the translation of words coming from the Hebrew root *rachum* (womb) or the Greek root *splanchnon* (bowels of yearning). The linguistic connection underscores the close personal relationship that the person who offers compassion has with the recipient. Our predecessors knew that *suffering with* means not just sympathy but sympathy that is active and often painful, like giving birth.

American churchgoers through the mid-nineteenth century also were taught that Biblical compassion was more the culmi-

nation of a process than an isolated noun. Repeatedly, in Judges and other books, the Bible says that only when the Israelites had repented their sins did God, as a rule, show compassion. Second Chronicles 30:9: “The Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him.” Nehemiah 9:27: “When they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers.”

God’s refusal to be compassionate at certain times made the pattern even more evident. Isaiah 27:11 describes Israel as “a people without understanding; so their Maker has no compassion on them.” In Jeremiah 15:6, God says, “You have rejected me . . . I can no longer show compassion.” The New Testament also teaches that those who have strayed from God must have the grace to cry out for help. Our predecessors did not worship a sugardaddy god.

This understanding of compassion as covenantal—requiring action by both parties—was critical in keeping the principle of *suffering with* from becoming esteem for suffering. The goal of all suffering was personal change. Those who refused to change did not deserve to be the beneficiaries of others’ suffering. They might have to be left to themselves until their own suffering became so great that they gave up their false pride.

The colonial understanding that compassion should be challenging, personal, and spiritual provides insight into what early American philanthropies such as the Scots’ Charitable Society (established in 1684) meant when they “open[ed] the bowells of our compassion” to widows but ruled that “no prophane or diselut person, or openly scandalous shall have any part or portione herein.”\* Sermons for several hundred years equated compas-

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\*For further research into the historical evidence cited in Chapters 3 through 5 of this book, consult *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, which is fully footnoted and deals at considerably greater length with issues summarized here.



sion with personal involvement that demanded firm standards of conduct among recipients of aid.

The belief that God did not merely establish principles but was active in the world contributed to a sense that man, created after God's image, also was to go beyond clockwork charity: "God values our *Hearts and Spirits* above all our Silver or Gold, our Herds and Flocks. If a *Man would give all the Substance of his House instead of Love*, the Loves of his Soul and the Souls of his House, *it would be condemned*." Personal involvement always was key. Great care had to be taken with any material distribution: Cotton Mather warned in 1698, "Instead of exhorting you to augment your charity, I will rather utter an exhortation . . . that you may not abuse your charity by misapplying it."

The difference between Mather's restraint and our mechanistic redistributionism shows how much dominant ideas of human nature have changed. For the next two centuries, it was believed that many persons, given the option of working, would choose to sit. Based on that belief, Mather told his congregation, "Don't nourish [the idle] and harden 'em in that, but find employment for them. Find 'em work; set 'em to work; keep 'em to work."

Likewise, minister Charles Chauncey told members of the Society for Encouraging Industry and Employing the Poor to restrain "the Distribution of [their] Charity; not being allowed to dispense it promiscuously, but obliged to take due Care to find out suitable Objects; distinguishing properly between those needy People who are *able*, and those who are *unable*, to employ themselves in Labour."

Referring to the apostle Paul's maxim in Second Thessalonians 3:10—"If a man will not work, he shall not eat"—Chauncey said, "The Command in my Text is plainly a *Statute of Heaven*, tying up your Hands from Charitable Distributions to the slothful poor." It was both economically foolish and morally

wrong to subsidize bad habits by "bestow[ing] upon those the Bread of Charity, who might earn and eat their own Bread, if they did not shamefully idle away their Time."

True compassion meant challenge rather than acceptance. The poor were seen not as standing on the bottom rung of the social ladder—with the only possible choices stagnation or upward movement—but as resting in the middle, capable of moving either up to economic independence or down toward "pauperism," characterized by a defeated spirit and dependent state of mind—as well as by a lack of income.

Some people, of course, became poor through circumstances beyond their control. They received personal care, often in neighbors' homes. The emphasis on *suffering with* meant that orphans during colonial times normally were adopted into families. As towns and cities grew, however, some institutionalization emerged: orphanages were established in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, and other cities.

At the end of the eighteenth century, some groups began providing small monthly allowances to working widowed mothers. "Widows who have the charge of two, three, four or five children," a Boston association declared, "are unequivocally proper subjects of alms." Even so, the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children (established in 1797 in New York City) was cautious in distributing aid. Volunteers checked the means, character, and circumstances of each applicant, making sure that relatives were unable to help and that alcoholism was not contributing to misery.

Further, aid almost always was given in kind—food, coal, cloth—rather than in cash. During the winter of 1797–98, the society helped ninety-eight widows with 223 children; by 1800, 152 widows with 420 children under the age of twelve were listed on its books. Because the society accepted only those clients' who "would rather eat their own bread, hardly earned,

than that of others with idleness," it emphasized finding work. In one year, widows received nearly 3,000 yards of linen to make shirts and other articles of clothing in their homes.

Since compassion for widowed or abandoned women meant self-help whenever possible, the obligation of able-bodied men was even more exacting. Some twenty-three Boston charitable societies declared in 1835 that recipients should believe it "disgraceful to depend upon alms-giving, as long as a capacity of self-support is retained . . . [To] give to one who begs . . . or in any way to supersede the necessity of industry, of forethought, and of proper self-restraint and self-denial, is at once to do wrong, and to encourage the receivers of our alms to wrong doing."

Echoing Mather's warning of 150 years earlier, the societies stated that "a faithful avoidance of the evils [of] an injudicious bestowment of alms" was essential to "Christian alms-giving." For that reason, they all agreed that relief should be given only after a "personal examination of each case," and "not in money, but in the necessities required in the case."

Alexis de Tocqueville, in the 1830s, observed that Americans "display general compassion" through personal interaction, unlike the European pattern by which the "state almost exclusively undertakes to supply bread to the hungry, assistance and shelter to the sick, work to the idle, and to act as the sole reliever of all kinds of misery." This difference, Tocqueville surmised, was due in part to the presence of small communities and strong religious ideas.

Americans understood that large-scale aid programs could not be discerning in that way and therefore intrinsically lacked compassion. An 1844 *McGuffey's Reader* ridiculed a "Mr. Fantom" who had "noble zeal for the millions" but "little compassion for the units." An English visitor observed that Ohioans did not favor building large institutions, but were compassionate on

an individual and family basis: a "disabled Scotchman" received free "board amongst the farmers, sometimes at one house, and sometimes at another," while in another town a Dutch family impoverished by sickness were "provided with doctor and nurse, and in fact with everything needful for them, until they recovered."

As towns grew into cities, more organizations to help the "worthy poor" emerged. The goal throughout was to make city relations as much as possible like those of the countryside. The Boston Provident Association (established in 1851) gave food, clothes, and coal to those willing to work but in temporary need. The association refused requests from drunkards and asked supporters to give beggars not money but cards proposing that they visit the association's offices, where volunteers would examine needs, make job referrals, and provide food and temporary shelter. It developed a list of "the worthy" and also a "black record," which in 1853 contained the names of 201 "impostors"—able-bodied persons who refused to work.

Those who were ill generally received help (given nineteenth-century medicine, questionable help) regardless of background. The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor frequently emphasized the importance of taking personal action. It reported "an increasing number of families and individuals who are willing to take charge of one or more, often of several, poor families." Similar associations emerged in New York, Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and other cities.

The South had fewer cities but similar patterns of compassion, as shown in historian Suzanne Lebsock's detailed examination of Petersburg, Virginia. Ms. Lebsock is typical of conventional historians in her bewilderment about the data she found. Describing Petersburg's economic difficulties during the 1830s and 1840s, and noting the lack of governmental response, she repeat-

edly indicates puzzlement and concludes, "How people got by, to repeat, is a mystery."

The mystery can be largely solved by recalling how compassion was then practiced: people got by when their neighbors showed true compassion. For example, women in Petersburg, Virginia, set up an orphan asylum in 1812, for they were "deeply impressed with the forlorn and helpless Situation of poor Orphan female Children . . . and wish to snatch [them] from ignorance and ruin." In Charleston, South Carolina, the Ladies' Benevolent Society in 1825 gave special support to a Mrs. Cowie, who suffered from blindness and leprosy; to Clarissa and Mary, two crippled black women; and to Mary McNeile, a free black with leprosy.

The first half of the nineteenth century, in short, witnessed a vast war on wilderness. The increase of neighborhood came not everywhere, not at all times, and, woefully, not for all races—but overall, the forward movement was remarkable. De Tocqueville was amazed by how strongly Americans felt "compassion for the sufferings of one another" and how—beginning with the establishment of the Female Humane Association for the aid of indigent Baltimore widows in 1798—women particularly were in the forefront of benevolent activity. Women founded and managed the Female Charitable Societies and Ladies' Benevolent Societies that started up in the early 1800s, first in large cities like New York and Philadelphia and then in towns both north and south.

Nineteenth-century sermons continued to define compassion as personal involvement: "To cast a contribution into the box . . . or to attend committees and anniversaries [are] very trifling exercises of Christian self-denial and devotion, compared with what is demanded in the weary perambulations through the street, the contact with filth, and often with rude and repulsive people, the facing of disease, and distress, and all

manner of heart-rending and heart-frightening scenes, and all the trials of faith, patience, and hope, which are incident to the duty we urge."

Churches and charity organizations believed that professionals should be facilitators of aid, not major or sole suppliers: "there must, of course, be officers, teachers, missionaries employed to live in the very midst of the wretchedness, and to supervise and direct all the efforts of the people . . . [but] mark you! these officers are not to stand between the giver and receiver, but to bring giver and receiver together."

The compassion consensus was based on the development of personal relationships, often cross-class. A few proto-Marxists challenged that definition by declaring that compassion meant not *suffering with* but forcible redistribution of income. That idea, however, did not receive a widespread hearing until some editors of the "penny press"—newspapers that because of printing and circulation innovations in the 1830s could sell for one cent—became, for both ideological and mercenary reasons, self-appointed tribunes of "the poor" generally.

The first popular challenge to the compassion consensus came from mid-nineteenth-century American journalist Horace Greeley, who founded and became editor of the *New York Tribune* in 1841. A theological Universalist, Greeley believed that people were naturally good and that every person had a right to both eternal salvation and temporal prosperity. He probably never said the words most often attributed to him—"Go west, young man"—but he did advise many young men and women to fight poverty by joining communes in which the natural goodness of humans, freed from competitive pressure, inevitably would emerge.

Not accepting orthodox Christian anthropology—that man's sinful nature leads toward indolence, and that an impoverished person given a dole without obligation is likely to descend into

pauperism—Greeley saw no problem with payment to the able-bodied poor who did not work. Rather than discuss the obligations of neighbors, Greeley argued that each member of “the whole Human Family” had “a perfect right . . . to his equal share of the soil, the woods, the waters, and all the natural products.” There was no need for *suffering with* when everyone, by government fiat if necessary, was due an equal sustenance.

Greeley and his followers were only partially successful in undoing the definition of compassion that had been built over the previous two centuries. Henry Raymond, founder of the *New York Times*, was Greeley’s principal opponent and emphasized individual and church action: “Members of any one of our City Churches do more every year for the practical relief of poverty and suffering, than any [commune] that ever existed. There are in our midst hundreds of female ‘sewing societies,’ each of which clothes more nakedness, and feeds more hunger, than any ‘Association’ that was ever formed.” Raymond praised “individuals in each ward, poor, pious, humble men and women, who never dreamed of setting themselves up as professional philanthropists,” but daily visited the sick and helped the poor.

Debates between Greeley and Raymond show clearly the conflict of views. Greeley contended that supporting a system of equal, society-wide redistribution was “the duty of every Christian, every Philanthropist, every one who admits the essential Brotherhood of the Human Family,” and argued that evil resulted from “social distinctions of master and servant, rich and poor, landlord and landless.” The way to end evil was to redistribute wealth by having the government tax the better-off and distribute food and funds to those who had less.

Raymond, however, argued that “before a cure can be applied or devised, the cause of the evil must be ascertained,” and that cause was “the sinfulness of the heart of Man.” The only solu-

tion lay in God’s compassion toward man and man’s subsequent compassion toward his brethren: “The heart must be changed.”

The groups Raymond particularly applauded emphasized personal contact with the poor, even when some of their members were stunned by the firsthand experience. They refused to settle for the feed-and-forget principle or its equally depersonalizing but harsher opposite, the forget-and-don’t-feed standard. They saw individuals made in the image of God, and when they saw someone acting disgracefully they responded with a challenge: *You do not have to be that way. You are better than this. We expect more from you than an arm thrust out for food.*

Personal involvement became the hallmark of nineteenth-century compassion. A consistent line of understanding and action runs from John McDowall in the 1830s, Robert Hartley in the 1840s, and Charles Loring Brace (who set up “orphan trains”) through the late-nineteenth-century efforts of Humphreys Gurteen, Josephine Lowell, and other leaders of the Charity Organization Society movement. They wanted the rich to see without sentimentality. They wanted those with a pauper mentality to see the need to change and to know that they had neighbors willing to help. They helped poor Americans as well as the better-off to live in neighborhoods, not wilderness.

Following the Civil War, urban problems increased as industrialization accelerated—and the number of poverty-fighting societies grew commensurately. For example, in 1890 and 1891, in Baltimore, Chicago, and New York alone, about 2,000 organizations of various kinds were active:

- In Baltimore, the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor had 2,000 volunteers who made 8,227 visits in 1891 to 4,025 families. Nearly half the families were headed by widows who generally received material aid; most others were headed by able-bodied men who received help in

finding jobs and in fighting alcoholism and opium addiction. An emphasis on personal involvement of rich and poor—not just material transfer—was evident in many ways.

- Other Baltimore groups emphasized self-help for the poor and material transfer only to those unable to work. In 1890, the Thomas Wilson Fuel-Saving Society helped 1,500 families save on the purchase of 3,000 tons of coal. The Memorial Union for the Rescue of Homeless and Friendless Girls offered free rooms in private homes for teenagers and young women until long-term housing and jobs could be found. The Presbyterian Eye, Ear and Throat Charity Hospital offered free beds and Bible readings to the poor and illiterate. While many groups had Protestant bases, Catholic groups also flourished: volunteers of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul of the City of Baltimore made 4,800 visits and relieved 345 families.

- New York's charity organizations also emphasized personal help and the exchange of time, not just money. The American Female Guardian Society and Home for the Friendless sheltered over 1,000 children "not consigned to institution life but . . . transferred by adoption to Christian homes." The Nursery and Child's Hospital provided free medical care and supported hundreds of unmarried pregnant women in return for an agreement "to remain three months after confinement to take care of two infants."

New York's 1,288 charitable organizations often employed professional managers, but their task was to coordinate activities of tens of thousands of volunteers who provided food, clothing, fuel, shelter, and employment; supported free schools and kindergartens; organized sea excursions and summer camps; staffed free hospitals and dispensaries; and constructed missions, reformatories, libraries, and reading rooms.

How effective was the late-nineteenth-century war on

poverty? That question is difficult to answer with certitude. Most overall statistics from the period are not thorough enough to be particularly useful. One page of the 1890 census report makes up in candor what it misses in accuracy by noting three times that "the results of this inquiry are comparatively valueless" and "the returns are so scanty that general conclusions can not be based on them."

Often we have to fall back on eyewitness reports and journalistic assessments, and here useful material is abundant. Author Edward Everett Hale analyzed the success of the Boston Industrial Aid Society in reforming alcoholics: "These women were most of them poor creatures broken down with drink, or with worse devils, if there are worse. But . . . five hundred people in a year take five hundred of these broken-down women into their homes, sometimes with their babies, and give them a new chance."

A middle-class volunteer in the slums was astounded when "with my own eyes I saw men who had come into the mission sodden with drink turn into quiet, steady workers. . . . I saw foul homes, where dirty bundles of straw had been the only bed, gradually become clean and respectable; hard faces grow patient and gentle, oaths and foul words give place to quiet speech." Writer Josiah Strong concluded in 1893, "Probably during no hundred years in the history of the world have there been saved so many thieves, gamblers, drunkards and prostitutes as during the past quarter of a century."

Strong and others were favorably inclined toward theistic values—but some who were deeply skeptical of the theology were nevertheless impressed by the practice. Muckraker Ray Stannard Baker was struck by testimonies such as that of a former "drunken wretch" whose life was transformed when he stumbled into the McAuley mission and came to believe "that Jesus Christ had the power to save me when I could not save myself."

Baker did not know quite what to make of the account and many others like it, but he was a good enough journalist, and a curious enough soul, to conclude that the saved person “knows what he has got, and those wretches who hear him—do they not understand intimately what he has suffered? And do they not also long blindly for the power . . . ?”

Baker also was struck by the realization that “it apparently makes not the slightest difference whether the man is an unlettered Christ or a university graduate; the power of reconstruction is the same.” He called the McAuley mission “one of the most extraordinary institutions in the country” and noted that once the individuals “surrendered” to Christ, they were able to escape alcoholism, find jobs, and be reconciled with their families.

For those who scoff at both believers and skeptics, the most credible observer of the entire era may be liberal reformer Jacob Riis, author in 1890 of *How The Other Half Lives*. Riis lived his concern for the New York poor by hauling heavy cameras up dozens of flights of tenement stairs day after day to provide striking photographs of dull-eyed families in crowded flats. Riis documented great misery, but he also saw movement out of poverty and concluded that “New York is, I firmly believe, the most charitable city in the world. Nowhere is there so eager a readiness to help, when it is known that help is worthily wanted; nowhere are such armies of devoted workers.”

Riis also wrote of how one charity group over eight years raised “4,500 families out of the rut of pauperism into proud, if modest, independence, without alms.” He noted that another “handful of noble women . . . accomplished what no machinery of government availed to do. Sixty thousand children have been rescued by them from the streets.”

## Chapter 4

### *The Good Old Days?*

Jacob Riis and his contemporaries were not arguing a century ago that the war on poverty was won, or was even winnable in any final sense: Riis wrote that “the metropolis is to lots of people like a lighted candle to the moth.” Those who climbed out of urban destitution were replaced quickly by others awaiting trial by fire. But dreams then were alive: the poverty-fighting optimism among Americans then contrasts sharply with the demoralization among the poor and cynicism among the better-off that are so common now.

What was their secret? They did not shower money on the poor, nor did they simply relax in an antistatist spirit: they knew that private agencies could be just as bad as government ones. No, charity workers a century ago were fired up by seven ideas that recent welfare practice has put on the back burner. For convenience of memory these seven seals of good philanthropic practice can even be put in alphabetical order, A through G: *Affiliation, Bonding, Categorization, Discernment, Employment, Freedom, God*. If we understand how these seven were applied, we’ll at least be able to ask the right questions about our recent wrong turn.

Let’s begin where poverty-fighting a century ago began, by emphasizing *affiliation: connecting with families and communities*.



Many men a century ago, as now, were abandoning their families. Church groups as well as the United Hebrew Charities fought the trend. Many young people were running away from home, and some of the elderly were out of contact with their children. Charity organizations responded by instructing all volunteers to work hard at "restoring family ties that have been sundered" and "strengthening a church or social bond that is weakened." The prime goal of relief, all agreed, was not material distribution but "affiliation . . . the reabsorption in ordinary industrial and social life of those who for some reason have snapped the threads that bound them to the other members of the community."

In practice, when individuals or families with real needs applied for material assistance, charity workers began by interviewing applicants and checking backgrounds with the goal of answering one question: who is bound to help in this case? Charity workers then tried to call in relatives, neighbors, or former co-workers or co-worshippers. "Relief given without reference to friends and neighbors is accompanied by moral loss," Mary Richmond of the Baltimore Charity Organizing Society noted. "Poor neighborhoods are doomed to grow poorer and more sordid, whenever the natural ties of neighborliness are weakened by our well-meant but unintelligent interference."

When material support was needed, charities tried to raise it from relatives and others with personal ties instead of appropriating funds from general income. "Raising the money required specially on each case, though very troublesome, has immense advantages," one minister wrote. "It enforces family ties, and neighborly or other duties, instead of relaxing them." Affiliation was important for both old and young. A typical case from the files of the Associated Charities of Boston notes that when an elderly widower applied for help, "the agent's investigation showed that there were relatives upon whom he might have a claim."

In another case, a niece "was unable to contribute anything,"

but a brother-in-law who had not seen the old man for twenty-five years "promised to send a regular pension," and he did. The brother-in-law's contribution paid the old man's living expenses and reunited him with his late wife's family. "If there had been no careful investigation," the caseworker noted, the man would have received some bread, but would have remained "wretched in his filthy abode." Similarly, abandoned young people were to be placed in alternative families, not institutionalized. Orphans were to be placed with families as quickly as possible—a century ago, that meant days or weeks, not months or years, in foster care.

Affiliation could also mean reinvolvement with religious or ethnic groups. The New York Charity Organization Society asked applicants what they professed or how they had been raised, and then referred them to local churches and synagogues. Some groups emphasized ethnic ties. The Belgium Society of Benevolence, the Chinese Hospital Association, the French Benevolent Society, the German Ladies' Society, the Hungarian Association, the Irish Immigrant Society, and many similar organizations did not want to see their people act in shameful ways. On an individual level, members of the same immigrant groups helped each other out.

When applicants for help were truly alone, then it was time for *bonding: helping one by one*. Volunteers in such situations became, in essence, new family members. Charity volunteers a century ago usually were not assigned to paper-pushing or mass food-dispensing tasks, but were given the opportunity to make large differences in several lives over several years. Each volunteer had a narrow but deep responsibility: the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charitable Relief noted that "a small number of families, from three to five, are enough to exhaust all the time, attention, and friendly care which one visitor has." The thousands of volunteers were not babied by promises of easy satisfaction and warm feelings. Instead, the Philadelphia Society

warned that volunteers would have “discouraging experiences, and, perhaps for a time little else,” but would nevertheless be expected to maintain “the greatest patience, the most decided firmness, and an inexhaustible kindness.”

There were failures, but success stories also emerged. The magazine *American Hebrew*, in 1898, told of how one man was used to dependency, but volunteers “with great patience convinced him that he must earn his living”—soon he was, and had regained the respect of his family and community. A man who had worked vigorously could no longer do so because of sickness, but was helped to develop a new trade mending broken china. Speakers at the Indiana State Conference on Social Work regularly told of those “transformed from dependent to respectable citizen.”

The key was personal willingness to be deeply involved. Nathaniel Rosenau of the United Hebrew Charities noted that good charity could not be based on the “overworked and somewhat mechanical offices of a relieving society.” The charity magazine *Lend a Hand* regularly reminded readers that they could not “discharge duties to the poor by gifts of money alone . . . Let us beware of mere charity with the tongs.” Philanthropic groups such as the Associated Charities of Boston saw their role not as raising more money, but as helping citizens to go beyond “tax-bills [or] vicarious giving” by serving “as a bureau of introduction between the worthy poor and the charitable.” *Charities Review* paid close attention to language abuse and emphasized the importance of understanding “charity in its original meaning of ‘love,’ not charity in its debased meaning of ‘alms.’”

Involvement was not uninformed. Volunteers—typically, middle-class church members—were helped in their tasks by careful *categorization*: the goal was to *personalize* charity so that individuals with different needs could receive different treatment. Charities did not treat everyone equally—and, since they

were private, they did not have to. Instead, charitable societies considered “worthy of relief” only those who were poor through no fault of their own and unable to change their situation quickly. In this category were orphans, the aged, the incurably ill, children with “one parent unable to support them,” and adults suffering from “temporary illness or accident.” Volunteers who were tenderhearted but not particularly forceful served as helpers to those who were helpless.

Other applicants for aid were placed in different categories and received different treatment. Jobless adults who showed themselves “able and willing” to work or part-time workers “able and willing to do more” were sent to employment bureaus and classified as “Needing Work Rather Than Relief.” Help in finding work also was offered to “the improvident or intemperate who are not yet hopelessly so.” However, the “shiftless and intemperate” who were unwilling to work were categorized as “Unworthy, Not Entitled to Relief.” In this group were “those who prefer to live on alms,” those with “confirmed intemperance,” and the “vicious who seem permanently so.” Volunteers who agreed to visit such individuals had to be of hardier stock and often of rougher experience; often the best were ex-alcoholics or ex-convicts.

How would agencies know the categories into which applicants fell? Background checks helped, but “work tests” were a key self-sorting device, and one that also allowed the dispensing of aid with dignity retained. When an able-bodied man in almost any city asked an agency for relief, he often was asked to chop wood for two hours or to whitewash a building. A needy woman generally was given a seat in the “sewing room” (a child care room often was nearby) and asked to work on garments that would be donated to the helpless poor or sent through the Red Cross to families suffering from the effects of hurricanes or tornadoes.



In 1890, wood yards next to homeless shelters were as common as liquor stores are in 1995, and the impact was sobering: work tests allowed charity managers to see whether applicants who held out signs asking for work were serious. Work tests also allowed applicants to earn their keep. The work test, along with teaching good habits and keeping away those who did not truly need help, also enabled charities to teach the lesson that those who were being helped could also help others. The wood was often given to widows or others among the helpless poor. At the Friendly Inn in Baltimore, for example, the count was exact: 24,901 meals worked for in 1890 and 6,084 given without work. The New Orleans Charity Organization Society described its wood yard as a place “where heads of families can earn household supplies, and the homeless food and lodging,” with assistance given “in a way that does not pauperize.”

Categorization, Jacob Riis wrote repeatedly, was crucial: the way to fight “real suffering in the homes of the poor” was to hang tough—“no work, nothing to eat.” Many organizations during the 1890s kept careful records. At Boston’s Associated Charities in one typical year, 895 volunteers visited 2,094 families requesting relief (the goal was one volunteer for two families). The visitors found that 18 percent of all applicants were “worthy of continuous relief” because of old age, incurable illness, or orphan status. Some 23 percent were “worthy of temporary relief” because of accident, illness, or short-term trouble. The 33 percent categorized as “able to work” (a few were unemployed not by their own choice and others were the “shiftless or intemperate where reform may be hoped for”) were sent to employment bureaus that had jobs aplenty. The remaining 26 percent were “unworthy” of support because they had property or relatives to fall back on, or because work tests and investigation had indicated that they were without “desire to change.”

With Associated Charities’ help and pressure, 817 clients found and accepted jobs that year and 278 refused them (“98 refusals with good reason, 170 without”). In addition, Associated Charities gave loans to eighty-one persons (the repayment rate was 75 percent), legal aid to sixty-two persons, and medical help to 304. Volunteers helped 185 families to save money, influenced fifty-three relatives to offer aid, and pushed 144 alcoholic breadwinners to make progress in temperance. Nearly 600 children were helped directly by volunteers. They found adoptive families or guardians for orphans, influenced truants to attend school more often, and placed other children in private day nurseries or industrial schools.

The New Orleans Charity Organization Society also emphasized “personal investigation of every case, not alone to prevent imposture, but to learn the necessities of every case and how to meet them.” Some 1,328 investigations in a typical year there led to 926 individuals being classified as worthy of help, 276 as “unworthy,” and 126 as doubtful. In the “worthy” category were 271 individuals found unemployed but willing to work, 252 who had jobs but wanted additional work, 205 who were ill, and sixty-four who were aged; forty-eight women had been abandoned by their husbands. Among the “unworthy” were forty-one drunkards and professional beggars uninterested in changing their conduct, 143 who were “shiftless” and unwilling to work, and seventy-two who were found not to be in need.

Categorization and self-categorization went along with discernment—or as we say today, *responsible giving*. The tendency toward caution grew out of the benign suspicion that came naturally to charity workers who had grown up reading the Bible. Aware from their theology of the deviousness of the human heart, nineteenth-century charity workers were not surprised when some among the poor “preferred their condition and even tried to take advantage of it.” The St. Louis Provident Associa-

tion noted that "duplication of alms is pursued with cunning and attended most invariably with deceit and falsehood."

One magazine reported that a "woman who obtained relief several times on the ground that she had been deserted by her husband, was one day surprised at her home with the husband in the bedroom. She had pretended that the man was her boarder." The husband turned out to have a regular income. Jacob Riis noted that some claims of illness were real, but other times a background check revealed "the 'sickness' to stand for laziness, and the destitution to be the family's stock in trade."

Only discernment on the part of charity workers who knew their aid seekers intimately could prevent fraud. Baltimore charity manager Mary Richmond wrote that her hardest task was the teaching of volunteers "whose kindly but condescending attitude has quite blinded them to the everyday facts of the neighborhood life." To be effective, volunteers had to leave behind "a conventional attitude toward the poor, seeing them through the comfortable haze of our own excellent intentions, and content to know that we wish them well, without being at any great pains to know them as they really are." Volunteers had to learn that "well-meant interference, unaccompanied by personal knowledge of all the circumstances, often does more harm than good and becomes a temptation rather than a help."

Discernment by volunteers, and organizational barriers against fraud, were important not only to prevent waste but to preserve morale among those who *were* working hard to remain independent. One charity worker noted that "nothing is more demoralizing to the struggling poor than successes of the indolent or vicious." The St. Louis solution was to require volunteers "to give relief only after personal investigation of each case. . . . To give what is least susceptible of abuse. . . . To give only in small quantities in proportion to immediate need; and less than might be procured by labor, except in cases of sickness. . . . To

give assistance at the right moment; not to prolong it beyond duration of the necessity which calls for it. . . . To require of each beneficiary abstinence from intoxicating liquors. . . . To discontinue relieving all who manifest a purpose to depend on alms rather than their own exertions for support."

Doles without discernment not only subsidized the "unscrupulous and undeserving" but became a "chief hindrance to spontaneous, free generosity": they contributed to "the grave uncertainty in many minds whether with all their kind intentions they are likely to do more good than harm . . . Only when "personal sympathy" could "work with safety, confidence, and liberty," would compassion be unleashed. The New Orleans COS tried to impress on its volunteers maxims of discernment by printing on the back cover of its annual reports statements such as "Intelligent giving and intelligent withholding are alike true charity" and "If drink has made a man poor, money will feed not him, but his drunkenness."

It was also important for every individual approached by a beggar to be discerning—and teaching that proved to be a very difficult task! *Charities Review* once asked the designer of an innovative program whether its success satisfied "the 'gusher' who desires to give every evening beggar 25 cents." S. O. Preston responded, "No, nothing satisfies the 'gusher'; he will persist in giving his (or someone else's) money to the plausible beggar as often as he appears." The magazine was filled with criticism of "that miscalled charity which soothes its conscience with indiscriminate giving."

Our predecessors did not pussyfoot around. Charity leader Humphreys Gurteen called giving money to alcoholics "positively immoral" and argued that if givers could "foresee all the misery which their so called charity is entailing in the future," they would "forgo the flutter of satisfaction which always follows a well intentioned deed." New Haven minister H. L. Way-

land criticized the “well-meaning, tender-hearted, sweet-voiced criminals who insist upon indulging in indiscriminate charity.”

The drive to stop foolish “compassion” continued throughout the 1880s and 1890s. *Charities Review* quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson’s famous self-criticism: “I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, but it is a wicked dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold.” Sociological analyses of the “floating population of all large modern cities” showed the homeless including some “strangers seeking work” and needing temporary help, but a larger number of “victims of intemperance and vice”—not all that different from today, with studies showing a majority of the homeless in major cities suffering from alcohol or drug abuse.

*Charities Review* criticized “that miscalled charity which soothes its conscience with indiscriminate giving” and proposed that individuals and groups restrict “material relief to those cases in which such relief would be given by the true friend.” True friendship was not encouraging “lazy imposture,” for “such mercy is not mercy: it is pure selfishness.” Instead, true friendship meant helping to deliver a person from slavery to a bottle, a needle, or his own laziness.

Affiliation and bonding, categorization and discernment—when the process was working well, the next key element was long-term *employment* of all able-bodied household heads. *Demand work*, magazines such as *Charities Review* stressed, proclaiming that “labor is the life of society, and the beggar who will not work is a social cannibal feeding on that life.” Indiana officials declared that “nothing creates pauperism so rapidly as the giving of relief to [able-bodied] persons without requiring them to earn what they receive by some kind of honest labor.”

An emphasis on work would have been savage had jobs not been available—but, except during short-lived times of “business panic,” they were. (In 1892, charity experts from several major

cities were asked whether honest and sober men would spend more than a short time out of work: they all said such a situation was “rare” or “very exceptional.”) A single-minded work emphasis also would have been unfair if alternatives to begging did not exist during short-lived periods of unemployment—but private charities in every major city provided the opportunity to work for food and lodging, as we have already discussed.

Most of the able-bodied poor accepted the work obligation, partly because of biblical teaching and partly because they had little choice. A New Haven mission manager reported that fewer than one out of a hundred refused to work in the wood yard or sewing room, perhaps because “there is no other institution in this city where lodging can be secured except by cash payments for same.” Had there been alternatives, bad charity might have driven out good, for charity leaders argued that it took only a short time for slothful habits to develop. After several years of easygoing charity in Oregon, N. R. Walpole of Portland “found among the unemployed a reluctance to work, and regarded compulsory work as the only solution of the problem.”

Take a hard line, charity leaders demanded, or else problems would worsen: New York charity leader Josephine Lowell wrote, “The problem before those who would be charitable, is not how to deal with a given number of poor; it is how to help those who are poor, without adding to their numbers and constantly increasing the evils they seek to cure.” Jacob Riis agreed; when some New York groups appeared to be weakening, Riis foresaw a tribe of “frauds, professional beggars . . . tightening its grip on society as the years pass, until society shall summon up pluck to say with Paul, ‘if a man will not work neither shall he eat,’ and stick to it.” Riis, like other Christians a century ago, kept coming back to the apostolic teaching. Jewish leaders, meanwhile, were stressing that poverty was not a desirable status within Judaism, and that a person unwilling to work could not

justify his conduct even by citing a desire to study the Bible: they quoted a Talmudic saying, "All study of the Torah that is not accompanied by work must in the end be futile and become the cause of sin."

Within the Talmudic tradition, avoiding dependency was so important that even work on the Sabbath was preferable to accepting alms: Rabbi Jochanan said, "Make thy Sabbath a week-day and do not be reduced to need the help of human beings." All charity leaders argued that even poorly paying jobs provided a start on the road from poverty; since travel down that road required solid work habits, true friendship meant challenging bad habits and pushing a person to build new, productive ones.

Along with an emphasis on employment came a focus on promoting *freedom*—which was defined by immigrants not as the opportunity to do anything with anyone at any time, but as the opportunity to work and worship without governmental restriction. To *promote freedom* meant to provide opportunity to drive a wagon without paying bribes, to cut hair without having to go to barbers' college, and to get a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, even if wages for that job were low. Freedom was the opportunity for a family to escape dire poverty by having a father work long hours and a mother sew garments at home.

This freedom did not make for an instantly successful war against poverty at a time when 200,000 persons were packed into one Manhattan square mile. Snapshots of abject poverty could show horrible living conditions, but those who persevered had roles in a motion picture of upward mobility. My grandparents, for example, all came from the Russian empire shortly before World War I and found the streets paved not with gold but with liberty—which, in the hands of people who wanted to work hard and were encouraged to do so, amounted to virtually the same thing.

It was clear to leaders a century ago that government subsidy

could not provide the kind of freedom that was important. In 1894, Amos G. Warner's mammoth study, *American Charities*, compiled what had been learned about governmental charity in the course of the nineteenth century: "It is necessarily more impersonal and mechanical than private charity or individual action. . . . There is some tendency to claim public relief as a right, and for the indolent and incapable to throw themselves flat upon it. This feeling will always assert itself whenever it is given an opportunity to do so. . . . In public charities, officialism is even more pronounced than under private management."

Warner prophetically continued, "The degradation of character of the man on a salary set to the work of relieving the poor is one of the most discouraging things in connection with relief-work. . . . It is possible to do so much relief-work that, while one set of persons is relieved, another will be taxed across the pauper line. . . . the burden of supporting the State tends to diffuse itself along the lines of the least resistance; consequently, money which is raised for the relief of the poor may come out of pockets that can ill spare it. . . . The blight of partisan politics and gratuitously awkward administration often falls upon the work. . . . Charitable institutions are spoils of an insignificant character, thrown frequently to the less deserving among the henchmen of the successful political bosses."

The goal of charity workers, therefore, was not to press for governmental programs, but to show poor people how to move up while avoiding dependency, depicted as slavery with a smiling mask. Minister Joseph Crooker noted that "it is very easy to make our well-meant charity a curse to our fellow-men." Social worker Frederic Almy argued that "alms are like drugs, and are as dangerous," for often "they create an appetite which is more harmful than the pain which they relieve."

Governmental welfare was "the least desirable form of relief," according to Mary Richmond, because it "comes from what is

regarded as a practically inexhaustible source, and people who once receive it are likely to regard it as a right, as a permanent pension, implying no obligation on their part." But if charity organizations were to do better, they had to make sure the poor understood that "dirt and slovenliness are no claim to help; that energy and resource are qualities which the helper or helpers will gladly meet half-way." Freedom could be grasped only when individuals took responsibility.

Affiliation and bonding, categorization and discernment, employment and freedom . . . and the seventh seal on the social covenant of the late nineteenth century was concern about the relation of God to all these things. *Rely on faith in God* was a constant refrain; "true philanthropy must take into account spiritual as well as physical needs," a frequent theme of charity magazines. Poverty will be dramatically reduced if "the victims of appetite and lust and idleness . . . revere the precepts of the Bible and form habits of industry, frugality, and self-restraint," Pennsylvania charity commissioners declared. The frequent conclusion was that demoralized men and women needed much greater help than "the dole of organized charities."

There were some differences between Christians and Jews as to what that help was. The biblically orthodox Christians of the late nineteenth century worshipped a God who came to earth, suffered with us, and died for us. Christians believed that they—creatures made after God's image—were called to *suffer with* also, in gratitude for the suffering done for them, and in obedience to biblical principles. (The goal of such suffering, of course, was to promote those principles, and not to grease a slide into sin.) Jewish teaching, however, emphasized the pursuit of righteousness through the doing of good deeds, particularly those showing loving kindness (*gemilut chasadim*). The difference was significant—but both approaches led to abundant volunteering.

Similarities in theistic understanding led both Christians and

Jews to emphasize the importance of personal charity, rather than a clockwork deistic approach. The Good Samaritan in Christ's story bandages the victim's wounds, puts him on a donkey, takes him to an inn—the Samaritan walks alongside—and nurses him there. The Talmud also portrayed personal service as "much greater than charity," defined as money giving.

Christians and Jews had many similarities in understanding because they both read an Old Testament that did not portray God as a sugar daddy who merely felt sorry for people in distress. They saw God as showing compassion while demanding change, and they tried to do the same. Groups such as the Industrial Christian Alliance noted that they used "religious methods"—reminding the poor that God made them and had high expectations for them—to "restore the fallen and helpless to self-respect and self-support."

In addition, Christians had the expectation that the Holy Spirit could and would rapidly transform the consciences of all those whom God had called. Those who believed in poverty fighting through salvation were delighted but not surprised to read in the *New York Herald* of how "the woman known as Bluebird up to a year ago was one of the worst drunkards in the Lower East Side. . . . Scores of times she had been in the police courts." Then she was met with by an evangelist, agreed to go to the Door of Hope rescue home, was converted, and decided to help others. The *Herald* reporter told how he visited "the Five Points Mission Hall. A big crowd of ragged, bloated and generally disreputable looking men and women were seeking admission. . . . a very pleasant looking young woman dressed neatly in black and having a bunch of flowers at her waist . . . spoke to them of love and hope. The crowds kept coming until the break of day. No one would ever think that the neatly attired young lady speaking so appealingly had once been the terror of the slums, always alert to get in the first blow."

Some one hundred of Bluebird's former gang associates changed their lives over the next several years as, in the words of the *New York Times*, she was "transformed into one of the most earnest and eloquent female evangelists who ever worked among the human derelicts in dark alleys and dives" and "threw her whole soul in the work of evangelism among her former associates." Most of those hundred changes were permanent, a follow-up years later concluded.

Affiliation, bonding, categorization, discernment, employment, freedom—and in the end, God's grace. Those were the principles developed by poverty fighters who did much more than the standard textbooks report, and who accurately warned us of the long-term consequences of the government programs that the standard textbooks praise. But hard questions still nag at us: did the late-nineteenth-century war on poverty work? What was the direction of movement—for how many was dire poverty only a short-term curse? To what extent did charity and challenge help individuals escape poverty? Was it fair that most would advance—some very slowly—but some would not?

To answer those questions accurately, we need to avoid both sentimentality about the past and snideness toward it. Clearly, the good old days were hard, and living conditions for many of the urban poor, particularly in crowded Manhattan (the 1880 census showed six wards in lower Manhattan with over 200,000 persons per square mile), were terrible. Without antibiotics, illness could ravage families overnight; without modern machinery, work was often long and physically exhausting; without modern heating and cooling systems, cold fronts and heat waves took a toll. Societies at different times have differing degrees of difficulty in their poverty fighting; materially, our predecessors' task was harder than ours.

Given conditions a century ago, how did poverty fighters acquit themselves? Various writers answered those questions in

different ways, but the person I trust the most is Jacob Riis, who before he became an acclaimed writer was himself a penniless, homeless immigrant. Riis's most famous work, *How the Other Half Lives*, is a particularly noteworthy combination of sad realism and thoughtful optimism. New York's "poverty, its slums, and its suffering are the result of unprecedented growth with the consequent disorder and crowding," he wrote, and argued that what government welfare there was made life worse by creating an "incentive to parents to place their children upon the public for support."

Riis, knowing through his own reporting the dire situation of many, still insisted that material distribution to the able-bodied, by the state or private charities, led to "degrading and pauperizing" rather than "self-respect and self-dependence." Instead of calling for governmental programs, Riis praised New York's Charity Organization Society and "kindred organizations" for showing "what can be done by well-directed effort." With the understanding that antipoverty progress was incremental and tied to economic growth, he pointed to problems but declared that "the thousand and one charities that in one way or another reach the homes and the lives of the poor with sweetening touch, are proof that if much is yet to be done . . . hearts and hands will be found to do it in ever-increasing measure."

The good news, according to Riis, was that through many charitable efforts, "the poor and the well-do-to have been brought closer together, in an every-day companionship that cannot but be productive of the best results, to the one who gives no less than to the one who receives." He concluded that "black as the cloud is it has a silver lining, bright with promise. New York is to-day a hundredfold cleaner, better, purer, city than it was even ten years ago. . . . if we labor on with courage and patience, [these efforts] will bear fruit sixty and a hundred fold."



## Chapter 5

*Twentieth-Century Debacle*

Some Americans did not labor on. Books and articles at the beginning of this century were filled with an unwillingness to go on patiently helping people, one by one. The process of turning wilderness into neighborhoods seemed too slow. A changed view of the nature of God and the nature of man led to impatience.

The older view saw God as both holy and loving; the new view tended to mention love only. The older anthropology saw man as sinful and likely to want something for nothing, if given the opportunity. The new view saw folks as naturally good and productive, unless they were in a competitive environment that warped finer sensibilities. In the new thinking, change came not through challenge, but through placement in a pleasant environment that would bring out a person's true, benevolent nature.

Such thinking packed a political pistol, for it soon became customary to argue that only the federal government had the potential to create a socioeconomic environment that would save all, and that those who were truly compassionate should rally behind the creation of new programs. Others, however, argued that compassion required "coercive philanthropy"—

forced redistribution through taxation—that would "establish among us true cities of God."

Hopes were high. "Social misery and wrong" could be ended by officials with "a genuine and earnest and passionate desire for the betterment of mankind." Welfare programs could "become the outer form of the altruistic spirit—the unselfish, loving, just nature of the new man." Since people were naturally inclined to goodness, why go slow?

Part of this revisionist definition was based on the revived belief that man is naturally good and productive unless a competitive environment warps finer sensibilities. Reporter Ray Stannard Baker saw that *suffering with* compassion was having an impact—"Whenever I went downtown to see [the] work [of one mission] I always came away hopeful"—but worried about those who did not undergo change. One-by-one compassion was based on hand-picking of fruit ready to be harvested, but an apple-grabbing machine presumably could motor through the orchard. Baker distinguished the mission's method from what he hoped could be a new one by titling one of his articles, "Lift Men from the Gutter? or, Remove the Gutter? Which?"

For those working within the biblical understanding of compassion, the question was not either/or. The goal was to remove as much of the gutter as possible so that no one would have to live in it. Yet, they had the grim expectation that some would seek out parts of the gutter that remained, or build new sections, and sometimes drag their children and others into it: "The poor you always have with you" (although not any particular poor). Those who believed the story of the prodigal son argued that times of torment were not wasted; some people needed to hit bottom before they were ready to move up.

One Charity Organization Society official conveyed this understanding: "The question which we try through investigation



to answer [is,] Are these applicants of ours ready to work out with us . . . some plan which will result in their rescue from dependency . . . ? If such elements are entirely lacking—no basis of good character, no probability of final success—then we do not assume the responsibility of asking societies or churches or private persons to help, and may even, if our advice is asked, urge them to refrain from blind interference with natural educational agencies.”

The goal, our predecessors insisted, was not “that poor families should suffer, but that charity should accomplish its purpose.” Mission workers steeled themselves to bid farewell to those who would not accept the challenge to change. Some who left never came back, but as one volunteer wrote, “The prodigals commonly returned confessing their weakness and laboring earnestly to prove their penitence.”

Such thinking was unacceptable to those who saw no need for hearts to change. Those who saw mistakes but not sin, foolish acts but not evil, also believed that problems originated in social conditions, not moral corruption. They argued that “the social evils of the day arise in large part from social wrongs.” They argued that environment determined action, so a good environment would save all. They reinterpreted compassion to mean acceptance of self-destructive behavior and postponement of pressure to change until all were in a good environment.

Since such theological liberals believed that persons freed from material pressures also would be freed from the sinful tendencies arising from those pressures, a focus on material need emerged. Popular novelist Hall Caine described the extent to which material comfort was believed to drive moral progress: “The world is constantly growing better and happier. . . . there can hardly be any doubt about this [when one sees] the changes which the century has brought about in the people’s health, education, and comfort. . . . People are better housed, and for that reason, among others, their morality has improved.”

If utopia could be attained through mass redistribution, personal compassion was unnecessary. Compassion could become synonymous with sending a check or passing redistributionist legislation. A new stress on professionalized social work accompanied increased government action. The New York Charity Organization Society’s Summer School of Philanthropy, established in 1898, soon became the Columbia University Graduate School of Social Work.

Such moves brought misgivings. One Charity Organization Society official worried that professionals were being “exalted . . . at the expense of the volunteer,” and noted a “certain opinionated and self-righteous attitude in some of the trained social workers [who saw the world as a stage] upon which we professional workers are to exercise our talents, while the volunteers do nothing but furnish the gate receipts and an open-mouthed admiration of our performances.”

But the band played on. National Conference of Social Work president Owen Lovejoy announced in 1920 that social workers would have a new kind of task. While volunteers had endeavored “to ameliorate evil social conditions, to lighten the burdens of poverty, to reduce the volume of ignorance, combat the ravages of disease and otherwise labor diligently to assuage the flood of human sorrow and wretchedness,” social workers and their allies would be “social engineers” capable of creating “a divine order on earth as it is in heaven. . . . [S]imply making the earth a place that will be humanely endurable and stopping there [is] an intolerable belittling of the innate qualities in man.”

In short, the idea that all (even the voluntarily idle) were entitled to a piece of the pie gained vast intellectual and theological support in the early twentieth century. Materialism triumphed among the academic and journalistic elite groups in American society. Lecturers and writers stopped teaching the truth that it may be good to send money to a charity, but that

such action is not compassionate activity. Political scientists stopped teaching that legislation may be wise or foolish, but that it cannot be compassionate. (It can erect barriers to compassion.) Those who were supposed to be the intellectual shepherds of society forgot that compassion means adopting a child, suffering with an adult trying to reform, or (like the Good Samaritan) binding up the wounds of a mugging victim.

As some leaders forgot that compassion means *suffering with*, they looked more and more to government. They combined power seeking (for the good of others, of course) with social universalistic faith. Social gospel leader Washington Gladden was among those who believed that God is unfair if all are not saved from hell (if there is a hell), and government is unfair if all are not saved from poverty (which Gladden knew did exist). Universalist soteriology, proposing that all must be saved regardless of belief, was matched by universalist sociology demanding that all receive provision.

Other changes followed. If provision of material aid was primary, programs could be measured by the amount of material transferred. Nonquantifiable considerations could be overlooked. The nineteenth-century concern that state charity would supplant private efforts—the “crowding out” effect—was turned upside down. Some began to call for less private charity, arguing that such efforts let government off the hook: no one should make it “easy for the state to evade the responsibility.” Grants from private groups to widows got in the way of governmental expansion.

Increasingly, some saw charitable organizations as a sign of government weakness rather than as a sign of social strength. As professionals increasingly dominated the realm of compassion, opportunities for charitable work decreased and volunteers departed. At United Charities of Chicago, by 1915, “interested laymen were as likely to be consigned to a desk job as they were

to be assigned to a family.” When board members at one organization wanted more involvement, its president announced, “Our staff is so well organized that there is very little for our Board Members to do. . . .”

Boards did, however, retain one major function: fund raising. Historian Kathleen McCarthy has noted that, “under the exacting gaze of a freshly certified professional elite, boards were remodeled into fund-raising bodies. . . .” Increased economic segregation and mediated compassion allowed the better-off to “measure community needs through abstractions: publicity, lectures, the photographs in annual reports. Communications innovations, like professionalization, separated the twentieth-century donor from the object of his largesse. [Donors] could exercise the obligations of stewardship at a safe remove from the problems they were helping to solve.”

By the 1920s, University of Chicago sociologist Clarence Glick was finding that suburban residents were unlikely to venture into poor areas. One woman explained, “[The slums are] too dirty and besides it’s too dangerous. I can’t see how anyone could get a kick out of doing that. Merely the idea of it is nauseating to me.” A willingness merely to spend money grew as the desire to expend time decreased: “Like some of Shakespeare’s characters [rich people] have developed a habit of flinging purses at the least provocation and crying: ‘Spend this for me!’” One wealthy Chicagoan, when asked why her peers were not involved in person-to-person activity, said, “Organizations look after everything, and they give to them, so why think about it?”

By the 1930s, the long-term trend toward redefinition was already on its way to making cash king. Decreased personal action was easy to justify when problems seemed overwhelming, and when an emphasis on community chest cash transfers provided “the ultimate in bureaucracy—an anonymous public supporting anonymous machinery supporting anonymous

clients." Philanthropy had become "as cold as the payment of taxes." One journalist noted, "Indeed the objectives of the two are often the same." The New Deal emphasis on compassion as income transfer was generally accepted because the ground had long been prepared.

When a major economic crisis emerged in the early 1930s, many believed it not only natural but inevitable to rely on governmental programs run by professionals and emphasizing material transfer rather than individual challenge and spiritual concern. During the Depression, when millions of individuals were not responsible for their own plight and jobs were not readily available, Mormons set up an effective church welfare system and other groups could have been helped to revive their own programs, but few thought in those terms. Instead of supporting the replication and expansion of church- and community-based programs, the federal government set up a new charity order.

Some governmental programs made moral sense (although the required expenditures may have prolonged overall economic misery) as temporary expedients. But later, when programs were institutionalized at a time when jobs were available, the potential problem grew. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, governmental systems were like a guillotine poised to sever compassion from thought. As long as most families were intact and most people saw benefits not as rights but as backups only for use during dire emergencies, the blade did not fall.

There was a deeper problem, though. In 1938, one editor wrote that "personal conscience in the United States has fallen to a new low in our history as a nation. It has been largely lost to our sight in all the din and dither that have been raised about that other moral concept, the social conscience, which, we are constantly reminded, has a nobler and more widely embracing function. And, the more we hear of the one, the less we hear of

the other. The personal conscience has been steadily submerged; the very foundation upon which any broader conception of individual responsibility towards society must rest is being washed away."

Influenced by ideas of the left, many social work leaders argued that an emphasis on personal change was a "trivial and reactionary" practice that "imposes on the individual the cruel burden of adapting himself to a psychotic society, and, insofar as it succeeds, constitutes a brake on social action." A typical writer on the subject, Grace Marcus, reported that "trained social workers in the relief field are helping fundamentally to bring about a new social order [through] the reorientation of clients from the still prevalent viewpoints of 'rugged individualism' to the newer social philosophy dictated by the interdependent, complex society of today."

For a time, even after the federal government jumped into the social welfare puddle with two enormous feet, the social universalistic impulse was held in check. Two gatekeepers—the welfare office and an applicant's own conscience—scrutinized each applicant. As late as the mid-1960s, only about half of those eligible for welfare payments were receiving them, and many of the enrolled were taking only part of the maximum allowance. Attitudes changed during that decade, however, as a postmodern welfare system emerged alongside a postmodern cultural system.

Postmodernism in welfare meant, in theory, that there was no right way to act. In practice, it meant a war on the biblical understandings that still underlay even New Deal governmental welfare—for example, the idea that able-bodied people should work. Biblical writers never argued that it is better to receive alms than to glean, but in the 1960s, Michael Harrington, author of the influential book *The Other America*, complained that some who were out of work for a long time "would take low-paying jobs" and in that way "accept humiliation rather

than go on the public dole." Until the 1960s, the public dole for those who did not need it *was* humiliation.

By the 1960s, a New York City lecture series by theological liberals was emphasizing the new conventional wisdom: "the age-old plague" of poverty will end as soon as "proper direction" and "imaginative planning" bear down on it. "We have reached the stage where old concepts of charity and almsgiving no longer apply. . . . There will always be the need for the spirit of generosity and neighborly benevolence, but it will act on a higher and happier level." That happier level was massive wealth redistribution, based on "a five-year or a ten-year or a fifty-year plan . . . to end this abject poverty."

While liberal theologians planned tours of the celestial city, Lyndon Johnson declared his intention to create "a Great Society: a society of success without squalor, beauty without barrenness, works of genius without the wretchedness of poverty." Johnson's legislative triumphs during 1964 and 1965—the Economic Opportunity Act, food stamp legislation, Medicare, Medicaid, public works programs, and so on—were immense. The speed of passage, unrivaled since the New Deal, showed a disregard for real-life effects, and was more remarkable in not being prompted by the mood of crisis so evident in 1933. Great Society legislation was truly a triumph of faith, the social gospel walking on earth.

Yet, as nineteenth-century charity leaders had warned, government programs lacked true compassion and tended to produce social folly at the margin. The War on Poverty meant that some Detroit autoworkers could earn more by quitting their jobs and joining job-training programs; in Johnson, Rhode Island, seventy-three parents of children in a poverty program owned more property—fifty-eight homes and 113 cars—than typical nonpoor residents.

Reports of such inequities were embarrassing, but underly-

ing materialist assumptions predominated. One administration official said, "The way to eliminate poverty is to give the poor people enough money so that they won't be poor anymore." One columnist wrote that for \$12 to \$15 billion a year (2 percent of the gross national product at that time), "poverty could be abolished in the United States"—as if a change in material circumstances would inevitably alter attitudes that, left unchanged, would create new poverty.

Crucially, the War on Poverty became a war on God. The successful antipoverty pushes in American history have been religiously based. They have worked on the inside by changing hearts and not just temporarily changing habits. Yet, government funding of groups that emphasize spiritual challenge was excluded by regulations concerning welfare. The 1960s-style welfare system was rooted not only in the separation of church and state but, with governmental programs dominating social service provision, in the separation of church and needy. That, in turn, meant a separation of program and effectiveness.

Books of the period generally equated compassion with redistribution and argued for compassion not just to widows, orphans, and other victims, but to those who had victimized themselves and wished to continue in self-destructive pursuits. Some of these books claimed to be based on the Bible, and others were explicitly Buddhist. The common theme was compassion as "a vision that dissolves division" and that teaches "seeing the unity in things." With that understanding, attempts to distinguish the deserving from the undeserving were seen merely as legitimizing inequality.

The political agenda in this use of compassion was evident. Government expanders such as Sar Levitan wrote, "Only through greater reliance upon programs that offer the promise of opportunity as envisioned in the Great Society is the nation likely to reject policies of negativism and retrenchment." The

theologically liberal National Council of Churches called for "the extrication of stewardship from its almost indelible association with economic capitalism." A typical "Christian left" writer, Douglas Hall, demanded "a new look at the socialist alternative" and a "search for new forms of community—including a 'New Economic Order' that can more adequately reflect our faith's concern for justice, equality, and mercy."

By the 1980s, observers such as Clifford Orwin noted abundant misuse of the concept of "compassion": "Our century has hardly seen a demagogue, however bloody and monstrous his designs, who has not known how to rally compassion and mine its potential for sympathetic moral indignation." Writer Mickey Kaus noted that Americans were supposed to have "compassion for the unmotivated delinquent who would rather smoke PCP than work. Compassion makes few distinctions . . . which is why a politics based on mass-produced compassion leads naturally to the indiscriminate dispensing of cash in a sort of all-purpose socialized United Way campaign."

Despite such warnings, a bull market in compassion raged throughout the 1980s, particularly on the issue of "homelessness." The *Washington Post* typically used "compassion" as a euphemism for "more heavily funded": when Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill favored more spending on the homeless, his "compassion was the size of his frame." O'Neill's successor, Jim Wright, was likewise praised, as was Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry. Professor Dwight Lee concluded, "The notion that compassion toward the poor requires favoring expansion of government transfer programs has achieved the status of revealed truth."

As the 1980s came to an end, leading newspapers also equated compassion with leniency. Chicago lawyers asked a judge for compassion when sentencing a sheriff's deputy for selling cocaine. California lawyers asked a jury to have compassion for

an accused murderer by letting him off. Baseball star Steve Garvey asked for compassion for having exercised passion through bigamy or trigamy. At times the word was even less defined: a music reviewer complained that an LP record was filled with "make-out ballads" for "the wine-and-cheese crowd," but was saved by "the mix of spiky aggression and compassion." A California music group was praised for trying to "communicate" the idea of compassion in a "noncognitive way."

Such ludicrous examples abound, but the misconception became more tragic than comic. Prior to the 1960s entitlement revolution, marriage was both a social and economic contract. Economically, it was a compassionate antipoverty device that offered adults affiliation and challenge while providing children with two parents. So strong was support for marriage in the 1950s that 85 percent of single pregnant women got married before their babies were born. Those who did not had a second option: placing a child for adoption. Fewer than one in ten pregnant women chose single parenthood for fear of social ostracism and lack of financial support.

While marriage under pressure certainly was not optimal, it did not leave a woman alone. Placing a child for adoption also was difficult, but one result of the marriage/adoption emphasis was that children had fathers during their early years.

In the 1960s, as part of the new definition of "compassion," government obligations to single mothers increased while marital obligations decreased. As no-fault divorce laws spread, women knew that husbands were allowed to be unfaithful with little penalty. Sociologist Jack Douglas noted, "Almost all women have enough economic common sense to realize that the marriage contract has been tremendously devalued by the legal changes. Since any potential husband can fly free of his family at the first impulse, women have far fewer incentives to get married, even when they are pregnant."

The reduction of social and financial barriers to single parenting made it seem logical to raise children alone, even though they often grew up not only materially poor—three out of five were in poverty—but emotionally impoverished as well. Their mother's husband, in essence, was the federal government. These children never knew what it was like to have a father who could love and discipline them.

In a sense, the blade on this social guillotine had been ready to fall ever since the 1930s, when children born out of wedlock first became eligible for AFDC help and harm. The blade did not fall until the 1960s, when—under conditions of prosperity rather than duress—a cultural revolution led to attacks on any kind of categorization and investigation of welfare applicants.

The War on Poverty of the 1960s was a disaster not so much because of its new programs but because of their administered emphasis on entitlement rather than need. Opportunities to give aid with discretion disappeared as welfare hearings became legal circuses and depersonalization triumphed. Talk of affiliation and bonding was seen merely as an attempt to fight wars on poverty cheaply.

Small efforts at categorization and discernment similarly were seen as plots to blame the poor rather than the socioeconomic system that trapped them. "Freedom" came to mean governmental support rather than the opportunity to work and move up the employment ladder. A *Time* magazine cover asked whether God was dead: he certainly seemed that way in much of what went by the name of philanthropy.

Many programs described as "compassionate" were actually the opposite, since they made neighborly or familial help less likely. To gain a full share of government-funded services, pregnant teens had to be on their own, without support from families or children's fathers.

There was no clear evidence that government entitlements

led women to become pregnant, but they did influence decisions to choose single parenting over adoption, welfare dependency over marriage, and living in an apartment rather than a family home or group home. Adolescents were aware of opportunities for government support and increasingly often "did not consider the expense of raising a child as a barrier" to setting out on their own. To a poor teenager, monthly AFDC stipends could look like a good deal—and they were available only if bonds were broken. As single mothers moved into their own apartments, government spending was actually reducing the level of true compassion by providing incentives for social isolation.

The destruction was obvious, but many who had bet their careers on Great Society success refused to acknowledge it. At a reunion of Johnson administration officials in Austin, Texas, twenty-five years after the War on Poverty fired its first cannonade, the mood of reminiscence was akin to Wordsworth's memory of enthusiasm following the French Revolution: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. . . ." Sargent Shriver exulted that the Reagan years had not essentially damaged Great Society programs, most of which were "still in existence, all helping millions of Americans today." *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker proposed that it was time to stop moaning and instead drink a toast to "vision and aspiration, confidence and compassion."

Vision, aspiration, and confidence were all there. But was compassion? Not if the word is given its historical and literal definition of *suffering with*—and we need to bring back that original emphasis on personal involvement and challenge. Not only is the current misuse notorious, but current confusion among those who say they want to help shows no signs of abating. The conclusions of political scientist James Fishkin typified the early 1990s tendency to punt on third down: "Some great revision in our assumptions or in our actions is required. But



because I feel genuinely caught in this dilemma myself, I am not now advocating any particular resolution."

Throughout the early 1990s, as politicians, journalists, and scholars continued to sit and debate, or increasingly gave up, a generation continued to roll down the slippery slope to destruction. Crack babies in inner-city hospitals trembled and twitched uncontrollably. Teenage mothers, alone with squalling children, fought the impulse to strike out. Men in their twenties called job holders "chumps" and went on a rampage in Los Angeles. Women in their thirties, abandoned by husbands, waited in welfare offices for their numbers to be called. Homeless men, aged beyond their years, lined up impatiently at food wagons. They then shuffled off to eat and drink in alleys smelling of urine.

Meanwhile, in middle-class areas, those who complained about income transfer through taxation were seen as lacking compassion. Private charity also changed as telethons and jogathons became typical activities. Stars on television for twenty-four hours, or those who ran long distances at so much per mile, suffered to raise money to pay professionals who in turn would help the needy.

These were good-hearted activities, even if the horseshoes pitched were at best leaners rather than ringers. Government groups and many charities, in turn, tended to offer not challenge but what might be called "Velcro compassion," with the poor treated as perpetual children unable to tie their own shoes and needing a supply of sneakers with Velcro closers.

Upset by ineffectiveness, Americans joined a backlash against welfare expansion that has grown consistently over the past three decades and accelerated during the past three years. If it had not been for media teachers instructing us that anyone who opposed welfare lacked "compassion," reform action could have been taken a decade or two ago, before the problems became as severe as they now are.

Now that we have waited, the welfare system has gotten incredibly out of whack. A person who knows how to take in not only the relatively miserly AFDC payments but also housing allowances, food stamps, medical help, and other tax-free benefits loses money by taking an entry-level job that would lead to something better over time, but in the short run reduces disposable income and especially disposable time.

A recent Cato Institute examination of the benefit levels of just the six (out of seventy-seven) most common types of federal welfare payment—AFDC, food stamps, Medicaid, housing, nutrition assistance, and energy assistance—showed that in thirty-nine states the welfare package is economically superior to an \$8-an-hour job. In sixteen states, welfare payments provide more income than would be gained by working at a \$10-an-hour job, and in eight states, including New York and Massachusetts, welfare pays more than a \$12-an-hour job; that's two and a half times greater than the minimum wage.

Payments are out of whack, but the worst aspect of welfare, again, is the effect on aspirations. If a person's expectations are low, if a person knows that no matter what he does or how often he fails, or how obvious it is that he has stopped even trying, he is still guaranteed by law a place to sleep, food to eat, and some money to spend; if all he has to do to keep these benefits is to stay poor; and if working hard probably will not improve his standard of living in the short run, then why go to the trouble of working?

The typical response to such a statement is that the benefits are not all that great, that few people would settle for them if they had real choice or access to good jobs with transportation and day care provided, and that it is societal rather than individual failings that are to blame. Again, however, individuals vary enormously, and for those who have grown up in the dog house and know its walls intimately, it seems like home.



*Chapter 6*

*That Was Then—This Is Now?*

**T**he full version of the history summarized in chapters three through five has been attacked in three ways.

First comes the accusation of romanticizing the past. That is easy to refute. The outpouring of charitable activities in the nineteenth century is well-documented, as are the great difficulties through which our predecessors persevered. They did not live in good old days; the times were bad in many ways, and Americans faced problems of drugs, crime, and assimilating immigrants.

A century ago, Americans were far poorer on average than we are today, and epidemics sometimes devastated communities. They had less divorce and illegitimacy but far more orphans than we have. Overall, they had problems. We have problems. The only glow from the past is this: they dealt with their problems; we whine about ours.

Next comes a criticism from members of the religious left. They say the Bible requires us to transfer whatever resources we can to the poor, for Christ said, "Whatever you did to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." That verse should be taken very seriously, but before it is blindly used to justify the welfare state a question needs to be posed: who are the least of

these in America and what kind of help is real help? Is giving to panhandlers money that goes for drugs akin to sticking heroin into Jesus's veins?

Christ does not include in his list of commended charitable acts, "When I was strung out you gave me dope." Since various biblical passages were cited repeatedly during the 1995 welfare debates, Appendix B provides an overview of a consistently biblical antipoverty position.

The third criticism is the most frequent: old times are best forgotten because, although an outpouring of compassion in the past did occur, that history is irrelevant to "our more complex society today." People today, it is said, will not go above and beyond the call of economic logic. They will not remember dreams and volunteer to bring them to life. They are so cynical about the large leaps promised by past political leaders that they will not start with small steps. Since affluent individuals are removed more from the everyday experience of poverty than our predecessors were, they will not feel the urgency of action—and in the absence of that sense of urgency, the motivation to act sacrificially will not be present.

There is some logic behind this argument, but it points to the need to go faster in changing the welfare system, not slower. As long as governmental welfare remains, it leads potential helpers to sit back, since they are paying for someone else to do it. Bad charity drives out good. Groups capable of replacing the welfare state will not emerge in full strength before they are desperately needed, but the governmental safety net masks the emergency. Urgency is the mother of motivation, and in the American welfare debate right now we have frustration but still not urgency.

Furthermore, as long as tax revenue needed to pay for government welfare comes from working individuals who sometimes need two jobs to pay the freight, those individuals can rightly say that they have little time for volunteering. Many

young mothers are pressed into the work force when they would prefer to stay home with children and then volunteer part-time. If the tax rate now was similar to that of the 1950s, they would be able to do just that. For every government social worker paid to help preserve families, there are families falling apart under government-created financial pressures.

The suggestion that ordinary people will not give of themselves compassionately, however, is partly belied by the experience of recent years. Tens of millions of Americans regularly do volunteer work, but all such gross statistics can be misleading because they lump together those who merely serve on charity ball committees with those who walk down mean streets daily. The deeper story is that despite all the bureaucratic obstacles that those who wish to be compassionate often face—more on this in the next chapter—it is heartening to see how many truly commit their lives to the task.

Here I have to get personal, because I am having the opportunity now to meet many heroes. Actually, they are ordinary people who become heroic as they show, through hard suffering, that the American dream of compassion is not dead.

Look, for example, at Bob Cote of Denver. He is a six-foot-four white exboxer who spent a year on the streets as an alcoholic in the early 1980s and then pulled together a few of his fellow winos and junkies to start a program that has become known as Step 13. In his organization's four-story building, mostly dead people from off the streets can, step by step, come back to life. They can get jobs of increasing responsibility and build up their own savings accounts. They can progress within that building from dormitory space to alcoves to separate rooms of their own; at the end of the process, they own their own furniture, have their own telephone accounts, and are ready to go out and rent apartments of their own. They go through a tough, time-intensive process of counseling and spiritual rebuilding as

well, but Cote has gone through it himself and is there to help others.

Cote is angry about the existing welfare system. He has seen the destructiveness of false compassion and knows that “you don’t just give a street drunk a bed and a meal and some money. He knows how to work the system too well. You’ve got to get him out of his addiction.” He has seen enormous amounts of money wasted in government programs and has learned how to resurrect dreams at a cost much less than governmental programs charge for killing them. Step 13, for example, costs about \$3,000 per man annually, one-fifth of what it costs to keep a person for only twenty-eight days in some fancy detox center. Residents pay about half the cost out of the wages they earn and donations take care of the other half.

Look, for example, at Hannah Hawkins, who lives in Anacostia, the poorest part of Washington, D.C. She is a retired school administrative aide and the widowed mother of five grown children. At the rundown, formerly abandoned community center that houses her program, Children of Mine, fifty children from five to fifteen look for attention in the late afternoon. Volunteers do everything, and Hannah Hawkins walks around her building and gets children in the study area to settle down and start on their homework: she knows each of her sheep by name, and they know her. One sixth-grader reports getting good grades and Mrs. Hawkins says, “Go ahead, girl.” Two little children come in the front door by themselves, in time for dinner, walking past the druggies and hookers outside on Mount View Street (but there’s no mountain in view), and Mrs. Hawkins gives them instructions in table manners and prayer.

Hannah Hawkins is gentle with her children but shows barely controlled anger when asked what the welfare system has done for her neighborhood. “Oh, there’s lots of government money floating around Anacostia,” she says. “I look at the bud-

gets and I see la di da administrative cost, eighty-five thou a year. Assistant to the assistant, sixty thou a year. Services, null and void." She skewers the jostling line of government grantees who "say they help the needy but are really the greedy." She tells of money-flush but program-poor organizations asking her to bring several dozen children on particular days when federal funders were around, so that fat-cat facilities would not look like ghost towns: "When I first started, I used to go because I didn't know nothing. Now I'm well seasoned. I see the pimping of these children, and I will not have any part in it."

That Hannah Hawkins is no pimp is evident as she stops one child who is running by and asks, "Do you have homework?" "Yes, ma'am." "Then sit down. We can't have you running back and forth, can we?" "No, ma'am." One junior-high boy makes a threatening remark to another, and the steely-eyed woman who has lived in Anacostia for over four decades reminds him quietly, "People who pick fights end up either dead or in jail." Hannah Hawkins calls her program Children of Mine because she insists that social progress comes not when professionals take on needy children as clients, but when ordinary people treat the semiabandoned children of others as their own. A strong Christian belief underlies Mrs. Hawkins's willingness to serve and keep serving: "Without Jesus you're empty. You're just out to sea, floating, and don't know where to go."

Hannah Hawkins says she would rather be where she is than hanging out at the White House across town: "The impression you make there means nothing. But your impression here is everlasting." To keep going she gleans food, books, and shoes from local businesses and churches, and she is unabashed when phone calls come in: "Excuse me. Children of Mine. Yes, I need me some dough, re, mi." Glancing at some financial records she adds, "We are flying on a wing and a prayer. Tell your neighbors to wake up little Susie."

Defenders of the welfare state should also spend time with Freddie Garcia, a softhearted but hardheaded Hispanic exaddict. Garcia, head of Victory Fellowship in San Antonio, became a Christian and a drug fighter three decades ago. Before his conversion, he had been not only an addict but a hater of white non-Hispanics. Immediately after his conversion, he "saw a Mexican-American girl holding hands with her Anglo boyfriend. It was a sight that had never failed to infuriate me, but now the anger was gone." At present, during lunches at his home and all through the day, he patiently counsels and teaches those of all skin colors whom everyone else has abandoned. Over the years, he has led hundreds of people out of substance abuse and trained many in the techniques of helping others.

Among those he discipled is David Perez, a veteran who came back from Vietnam "strung out on drugs, and . . . kept doing it." After years in the pits, however, Perez's uncle pressed him to go to church, and Perez saw there "all kinds of drug addicts. Men and women I knew on the street, they were praising the Lord, their lives were changed. I said, 'Man, what's going on here?' And then Pastor Freddie was preaching, and I gave my life to Christ." Garcia taught and mentored Perez for several years, and Perez then became head of a Victory Fellowship chapter in Austin, seventy miles north of San Antonio. He has been working there at bare subsistence pay for fifteen years and has influenced hundreds of addicts and alcoholics during that time.

Perez, like Garcia, scorns the federal welfare system's fostering of dependency and its insistence that the way out is through job training. He points out that many homeless and apparently hopeless men are not without skills and solid job experience, and the Austin chapter's intake forms show that. Some of the addicts and alcoholics cannot read or write and have never held responsible jobs, but most have large amounts of productive experience as teachers, machinists, computer repairmen, certi-

fied welders, carpenters, licensed plumbers, auto mechanics, electronic technicians, tailors, and so forth. Cocaine, heroin, and alcohol, not tough job markets, have brought them down; as Perez puts it, "They're not untrained, they're in bondage."

The way out, he says, is through God, personal help, and discipling. One of Perez's disciples, Gene Lucio, recalls that "the first few days here were really rough. I still had the temper that had gotten me into fights at stoplights and in supermarkets. Gradually, though, I got some structure and discipline in my life. Delivery from drugs took a few days, but it was the delivery from rage and violence that took a long time. I told Pastor David, 'Help me to change, please, don't be easy on me, if anything be double-hard on me.' He worked with me day after day, helping me to see myself as self-centered. He rebuked me but also gave me love."

Lucio has now been placed as leader of a chapter of Victory Fellowship in San Marcos, thirty miles south of Austin—far enough away to require some on-the-spot decisions, close enough to be under supervision. For the eight men who live there, he is Pastor Gene. From Garcia to Perez (and many more) to Lucio (and many more), Garcia's disciples have spread his life-changing teaching throughout the southwestern United States and as far south as Peru.

Bob Cote, Hannah Hawkins, Freddie Garcia and two generations of disciples . . . all have created challenging, personal, and spiritual programs that work, without a dime of government money, and there are hundreds more like them. None of them knew the best ways to help others when they began the practice of effective compassion; none was an accomplished speaker or program manager. Each developed under pressure, and others can too.

It is particularly impressive to see the way that soft-hearted people lose their soft-headedness as they accumulate experience

in helping others. Seven years ago, for example, Marsh Ward came to Washington, D.C., to build a haven for homeless alcoholics and addicts. His ideal was a detox program with no rules ("They're all adults, aren't they?") and no pressure to prepare for a job ("Nothing good available under capitalism, anyway"). In 1988, Ward recalls, "we believed that if you brought people in off the streets and gave them food, they'd pull themselves together and get on with their life."

That did not work with alcoholics and addicts, though: "If you treat them that way, you're killing them. You're enabling them to stay with their disease." When Ward and a partner, Julia Lightfoot, set up Clean and Sober Streets in line with their liberal philosophy, "drug dealers set up here. They could deal all day, then come back here for a room and hot meal, get their food stamps and welfare, then go back out and deal the next day." Soon, to protect residents who did want to beat their addictions, Ward established rules: "Real simple: no violence, no sex. If you sit down, get too comfortable, make no progress, you're out. Any stealing, you're out. No alcohol, no drugs—not even legal ones, unless I've approved them. If you miss the curfew by one minute, you're out."

At first, Ward's tendency was to accept excuses for violations: "We did it sometimes just out of mercy, or sympathy, because we like the guy—but it never worked out. Every time we let someone get by, he screwed up again. It's hard to kick people out, but you also have to think of the effect on the honest people." Walks through Clean and Sober Streets show that law and order has taken over what once was a zone of anarchy. Interviews with many of the eighty residents show that they welcome the hardball approach and are ready to report on rule breakers. (One resident said, "This program is saving my life. If someone messes it up, I have no hesitancy going to the office and telling them about it.")

Graduates of the program have responsible jobs and are building families. "I've found that this society has a place for everyone who is sober and responsible, who has a skill and is willing to work," Ward now says. One definition of a neoconservative in politics is "A liberal mugged by reality." Ward's experience is similar: "Yes, there's racism and injustice. But, on the other hand, if I take a guy from outside, sober him up, teach him how to read, and teach him the computer, there's a hole in the wall for that man. He goes right through."

*He goes right through.* That could also be the motto at Boys Town, still based in Omaha but now expanded across the country. House parents are generally not charismatic individuals—one effective leader, when asked how and why he hooked up with Boys Town, said truthfully, "Failed as a farmer"—but they show children with unstable pasts the hole in the wall. Boys Town has worked out a sensible procedure of handing out points to reward good behavior, and it can be applied by people of normal parenting skills. Boys Town has found that children from troubled backgrounds will respond when the adults around them finally do the big people's job of creating an environment that is safe and nurtures growth, so that the weight is off shoulders too small to bear it.

*He goes right through.* That is what leaders of the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship just south of Dallas have learned. As the Reverend LaFayette Holland explains, Oak Cliff is in the "transforming business," and the methods of transformation are prayer and teaching that concerns not only belief in God, but what God expects of man. Ordinary people see from the Bible that God values work, marriage, respect for employers, peaceful conflict resolution, careful stewardship of time and money, and excellence in craftsmanship (Holland says, "God gave us his best, we should give him our best"). When students absorb those lessons, they get jobs and begin working their way up; after years

of thinking of themselves as stuck within walls, they see the holes and they go right through.

What's most important, again and again, is time rather than money—and time well spent leads to the discerning use of money. The experience of Patty Brown is a case in point. Patty majored in urban anthropology at the University of California at Los Angeles, then received an M.B.A. in finance from the University of Southern California. In 1985, after work in marketing, she joined the Bettingen Corporation, a foundation begun by Burtie Bettingen to help runaway children, child prostitutes, and other truly needy homeless persons.

If Patty had followed normal foundation staff procedure for assessing an organization, she would have made an appointment to swing by a facility to inspect its pipes and hear of its goodness from some carefully chosen clients. She would have eaten lunch with several members of the board. She would have exercised due diligence by examining the group's financial statements and then written a recommendation. But Patty colored outside the lines. "I wanted to find out what nonprofits actually provided," she recalls. "I wanted to find out why kids used some services and didn't use others, and where there was a void. I listened to presentations by organizational development directors, but in market research you need to find out what the buyers think. I was thirty-two in 1985 and able to pass as a street person not much older than the kids, so I started living in the shelters."

A foundation official living in homeless shelters? Yes, and not just for a short time either: three days here, a week there, in San Francisco and Los Angeles, many months in all. When Patty wanted to find out about Children of the Night, a privately funded Los Angeles outreach to young prostitutes, she invested several Saturdays in the program's hotline training, then worked as a three-hour-per-week volunteer for several months. To learn more, she frequently went out in the van that goes around to

hookers' hangouts from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m., went on foot patrols as well, and hung out during those times at the joints the kids frequent. She traveled with police and juvenile officers as they encountered teens living in abandoned buildings.

Patty Brown's practice is strange in the philanthropic world, where most staffers have no business background, evaluate programs by good intentions rather than results, and spend more time in air-conditioned organization offices than on the mean streets. Those board members who have business experience often do not apply it in their foundation work. Some compartmentalize their brains and do not think that bookkeeping has any relation to doing good; others do not care if someone else's money is misused, because they will not be personally embarrassed or taken to task.

But Patty has learned through her personal research that "much of what is presented by fund-seeking organizations has no relation to reality." And she also has had a direct influence on others. Patty recalls how she was accepted into street culture: teen hookers who were pregnant asked her what she thought about abortion. She thought about it and realized that, by some standards, teenage prostitutes were exactly the people who should have abortions—but she said she was against it because abortion "destroys a life that is unique, that has a purpose."

What happened next was remarkable. As Patty recalls, "That conversation had a result I would not have expected. When I said there was hope and purpose for the unborn even under such tough circumstances, they started to believe that there was hope and purpose for themselves. They saw themselves as throwaways, but I had come to believe that they were important in God's eyes and in mine. It was hard for them to believe that they had some purpose besides just surviving day by day, but once some of them started thinking in those terms, that made all

the difference." They saw that there was a hole in the wall, and some of them went right through.

How effective are such groups? In addiction, it is common for Bible-based groups to have success rates of well over 50 percent and for government organizations to be down in the single digits. In fighting teenage pregnancy, groups that teach abstinence have been far more effective than their condom-pushing counterparts. In education generally, children from poor socioeconomic groups who go to church-affiliated schools have done demonstrably better than their public school counterparts. Statistics keeping in many areas is suspect, but those figures that are available consistently suggest that spiritually based programs are much more successful than secular approaches.

More telling than the statistics themselves, however, are the stories that exaddicts and alcoholics tell; one anecdote by itself, of course, means little, but I have now heard hundreds of autobiographical tales, and a pattern is evident. A typical several hours of listening came on a cold night in February 1995 at the Gospel Mission, a mile from the Capitol in Washington, D.C. With me that evening were Arianna Huffington (a friend and colleague at the Center for Effective Compassion) and a *Washington Post* reporter. We sat around a table in a small, bare room and heard resident after resident tell his story.

One resident, forty-five-year-old Rudy Jones, told us how he grew up in a middle-class household and as a teenager reacted, sixties-style, to school "regimentation." He became a voracious reader of political thrillers and worked for Hubert Humphrey's campaign in 1968. Then he went to a college where drugs were more important than studies and learned about LSD, speed, and surrealistic painting. After college, Jones moved to Los Angeles and "tried to get into the film business. That's where I really got into some fast circles. I was doing a lot of powdered cocaine out



there.” The infantilized gratification seeking that characterized late-sixties politics and culture stayed with him as he worked at a television station as a production technician and then as film and tape editor.

A stripper in a striptease joint introduced Jones in 1984 to crack cocaine, which he had heard of before as a drug that led middle-class people to “sell their houses and break up their lives.” He had scoffed at such reports, but when he took his first hit “the bells were going off in the center of my brain.” The mid-1980s were filled with more cocaine and more disintegration in life: “It was like a slow-motion train wreck. A big long pileup.” Unable to work consistently because of his drug use, Jones left his job in 1988 and began a series of freelance assignments that would give him the money for crack without the obligation of regular labor.

The culmination came in September 1994, when he received a check for \$1,500 from a public television station: “I just went nuts. Didn’t sleep or eat for four days in a row, doing crack all the time. That’s when I realized I needed to do something drastic.” Drastic for Jones was entering a live-in, religion-based anti-addiction program. Ironically, it was sixties reasoning—Don’t think about right and wrong, just show me where I can get a buzz—that led him into a program built on right and wrong. Jones based his decision to enter the Gospel Mission not on faith in God, but on research showing that religious antiaddiction programs are more successful than others: “I wanted to get results, I didn’t care how.”

Pragmatism changed to awe as Jones participated in Bible studies and counseling programs, however. The transformation, he says, began when he stopped thinking of God as “a bunch of physics laws” and started to see Him as “a personal entity that man could relate to.” Suddenly he could pray, for he knew someone was listening. Suddenly there was purpose that went

outside self-pleasing, for someone was watching. Suddenly there was power to change, because someone was helping.

After five months Jones felt “completely changed.” In February 1995, he spoke of no longer living for each day’s pleasures as he had done since the 1960s, but of dying to self—seeing God rather than man as the center of things. Complete changes sometimes short-circuit; time heals all wounds and also tests all spiritual swoons. But at the end of 1995, Rudy Jones was still clean; he lived with and cared for his mother, who is now in her eighties and in need of help; he was working in telecommunications and volunteering twice a week to teach English and writing to newcomers to the Gospel Mission.

Arianna, the reporter, and I sat and listened to another forty-five-year-old man, Ferdinand Banks, talk about the skin disease he has had from infancy that left him hating to look in the mirror, and hating the alcoholic father who treated his unattractive son with contempt that became physical abuse. Banks smoked marijuana when he was twelve and then regularly “started getting high, or drunk. That was the only thing that made me feel like a regular person.” A tour in Vietnam was followed by service in Washington as a street cop beginning in 1974. For a decade, Banks scared bad guys and, souring further in the process, did more drugs. In 1985, he was convicted of drug selling, dismissed from the force, and put in jail for a year.

The day of his release, Banks did crack. Over the following five years, he had many different jobs but lived in shelters and in the street, because every time he received a paycheck he would immediately use it for drugs. Despite his conviction, he also received a retirement check for \$16,000 from the police department and went on a drug binge. The money was gone in a week. Banks remembers that finding jobs and making money was not a problem: “The last job I had was driving a trash truck, making very good money, almost \$1,000 a week. It all went to



support my habit." He flamed out in four different state-approved antidrug programs and always ended up in city shelters that were full of drugs and sported occasional murders.

His laconic answers to questions about life there illustrate the nature of government "compassion": Did anyone ever help you in any way in the shelters? "No." Not at all? "No." What did they do for you? "They gave me a cot, and a blanket, and a shower. That's it." Did they ever try to help you change? "They had counselors. They knew I was getting high. I looked terrible every day. They never came to me." One day, Banks, trudging along, saw the cross at the front of the Gospel Mission. "That day I had done a drug run and still had \$300 in my pocket," Banks said, "but I was tired and I wanted to be healed. I stumbled through the glass doors."

Banks had a very hard first two weeks but was "scared to go outside the building, because if I went out I would not come back. . . . I prayed and cried and prayed some more and made it." Banks stayed then and for two years. He now works for the Metro system and has a girlfriend who is capable of looking beyond appearance to a newly scrubbed spirit. The skin disease has not gone away but Banks says, "I don't have the pain anymore. Now that I know I'm made in God's image, I feel like a regular person."

We sat and listened as a third man, forty-one-year-old Jerry Minor, opened the furnace door of his past and looked into hell. "I couldn't—I couldn't hold a job," he recalled. "Drugs and alcohol." Minor, who started using heroin and cocaine when he was nineteen, was married at twenty-two and over the next few years turned from "recreational user" into a drug-focused wreck of a man. Mrs. Minor accepted the occasional use, but as it mastered her husband and he became unable to hold a job or act decently in the home, she "just couldn't put up with it anymore" and left in 1984. Minor hit the streets, selling crack

cocaine and heroin but not netting much cash in the process, "because I was using as much as I was making. Most of the money went right back into my body."

Minor was also "off and on" in jail for selling drugs. When not behind bars, he would see his wife and children every few weeks; she would plead with him to stop doing drugs, but "it was just beyond my control to stop." He sometimes stayed at big, government-funded homeless shelters, but he found there "a lot of the same things that I was always doing. A lot of drugs, a lot of fights." He walked into the Gospel Mission in 1992 not because he had any Christian belief, but because he was desperate. "I was tired of doing the things that I was doing. I was tired of going in and out of jail. And that was it. The shelters fed me and clothed me but they gave me no rest. I was just tired, you know?" He was also functionally illiterate and deciding it was time to do something about that.

In the new program, constructive envy started to set in. "I started seeing other people accepting the Lord, and realized they were getting better. I wanted some of that, because I had tried everything else. And there were people here showing me that they cared about me. People helped me learn to read, they helped me to understand the Bible. And it was the grace of God that finally did it." Minor developed a strong faith in God and decided to stay at the mission and help others; he is able to work as a drug counselor because the Gospel Mission doesn't care about his lack of classroom hours in counseling or his poor reading skills. He is particularly valuable because he knows the tricks of the drug trade and isn't easily taken in by scams; he's stood up to bullies before and isn't easily possessed by fear; he's learned to live with little and isn't readily subject to greed.

Arianna was enthralled by such stories. I had heard similar ones before, but in an age of hopelessness about drug abuse found them moving. I looked over at the reporter and thought

of Ray Stannard Baker, the skeptical reporter a century ago who was impressed despite himself at the “earnestness and simplicity” he found in similar accounts of sin and redemption at the McAuley Mission in New York, which he ended up calling “one of the most extraordinary institutions in the country.” I thought that perhaps the reporter would note some of the testimonies, but in a *Style* section story that he wrote about Arianna, there was deep coverage of dinner parties but not a word about what she and he had heard that night.

It is not only reporters who have their eyes elsewhere. Ask members of a typical middle-class audience to raise their hands if they have ever talked with a homeless person, and the atmosphere is almost entirely undisturbed. And yet, those who live in or near a fair-sized city and are tired of learning about homelessness only from media reports could do an easy experiment. Many urban shelters for the homeless have cards that volunteers can hand out. The cards typically have the address of the organization and a pointed offer: “Good for a night’s lodging and two free meals.” Anyone who wants to find out whether those with signs such as “Hungry, need a meal” or “Will work for food” are truly starving or actually desiring to work can hand out cards to the first ten panhandlers encountered and point them in the right direction if they express any interest.

Such an experiment has been tried in at least four cities, and probably many more. In 1995 Rita Kramer of *City Journal*, a New York City magazine, gave twenty homeless Manhattanites tickets from the McAuley Mission that promised them three nights lodging, food and clothing, counseling, and further assistance. Only one person seemed interested. In 1991, in Washington, D.C., I passed out ten numbered cards from the Gospel Mission there; the numbers allowed me to call a few days later and see if the several men who said they were hungry actually had shown up for grub and a bunk. None had.

On a larger scale, Bob Cote tried to bring more homeless men into his Step 13 program from 1989 through 1994 by passing out 90,000 coupons reading “Good for One Free Meal.” At the bottom of the coupon in smaller type came the words “Need a job? A place to live? Step 13 offers you a chance to take charge of your life!” Over those five years, twenty-four persons came for a free meal; of the twenty-four, not one entered Step 13 and accepted work. Randy Willis, an Austin, Texas, businessman and rancher who was ready to employ homeless men, stopped at Austin freeway entrances forty times to ask men with signs if they indeed wanted to work; not one accepted. This does not say that the homeless generally do not want work; some do, and in cities like Austin they assemble early in the morning at “work corners” where they are picked up by those who hire day laborers. But many prefer to rely on the false kindness of strangers and use their preferred substances throughout the day.

Compare the panhandler by the subway stop or the freeway with the man or woman who enters a good program. The former is likely to be similarly down and out next year and the year after, while the latter will probably be heading up and away. How can there be more good programs, and how can people receive the productive pressure that leads them to change their lives? How can good programs be replicated and bad ones exposed? How can we help good programs to receive the right amount of resources—not too much, lest they be overwhelmed, or too little, lest they be frustrated?

In short, happy is the land that needs no heroes, but that is utopia. Happy also is the land that breeds heroes, but when a country is in greatest need the quantity of born leaders is likely to be insufficient. In what ways can we encourage the development of more?

Chapter 7

*Pushing the Back of the Envelope*

The once ordinary people spotlighted in chapter 6 all became heroes of antipoverty work because at one point in their lives they felt a sense of urgency. Governmental programs over the past several decades have been designed to lift the burden from ordinary people by allowing them to write a check to pay the professionals who would solve problems. This chapter proposes exactly the opposite: it is time for Congress to increase the pressure by phasing out federal programs and pushing states to develop ways for individuals and community-based institutions to take over poverty-fighting responsibility. In that way, Washington can promote compassion and not just fail again by attempting to provide it.

The use of the words "promote" and "provide" is deliberate and crucial. Our predecessors understood the Constitution's charge to provide for the common defense but promote the general welfare as ensuring an environment within which individual and community action could flourish.\* Occasionally,

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\*The term "general welfare" in the preamble to the Constitution did not have welfare state connotations in 1789, but it did mean that government should promote a social framework in which justice is the norm of public life and opportunity is open to all. These are not characteristics of the day-to-day experience of many poor Americans now.

when Congress would go over the line into providing, presidents used veto pens. For example, when Congress in 1854 responded to impassioned pleading by Dorothea Dix and passed legislation for federal construction and maintenance of mental hospitals, President Franklin Pierce vetoed the bill.

Pierce explained that he wished to help the mentally ill, who were not responsible for their plight, but argued that even worthwhile appropriations would push the federal government down a slippery slope: "If Congress has the power to make provision for the indigent insane, it has the same power for the indigent who are not insane." He also contended that the law actually would be "prejudicial rather than beneficial to the noble offices of charity," since federal funds would end up substituting for local assistance: "Should this bill become a law, that Congress is to make provision for such objects, the foundations of charity will be dried up at home. . . ."

Pierce's veto was sustained. His concern about "dried up" charity was typical of the era: municipal aid to the poor could dry up private charity; state relief could dry up city aid; federal programs could dry up state efforts. Any time appropriations were made at a higher level than they had to be, "the powerful workings of generous and compassionate feeling" at the next lowest level were dampened.

The concept of the modern welfare state, however, placed responsibility for fighting poverty not at the lowest level but the highest: national entitlement programs came to dominate the social services scene. The reversal of Pierce's doctrine was so complete that, in the 1980s, even conservatives who favored reducing the growth of welfare programs still talked of the importance of maintaining a federal safety net. They did not understand that the federal safety net was not only inefficient, with most of the money designed to help the poor being snatched away by managers and employees of the poverty

industry before it reached those in need, but conceptually mistaken.

What? Criticize the safety net itself? Yes. When I took my children to the circus recently, I realized how infrequently the Ringling Brothers safety net is used. For an acrobat, a fall to the safety net is failure; if he does it stunt after stunt, he will be fired. Most people during the Depression had the psychology of the acrobat: the newly installed federal safety net was to be used only when the choice was between it and a hole in the ground. But over time, as attitudes softened and welfare programs expanded, that desire to avoid use of the safety net was often lost. The destigmatizing of welfare in the 1960s meant that the acrobats no longer needed to strain for those extra inches, because the audience would still applaud even if they fell into the safety net every time.

Do away with the safety net? Yes. "Lead me not into temptation," the Lord's Prayer says, but the welfare system has tempted millions. Although some recipients have retained the *esprit de corps* of trapeze artists, others have been tempted into not getting up early on a cold morning, not working that extra hour, not shaping up. Circuses need safety nets because without them performers are injured and the show does not go on, but in American society the federal safety net has become not a rare lifesaver but a frequent place to flop. Seeing that, the hardheaded and hardhearted say, No safety net. Let people fall, and those who are softhearted and softheaded say, Hammocks for all. The compromise reached over the years is a dilapidated safety net with gaps, so that some individuals do fall through and others weave bunches of frayed strings into hammocks that resemble webs.

Do away with the safety net? Visits to families supposedly protected by the safety net show how some do not receive the help they desperately need and how others flop around in the net for years, resenting its presence even as they stay stuck to it.

Life within the safety web is miserable enough that many relatively wealthy Americans look at it and wonder how someone can be tempted not to do what is needed to climb out—but here is where we have to step outside the warm glow of our own good intentions, as nineteenth-century reformers suggested. It is tempting to approve of a slightly reformed safety net, one not dyed in such vibrant colors that it is the first thing an acrobat sees after arriving in the big tent. But that is not fair to people who need challenge, not entitlement.

Yes, do away with the safety-net concept that proposes that one net is adequate for all, on the supposition that people will fall only occasionally, and that when they do they will want to climb right back up. The vastly differing attitudes toward work and challenge in current American society, and the inescapably personal nature of true compassion, point us toward making not one safety net but a vast variety of small trampolines suited to individual needs, movable so as to be present for individual crises, and providing a level of bounce fitted to the skill level and psychology of the individuals they are designed to save.

The government role under such a plan is clear: eliminate the negative by getting rid of constraints on the construction and movement of trampolines, and—if it does not appear that enough trampolines will be produced—accentuate the positive by providing incentives to get more. In that way, government can promote the general welfare.

### *Eliminating the Negative*

Washington and state-level task forces should detail the ways in which government bureaucracies have frequently obstructed the effective operation of small trampolines by trying to turn them into large safety nets. For example, in 1992, the Los Angeles charity, Children of the Night, opened a shelter for eleven-

to seventeen-year-old exprostitutes who wanted to rebuild their lives. (How extraordinary it is that a twelve-year-old could be an ex!) But, as Children of the Night president Lois Lee recalls, "Regulations were a problem. They wanted us to have handicapped-access rooms. I told them that all the kids here were prostitutes, they don't need handicapped rooms. Kids in wheelchairs carry dope."

Mrs. Lee's logic was impeccable but the government was unmovable. She finally agreed to put in a ramp that would connect one door to a yard area. (To this day, it never has been used.) And until the ramp actually was in place, she had to agree that no one would ever open that particular door to go into the yard. She promised that if a handicapped teenage prostitute were to show up, the young woman and her wheelchair would be carried down the three steps. No, officials insisted, no one could go out that door—and they had their way.

Such problems are common throughout the country. In western Pennsylvania, when the Light of Life Mission bought a farm to serve as a facility for recovering drug addicts, officials ordered the group to retrofit the buildings to make them wheelchair-accessible. No one in a wheelchair would be coming to the farm, protested the director. That did not matter. All right, the organization would erect an entirely new building that met the wheelchair specifications. Not good enough. The farmhouse had to undergo major reconstruction, at huge expense, in order to be prepared for a circumstance that was almost certain not to occur.

That antidrug facility at least opened; in one well-reported situation, nuns of the Missionaries of Charity—Mother Teresa's organization—gave up their plans to spend \$500,000 to convert an abandoned New York City building into a four-story homeless shelter when they were told that an additional \$100,000 or more would be required to include an elevator in the recon-

struction. The nuns explained that their vows of poverty obliged them to avoid the use of modern conveniences, so they would never use the elevator; if a homeless man could not ascend the stairs, they would carry him up. When the nuns were told that the law could not be waived, they decided not to waste money on something that would not help the poor.

Just as the nuns were frustrated, so are some doctors. Those who wish to serve the poor enlarge their exposure to malpractice claims and find their insurance premiums dramatically increased; now, it is financially easier for doctors to go on medical missions abroad than to volunteer in their own cities. There are relatively simple ways to reduce these barriers to Good Samaritan conduct. For example, two hundred Los Angeles-area doctors and nurses provide medical care for the poor by volunteering at the Azusa Evening Clinic. They are able to do so because Los Angeles County covers the cost of malpractice insurance for the volunteers. As clinic founder Dr. George Ferenczi recalls, "Initially, the county was shocked. They couldn't believe that doctors and nurses would want to work for free." Many more people across the country could be similarly shocked if governments made it their business to promote the general welfare.

Senator Dan Coats has proposed a Medical Volunteer Act that would aid the process of medical volunteering. As David Stevens, executive director of the Christian Medical and Dental Society, said concerning the need for such a bill, some members of his society "have decided to devote their careers to serving the needy. In recent years, however, the constraints of medical practice liability have made it increasingly difficult for our members to provide charitable care." The Medical Volunteer Act would help by extending federal tort claim coverage to any health care professional who provides free medical services to a medically underserved person. (Such coverage is already provid-

ed for medical services in Indian health facilities and in community migrant, homeless, and public housing centers.) Stevens says that the Coats legislation, by freeing medical volunteers from the fear of devastating lawsuits, could “knock down the barriers that have hindered health care for the poor.”

Legislation in other areas could eliminate many obstacles charities generally face. That would be helpful, but regulations designed to ensure that no one is left out also constrict the opportunities that small businesses provide to entry-level workers. A Sherman, Texas, restaurant—Raviolli’s—employed eighty-five persons until one of them, a dishwasher, began to display sores on his neck and arms. The owner, Carlo Morelli, saw the sores, heard Jeremy the dishwasher’s bad cough, and asked him what was wrong. “He said he had AIDS,” Morelli recalled. “An AIDS patient has no immunities. That means Jeremy caught everything that was going around—when he caught a cold, it darn near would turn into pneumonia. TB is a problem, and I just couldn’t have someone who came into contact with every utensil in the restaurant passing along communicable diseases. That’s common sense.”

Morelli continued, “I didn’t want to fire him, so I asked him to move out of the kitchen, maybe run errands for me, do some gardening and groundskeeping. I even gave him a raise for that.” But Jeremy returned with lawyers and bureaucrats who told Morelli that moving Jeremy to another job restricted equal opportunity. As word about the AIDS patient in the kitchen spread through the community, many people stopped coming and Raviolli’s receipts declined by 75 percent. Morelli’s lawyer told him that if he moved Jeremy it could cost as much as \$1 million to defend the restaurant in court, so Morelli closed the restaurant and eighty-five jobs—personal trampolines—disappeared.

Government officials, like doctors, should be committed to the principle “Do no harm”—yet many regulations end up

eliminating the bottom rung of the ladder for those who could otherwise climb out of poverty. For example, if small business owners are to give job applicants with poor work records a new chance, the businessmen should be free during the first few months of employment to fire at will those who do not work out. If employers are subject to wrongful termination lawsuits or huge charges to their unemployment insurance accounts, they will not take a chance.

Furthermore, if an employer cannot single out a new hire for a surprise drug test and be able to fire him if the test comes out positive, that employer also is unlikely to take a chance. If the new hire comes in late and leaves high, and after being fired turns up with a Legal Services lawyer, sues, and gains a settlement, he is being taught how to shake down the system. In all such cases, employers are being taught to just say no the next time they are approached with a plan to increase job opportunities. Government is doing harm to both those who need help and those who could offer it.

State task forces should examine these types of barriers and recommend their removal. State legislatures should eliminate the negative, and Congress should do the same when federal statutes contribute to the harassment of compassion. At the same time, the positive question should be posed: how can the state promote the production of additional trampolines?

### *Accentuating the Positive*

Congress in 1995 tried to push the back of the envelope by breaking with decades of more-funds-available-on-request entitlement thinking. The plan was to block grant amounts to states; for the five years from 1996 to 2001, Washington would collect hundreds of billions of dollars in taxes and then return them to the states, minus postage and handling, of course.



President Clinton's veto kept states from having more flexibility to design their own programs than in the past—but block grants were only a transitional device anyway. A new Congress in 1997 should take the next logical step, either by passing a charity reform act that would establish tax credits for contributions to poverty-fighting organizations or by voting to place in the hands of state officials all decisions about welfare and the financing of it.

Under the first alternative—national tax credits—taxpayers would be able to receive a dollar-for-dollar credit for contributing a certain sum of money to organizations that have as their primary purpose the prevention or alleviation of poverty. In legislation introduced by Senator Coats, the amount is \$500, or \$1000 for married couples. Senators Ashcroft and Santorum, Representatives Knollenberg and Kolbe, and other legislators have also proposed such measures, sometimes with different dollar amounts. The common objective is to break the federal welfare monopoly and provide a pool of capital for community organizations like those in Milwaukee and around the country that are doing a far better job than their governmental counterparts.

Passage of Coats's 'Comprehensive Charity Reform Act' would also allow the 71 percent of taxpayers who do not itemize to deduct charitable contributions from their tax liability, thus broadening the base of giving in America. In addition, the bill would extend the deadline for charitable giving from the end of the year to the tax filing deadline of April 15, thus increasing the incentive and opportunity to reduce tax liability by giving to charity. Finally, the bill would require full public disclosure by government welfare programs of the amount of money they spend that actually benefits the poor. This would bring greater public accountability to public spending programs and expose them when they are inefficient or ineffective.

Furthermore, to avoid placing the emphasis solely on money—because, as we have seen, the expenditure of time is often more crucial—a companion Coats bill, the Compassion Credit Act, provides a small but good incentive to people who open their homes and their lives to some of the most vulnerable members of society: the homeless, those requiring hospice care, women in crisis pregnancies, and battered women and children. To receive a \$500 credit, taxpayers would have to house individuals referred to them through a qualified 501(c)(3) organization that has as its primary activity provision of care for the needy.

Historical precedents for governmental help that encourages families of average means to take in poor neighbors are clear. Early American leaders opposed direct welfare spending by the federal government, but town councils provided subsidies to those who housed the poor. A \$500 credit will not cover the cost of care, and people who are willing to open their homes to needy individuals will not do it for the money. Some who want to, however, are stopped by finances. The credit would encourage a greater opening of homes and hearts and make the option available to more than just the affluent.\*

These are all excellent ideas, and well worth passage. Appendix C discusses the national tax credit idea further, provides additional rationale, and proposes a fast pace of movement along that route, if that is the route chosen. Nevertheless, the rest of

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\*The current tax code is deficient in this regard. Now, a taxpayer who turns a spare room in his home into an office can deduct the costs of that room as a business expense. Yet, if he is a volunteer at a local homeless shelter, sees the progress toward responsibility that one of the shelter residents is making, and decides to turn that extra room into a bedroom so he can mentor that individual, there is no deduction. People should be encouraged to offer shelter to homeless individuals (discernment is needed here), to abandoned young women going through crisis pregnancies, and to others in need. A taxpayer willing to make that commitment should have it treated in the tax code as equal in importance to a business expense.



this chapter will put on the table a more revolutionary proposal: placing in the hands of state officials all decisions about welfare and the financing of it, and then pressing them to put welfare entirely in the hands of church- and community-based organizations.

In this second, radically decentralist scenario, Congress would acknowledge that block grants violate common sense: far better to leave the money in the states in the first place. Congress would acknowledge that block grants reduce accountability: the goal of block grants is to free state governments from centralized control, but they also tend to free state governments from taxpayer control because the funds are viewed as “free money” blown in from Washington. Congress would acknowledge that block grants tend to breed scandal: without real accountability to either the national capital or the state citizenry, funds are wasted and pressure mounts for Congress to attach not just strings but ropes to hold in the sides of the box.

But in this scenario a bold Congress, pushed hard by the newcomers of 1994 and 1996, would not fall into the “same-old same-old” and recentralize. Instead, Congress would pass, effective at the end of a transitional period, a massive tax cut, with federal taxes decreasing by the amount no longer block granted.

States would then use their own taxing authority to implement new programs or duplicate the old ones if they chose to do so. If a new Congress were to make that decision in 1997, states would then begin entering the post-federal welfare era. They could tax residents adequate amounts to care for the poor, but provide incentives for citizens to contribute sizable amounts of time or money to local poverty-fighting charities by providing exemptions to the new tax.

It is not as if a dollar-for-dollar replacement for the \$350 billion annual cost (in 1994) of federal and state welfare spending

(70 percent of it coming from Washington) is necessary: we know that much money is wasted and worse than wasted, actually causing harm. Yet, if more trampolines are needed, we should not be opposed theoretically to governments, once they have worked to reduce barriers, also working to promote the general welfare.

The major way for state legislatures to do this would be to offer the average taxpayer a deal of the following kind: Come the year 2001, under the Welfare Replacement Act of 1997, your federal tax burden will be reduced by an average of \$3,000. We certainly do not want to be accused of being cruel or mean-spirited, so we will raise state taxes by an average of \$2,500 for social welfare purposes. However, we also want to promote personal involvement with community-based organizations that offer effective compassion to the poor, and if you provide to such an organization a combination of money and time totaling at least \$3,000—thus leaving the quantity of societal commitment to the poor unchanged—you will be exempt from the new tax.

This would obviously represent a sweeping change from the current system. Now, taxpayers who itemize can deduct from their taxable income the contributions they make to a wide range of religious, charitable, and educational organizations, at their marginal tax rate (low is 15 percent, high is 39.6 percent). This is helpful but not good enough, and movement toward a flat tax might eliminate that deduction anyway. States, under the new system proposed here, would be pushing taxpayers in a massive way to become involved with groups that provide direct social services to the poor, and offering exemption from taxation for such purposes to those who were helping others in their own way.

A dozen critical questions about such a revolutionary departure from current practice immediately arise:

1. What percentage of taxpayers would choose to support local charities and thereby gain exemption? That is very difficult to predict, but with four years of preparation it is likely that many would, with a tremendous boost to nonprofit finances and a large increase of citizen involvement resulting. Those who did not become involved would pay the new tax, and states could use that fund to pay for any missing trampolines.

2. Would church- and community-based organizations be ready to expand or replicate themselves in order to make use of the new resources they would have in a new century? They would have time to prepare, and the encouragement of a new system would blow away the compassion fatigue that has built up over the years. (The related question of whether religion-based groups should be allowed to participate will be covered in the next chapter.)

3. Would acceptance of exemption-creating contributions force poverty-fighting charities to accept governmental control? Now, charitable organizations that seek government grants come under government oversight; some church-related programs have gained financially but lost their souls in the process. Even nonreligious charities accepting public funds have been forced to treat all of their clients bureaucratically, within the parameters set by law and regulation, rather than dealing with each human being on an individual basis.

The advent of "new tax" exemptions would not automatically free up religious groups and other community-based institutions to participate as equals in the social services sector. Despite precedents set by the GI Bill and other programs that allowed consumer choice, the ACLU would not be amused by the removal of secular liberalism from its established, privileged place.

Still, the offer of an exemption (signifying a right not to pay

because of other services rendered) is as clear a hands-off statement as a legislature can make. Exemptions offer a greater degree of protection than deductions, credits, or especially vouchers, since the latter require government not only to overlook revenue but to send out checks. A political coalition strong enough to obtain tax exemptions should be strong enough to keep them from being abused by antireligious zealots.

4. Wouldn't some exemptions from taxation go for funds sent to phony, needless, or simply ineffective projects? Wouldn't these cases be cited by partisans of the welfare state as reasons for opposing the exemption system? Certainly, and those cases would make an impact on people who are startled to find that some among their fellow human beings are foolish, incompetent, or gullible.

Markets work not because everyone exercises perfect judgment, but because, on balance, most people make good judgments most of the time. Even with all the anticipated human error, a charitable sector in which the funds are allocated by individual private decision is likely to be less wasteful than the current system. Besides, with more resources at stake, more careful analysis of charitable effectiveness is likely to become common. Publications that examine charities the way *Consumer Reports* examines products would emerge.

5. Wouldn't acceptance of volunteer time as part of the exemption-creating contribution open the door to fraud? It is true that proof of the giving of money tends to be clearer than that of the giving of time, the valuation of which can be complicated. Still, emphasis on the crucial meaning of compassion—suffering with—is vital, and a plan that provides incentives for contribution of money but not time is incomplete.

Many groups already keep records of volunteer hours, so bookkeeping would not be an insurmountable problem. Cor-

ruption could be kept to a minimum by keeping the general credit for exemption purposes at the level of the minimum wage—enough to provide a bit of compensation for work time lost and to signify societal commitment to compassionate action, but not enough to promote widespread cheating.

6. What would happen to health care for the poor? Medicaid is the single biggest element of current federal and state welfare expenses: of the \$324 billion that federal and state agencies spent on welfare in 1993, \$132 billion went for that one program. And yet, many cities have free or sharply reduced-price clinics where some dedicated doctors and nurses volunteer their time. What can governments do to help such organizations?

In Jackson, Mississippi, for example, the Voice of Calvary Family Health Center sees about 8,000 patients each year and would like to expand its operations or grow other clinics like it. Center director Lee Harper contrasts her clinic with higher-budgeted state operations and concludes, "When you have more money, you tend to waste more"—but still, she needs more funds. Job one, however, is getting more hours from volunteer doctors, dentists, and nurses: "If we get the health professionals, we'll get the money."

Such an urgent need translates into a specific proposal that could be implemented at the federal level in lieu of all the macroreform proposals of the 1990s: give medical professionals tax credits for hours regularly worked at clinics. If a typical doctor, dentist, or nurse worked one day every two weeks at a clinic or in a similar way spent time to provide health care to poor individuals, billions of dollars in medical expenses could be saved. Participating health personnel, in return, could receive a tax credit equivalent to 10 percent of their salaries. Such a credit could be the cornerstone of the personal alternative to bureaucratic health care plans that are rightly regarded with skepticism.

7. Why substitute a state tax (with exemptions) for a federal one? Why not simply reduce taxes and allow individuals to spend the money as they see fit? Advocates of individual rather than governmental responsibility have the personal emphasis right, but will a reliance merely on individual goodwill and effort lead to the production of enough trampolines? For those who emphasize original sin rather than natural goodness, there is a middle ground between government and individual: call it societal responsibility, within which government requires payment but leaves to the individual taxpayer how the money is to be spent.

8. Would it be possible to restrict tax-exempting contributions to those organizations that are actually engaged in fighting poverty and its associated pathologies? In some cases, the correct category will be obvious, but in others careful judgment will be required. For example, it would seem that general donations to a college or a private school should not be used for exemption purposes, but donations to college or school scholarship funds for poor students should be. General donations to a church should not produce an exemption, but those to a church's specific poverty-fighting endeavors (an antiaddiction program, for example) should be. General donations to a hospital should not; donations to a free or reduced-rate clinic for the poor should.

Such categorization would be necessary, even though it could cut into the individual flexibility that straightforward tax reduction would allow. No matter how carefully state legislatures define the new tax category for poverty-fighting organizations, officials would have to write and apply regulations implementing the new tax; that potentially could give a state agency the opportunity to exclude organizations that it did not favor for ideological, theological, or political reasons, and it also means that some organizations might change what they do and the way they do it in order to conform to the regulatory standards.

Such a threat does not mean that the new system could not work; it does mean that eternal vigilance will continue to be the price of liberty.

9. Why not rely on pure voluntarism to do what is necessary? The seeds of welfare replacement are already planted, as chapter six suggested; if we wish to move quickly enough to save a generation of children during the first decade of the twenty-first century, those seeds will need lots of water. If men were angels, no incentives for goodness would be necessary, but devolution to the states and further devolution through an exemption system is a good way for human beings to shift resources from the public sector to the private sector. Such a shift would provide a pool of capital for worthy charities to use in replicating themselves and thus replacing the welfare state.

The stimulation of voluntarism through tax exemption is an impure tactic but our predecessors in this country, with their realistic view of human nature, were not above using impure motives to promote virtue. Colonial settlers who took in a poor person received compensation from the township, and some of them may occasionally have profited a bit (although that would have been more than made up for by the time they spent mentoring the needy person). A farm family that adopted an orphan gained a farmhand (again, the economic advantage was more than paid for by the hard task of being new parents to someone who had grown up under tough conditions).

10. Why require \$3,000 to receive the exemption from payment of \$2,500? If some people hesitate to give (in money or minimum-wage time) the greater amount necessary to receive an exemption, that is fine: the quality of their giving would probably be low. Some personal contribution by the taxpayer is important to build a sense of involvement with and responsibility for the work of the charitable organization. The goal is

to have as many taxpayers as possible think through their giving, and not merely respond to direct-mail appeals.

11. Why would taxpayers be expected to make better decisions about which groups to support than government officials have? Competition has made the American economy the strongest in the history of humanity and the American political system the envy of the world. The American people have proven themselves capable, on average and over the long haul, of making good economic and political judgments. Taxpayers who invested \$500 of their own money and time in order to direct \$2,500 to satisfying projects would be likely to make equally good judgments in the charitable sphere.

Decisions about where funds shall go would no longer be a function of political struggles over the budgets of government agencies, but would result from the decisions of millions of individual donors. Independent charitable organizations would for the first time in generations be on a level playing field with those groups favored by government. Some errors would occur, but there is every reason to expect this system of delivering assistance to the needy to be far more effective than the current model of top-down government monopoly.

Yes, some innovators would fail, but isn't it better to win a football game fifty to fourteen than to play so defensively as to fall into a three-three tie? Given the growing body count of damaged children and ruined adults under our current regime, isn't it better to take the rational risks that could liberate millions, rather than for it to be always winter and never Christmas?

12. Could the Coats national tax credit provisions be combined with this state-emphasizing approach? Possibly: Washington could retain some social services taxing authority and implement limited national tax credits, but most of the funding expectations could be returned to the states along the lines dis-

cussed. Following both paths does seem complicated, however; one approach probably would become dominant.

### *National Versus Decentralized Approaches*

Which is better, the national or state-by-state approach? Either would represent a substantial improvement. I would be delighted to see national plans pass, but—in general—decentralization offers the best shot for each state to innovate in the way that is right for its unique population and specific problems. Since we do not know precisely which legislative plan would best promote the offering of individual compassion, an emphasis on state-level action maximizes the opportunities to find out for sure which tactics work best. Furthermore, there may be more opportunity to move quickly in some states than in Washington.

While each state would have to sort out its particular problems, all would have to deal with rising rates of illegitimacy. Abstinence programs are a start. When pregnancy nevertheless results and marriage does not, states should foster group living arrangements for women during pregnancy and during the next year or two, so that those who would otherwise be alone would have a support network. Biases against adoption should be challenged and the advantages to the child of adoption at birth (or up to age two, at the latest) stressed. Having a baby out of wedlock should not bring with it the reward of any governmental cash payments. Appendix D examines a variety of poverty-related subjects that legislators should visit.\*

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\*Following completion of this manuscript I received from the Beacon Hill Institute at Suffolk University (Boston, MA) an excellent, book-length examination of poverty-fighting tax credits. Interested readers should consult that work: the authors are James P. Angelini, William F. O'Brien, Jr., and David G. Tuerck; the title is *Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due: A New Approach to Welfare Funding*.

Some programs already put into limited practice could be expanded. The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute recently reported on 70 "Time Dollar" programs now up and running in 30 states, where individuals commit time to helping others but receive credit for their hours so that the givers can receive help when they need it. Concerning state tax credits for poverty-fighting, it is worth noting that several states already provide tax credits to businesses that contribute cash, materials, or services to nonprofits.

Such developments are significant—yet we should remember that no public policy measure can take the place of the personal changes that are necessary to raise high the standard of American compassion. With supportive laws and rules, compassionate individuals can make real progress toward reducing some of our most serious social pathologies, but the crucial change is still the one that goes on in each individual soul, not in the federal or state capitals.

## Chapter 8

*Down the Drain?*

As chapter 6 suggests, compassionate individuals and groups are still at work in the 1990s, much as they were in the 1890s. And as chapter 7 proposes, legislators can play a useful support role by removing barriers to compassionate action and developing practical plans to ensure that organizations with good reputations receive the material support they need. But a harder question remains: do we, as this troubled century closes, have the optimistic willingness to do what it takes to renew American compassion?

During my early teenage years, from 1963 through 1966, I spent many Saturdays at Fenway Park in Boston, cheering on the Red Sox as they lost game after game. They were terrible then, and there always seemed to be a loud-mouthed fan behind me shouting, as the Sox fell behind, "Down the drain." That cry still resounds in my mind when talk at public policy conferences turns to our nation's present plight.

There is no doubt that America is in trouble. Bill Bennett's "index of leading cultural indicators" shows us the depth of the problems in many areas: underachieving schools, overachieving criminals, and illegitimacy swamping us all. Even greater than

the problems that can be measured are those that cannot. The last two Democratic presidents were ridiculed for talking about a national "malaise" or "funk," but the evidence of "compassion fatigue"—a cynicism about the possibility of helping others—is evident.

If history were a slippery slope, we would already be so far down that it would seem impossible to scramble back up. But the historical flow is not so straight. There are historical precedents for cultures rubbed as raw as ours making astounding comebacks. For example, the British upper classes at the time of the American Revolution were morally sick, but the efforts of Member of Parliament William Wilberforce and others who fought for Bible-based renewal from the 1790s through the 1830s helped to give England a much improved nineteenth century.

Another example of national revival comes from the United States itself. Although conventional history books generally leave this out, the 1840s and 1850s were decades of spiritism and free lust—New Age theology and sexuality—throughout the North and to some extent in the South. Then came the Civil War, with its loss of 600,000 lives and much of the southern economy, and the troubled Reconstruction era. And yet, the reunited states recovered and witnessed economic and moral growth through the remainder of the nineteenth century. Huge problems such as racism remained, but American citizens were able to assimilate millions of immigrants and extend compassion to them and to millions of the native-born without enabling destructive behavior.

Today, the United States needs to recover from the social civil war that has raged since the 1960s. On the one side are those who scorn words like responsibility, discipline, and maturity; some are affluent enough to act foolishly and not be out on the



streets, but the poor who imbibe the propaganda of a radical elite have no such margin for error. On the other side are leaders like Sister Connie Driscoll, who founded and heads St. Martin de Porres House of Hope in Chicago, a hundred-bed shelter that is operated without any government funds.

The women who come to her, Sister Connie notes, "almost always have the money to pay their rent, but they often spend it on something else, and they don't pay the rent on time, month after month, until the landlord evicts them." The main cause of homelessness, Sister Connie says, is "an often total lack of understanding of personal responsibility and discipline." When women are willing to accept discipline and strive toward responsibility, she has had great success in turning around lives.

We often hear today that the problems of poverty are incredibly complex, but if that is true the success of some fairly simple programs is even more remarkable. There is nothing fancy about the Gospel Mission programs that helped to turn around the lives of Rudy Jones, Ferdinand Banks, Jerry Minor, and hundreds of others. Nor is there much more than meets the eye—love, Bible, discipline, fun—behind the success of Kathy Dudley, a young woman who began Voice of Hope in Dallas and has helped to turn around the lives of numerous inner-city children and teenagers. She walked down an inner-city street there a dozen years ago with a soccer ball under her arm and an invitation to children: play, learn about God through Bible studies, and work at rehabbing deteriorated homes in the neighborhood. During the past decade, crime rates among the boys she works with and pregnancy rates among the girls have been much lower than those in the surrounding community.

There is nothing all that complicated about the work of pregnancy help centers such as the Capitol Hill Crisis Pregnancy Center in Washington, D.C., where unmarried, pregnant

teenagers learn responsibility. Toni McIlwain of the Ravendale area of Detroit would be the first to say that advanced degrees are not needed to help neighbors work with each other to fight drugs and make their city blocks safer. It does take hard work, though, and she worked to set up Neighborhood Watch clubs on thirty-five high-crime blocks. (Battling alongside a Joy of Jesus group that pushes for spiritual revival, she has seen a significant drop in her area's crime rate.) In many areas—promoting abstinence, facilitating adoption, helping the handicapped, pushing young men to accept their responsibility as fathers—we already have working models.

Furthermore, it does not take elaborate flowcharts to motivate people in suburban churches and other religious institutions to become involved with their inner-city neighbors. In this regard, the experience of Virgil Gulker, head of KidsHope USA (which connects children with adults willing to help), is instructive. Gulker has learned to stress specificity. Inviting people to a general war on poverty overwhelms them, and it even "did little good to ask churches if they could 'supply tutors for learning-disabled children.' The request was too broad. Once, however, we asked if there was anyone who could help a little boy named Johnnie. We told church members that he was a fourth grader who was unable to read and, because he could not read, the other children made fun of him and would not play with him. I was amazed at the response. It seemed as though everyone wanted to tutor Johnnie. We had to tell volunteers that we were sorry, but Johnnie was already being helped. Perhaps they would like to help Becky or Kimberly learn to read? They did."

The best place to learn more about what works is not in a graduate program of social work oriented toward government models. State welfare headquarters also tend to be great dismal swamps, although there is much to learn from shake-up-the-



system innovators such as Kay James of Virginia or Eloise Anderson of California. Just as Wisconsin state welfare is an improvement on the typical but not good enough, so welfare administrators and social workers whose livelihoods depend on the current system generally push programs that taste great but are far less filling than what private groups offer. No, the best way to learn more about effective compassion is to hear from those who practice it on mean streets.

In California, for example, we should listen to the experienced poverty fighters of a gospel-proclaiming inner-city church such as St. Stephen's Church of God in Christ. There, in southeast San Diego, the fellow playing the bongos on stage may have been a drug addict a year ago, and the man in a suit in the next pew a recently released convict—but a spiritual transformation has swept both of them, and hundreds of others, into a new life. As church leader Richard Smith points out, the church's goal is to deal with not just poverty, which is a relatively easy material problem, but "impoverishment—long-term hopelessness, humiliation, and degradation, a culture unto itself. It takes more than money to redeem the lives of those who have become spiritually destitute."

In Georgia, rather than listening to those who believe in magic—flick the wand, provide new housing, and the problem of poverty goes poof!—we need to hear explanations such as the one coming from Summerhill Neighborhood head Douglas Dean: "We're not just talking about changing people's physical environment. We're talking about spiritual change, changing people's hearts." In Oregon, we will want to learn from Don Michel, a mission director who has watched people trading food stamps for drugs and now tells reporters how his attitude has changed: "I thought just handing out food and clothes without question was a very compassionate thing to do. But I think now that when you give things out without

accountability, you're participating in that person's harm. . . . It's never been true that there is an absence of service. . . . there is an absence of motivation."

What Michel calls the "absence of motivation" is the missing link to reality in much naive talk about homeless people restoring some order to their lives or people on welfare going to work. Necessity is the mother of change, and our removal of urgent necessity from the lives of many poor people has also taken away the impetus for productive behavior. Steve Gilkenson, program administrator at the McAuley Mission and a man who has been through tough times himself, suggests that "the problem today is nobody's able to hit bottom, they just bounce around the bottom, and every couple of months someone picks them up." That is the safety net problem again; if welfare payments decrease, Gilkenson says, "our chapel would be fuller and our audience would be soberer."

Gilkenson points to a key issue: do we want audiences to be sober, if the condition is that chapels are also full? Government officials for the past thirty years have in essence decided that it was more important to shut out religion than to back the most effective means of fighting addiction and alcoholism. Yet, drug and alcohol abuse are frequently related to lack of a religious commitment in a person's life: nine of ten alcoholics in one study said they lost interest in religion during their teenage years, and researchers found a strong religious commitment to be a consistent predictor of not using illicit drugs. Religious belief has been shown to be the most powerful force for recovery from alcoholism.

Such evidence points to one of the inescapable correlations of late-twentieth-century life: intellectual elites may continue to proclaim the death of God, but programs that fight substance abuse, as well as the hopelessness that underlies all forms of long-term American poverty, need a living God if they are to be

successful. Theoretically, philosophers can contend that this need not be so, but in practice the evidence is overwhelming. Religious commitment, particularly church attendance, correlates negatively with delinquency. Frequent church attendees have lower crime rates than infrequent attendees. Belief in an afterlife (with the threat of divine punishment) is also associated with lower crime rates. Former prison inmates who are religious have a significantly lower recidivism rate than their nonreligious peers.

Religious beliefs also have an effect on the supply side of charity. In 1993, individual donors gave \$102 billion to nonprofits, and a Russ Reid Company study showed that the best predictor of giving behavior continues to be the intensity and nature of spiritual commitment. In terms of money, individuals who give to religious groups contribute a total of 66 percent more than nonreligious givers. In terms of time, the difference is probably even greater. Only when helping the poor is a calling rather than a career do those capable of service stick with the hard cases.

Some government social workers in Wisconsin call the hard cases FUBBs. The only cost-effective treatment for a FUBB (and his more genteel cousin, the MUBB, for "messed up beyond belief") is to give up on him. Take the case of twenty-eight-year-old Willie Wilson, a cokehead who started freebasing six years ago while working in a restaurant and deejaying at a nightclub: "I started using more drugs. The more drugs I took, the better I felt I was on the turntable, making people dance. I was snorting in the DJ booth."

Love had a chance to change Wilson. A woman he moved in with—whose sister was on crack—demanded that he stop using the drug. He stopped for a week but then started lying to her, and soon disappeared for days at a time. Strike one. The woman

gave him another chance, and he stopped using cocaine for two months. She was happy, until she found out Wilson had switched to alcohol and slept with another woman. Strike two.

That woman became pregnant and had their child, and Wilson "promised to give her and the baby all the money I could. . . . But when I had money in my hand, I bought a small portion of crack cocaine, maybe a \$50 rock, planning to leave . . . but then I wanted to test its quality right away . . . and once I tested the crack, I couldn't go nowhere, because I got paranoid, so I ending up spending all the money at the crack house." Strike three.

Wilson kept promising to do better and was able to hold a job, but each week he received a check for \$280 "and everything would just go. No money the next day." Strike four. Wanting more money one day after sleeping at the crack house and being turned out on the street, Wilson "went to my mom's house. She knew something was wrong. But she left me in the house alone for a few minutes. I went into the bedroom and took her \$200 camera, ran out, and sold it for a \$50 rock of cocaine." Strike five. Managers at a Burlington coat factory gave Wilson another chance, but after only a few days he "got high and couldn't go to work. So, they fired me." Strike six.

Then Wilson stayed with his aunt and stole \$300 in cash, along with her television, VCR, and microwave: "I took them to the crack man. He gave me money." Strike seven. Wilson entered a twenty-eight-day, government-funded detox program in Laurel, Maryland. It was the same old thing: the program treated a symptom of his problem, not the problem itself, so when he came out he fell into the old pattern of giving up cocaine only to embrace alcoholism once again. Strike eight. Wilson found a job, the paychecks started coming—and crack was back: "It seems like every time I got money in my hands, I

started using crack. And I saw myself blowing everything I have in the paycheck. I spent \$598 in one day." Strike nine.

Did spiritual deliverance finally come in 1993 when he started going to church? That would make a happy ending, but Wilson dropped cocaine only to start drinking again. Strike ten. A church in suburban Washington gave him a paying job and he started using cocaine again; then he stole equipment from the church and sold it for drugs. Strike eleven. He had an enormous high, then came down and "wanted to jump in front of the Metro, because I was so disgusted with myself. How can I take from the house of God? How can I take from people who care about me?"

There's more to the Wilson story, including not just one but three children fathered at various times, and other problems as well. His self-recrimination aside, at this point Wilson is clearly a MUBB, right? Anyone who tries to help him is a fool, right? Maybe—but at the Gospel Mission, where Wilson has lived over the past year, residents, staffers, and volunteers see themselves as fools for Christ. Wilson is in the Mission's antiaddiction program, has gone back to school, is working on a commercial driver's license, and subjects himself to random drug tests. So far the tests show that he has stayed clean.

Conversation with Wilson certainly reveals a willingness to confess past actions and a desire to go and sin no more. "Only the power of Jesus will let me do that," he says. Life at the mission also puts him in constant contact with "the guys who have been in the program longer. I get strength from them, because I can see where they came from, and where they're going." Will that be enough? Stay tuned. And why do Gospel Mission staffers and volunteers stick with Wilson at a time when government would have given up? As long as Wilson confesses and strives, the answer is simple: they believe that Christ changes lives.

Take a rocklike faith of that sort, rub it against a rocklike state

bureaucracy, and sparks fly. During the 1990s, highly effective groups that emphasize biblical rather than secular ways of fighting addiction and alcohol have had run-ins with state licensing authorities in Oregon, Pennsylvania, and many other states. In the most highly publicized case of 1995, Teen Challenge of San Antonio stood firm against state pressure by maintaining its effective policy of treating alcoholics and addicts. It continued to teach about Christ and in that way fill holes in souls. Teen Challenge was not receiving any government grants, but the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse nevertheless subjected the organization to arbitrary licensing and credentialing procedures. Counseling that emphasizes religious belief is not real treatment, the state insisted: turn in your license!

Teen Challenge eventually survived, but only after putting on a rally at the Alamo and having its case brought to wide public attention by several journalists and activists. Texas Governor George W. Bush, facing an uprising from Christian and conservative voters who had helped to elect him, said, "I support faith-based programs. I believe that a conversion to religion, in this case, Christianity . . . by its very nature promotes sobriety. There is logic to what Teen Challenge is doing, and I support it strongly." He agreed to push for new laws and regulations that, at least as far as the state government is concerned, would create an alternative licensing agency run by religious organizations themselves. Florida already has such a system; other states need one.

The Teen Challenge episode and others like it point to a problem growing out of the curious interpretation of the First Amendment's religion clauses that has become dominant. Now, government funds bankroll many programs that promote atheism or at least marginalize God, but they cannot be used in religious programs that show materially and spiritually poor people what will meet their needs. Even licensing, the government's

seal of approval, may be withheld from religion-based organizations that believe strongly enough in what they profess to want to share that faith with those who walk through their doors.

Government funds may be used by religious groups that have set up religionless programs, government look-alikes that are rarely effective—but any program that communicates to clients the need for religious conversion, no matter how effective, faces a ban. With many first-rate programs out of bounds, government often buys into the second-rate.

No rational business leader trying to develop an effective product would eliminate from consideration many of the most impressive prototypes. But the ACLU and similar organizations have made it their business to foster an eccentric interpretation of the religion clauses, even though it was certainly not the intent of the framers of the First Amendment to ban religion from the public square, or to press a lawsuit on any recipient of government funds who says the G-word.

Even Thomas Jefferson, who was not involved in the Constitution-framing discussions but spoke his piece later, would be surprised to find out that, in his name, conversations about spiritual matters, or reflections on the most important topics, must either be expunged altogether or conducted in such an antiseptically censored way that they cannot seriously address the questions that lie in our hearts. How has it come about that any activity funded by the government must be conducted as if atheism were the established religion? Why should we tolerate such bias against a vital dimension of our existence that has demonstrably made a difference in the lives of millions?

Halfway covenants will not suffice here. Jean Rogers, a key division administrator within the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, notes that a plan adopted late in 1995 will allow explicitly religious groups in her state “to bid on segments of the [social services] operation . . . as long as groups

can stay away from direct proselytization, we can be legally safe.” That is a well-intentioned attempt, but the groups that are most effective often view Bible studies and “proselytizing” actions to be the engine of their ship.

A more comprehensive attempt to provide religious liberty came in Washington late in 1995, when the Congress approved a proposal by Senator John Ashcroft “to allow religious organizations to contract, or to accept certificates, vouchers, or other forms of disbursement” for federally paid social service programs “on the same basis as any other provider without impairing the religious character of such organizations. . . .” Antireligion groups went predictably ballistic. The provision “could lead to the creation of an unprecedented church-government relationship,” American Civil Liberties Union lobbyist Liz Symonds screamed.

The reaction came even though the Ashcroft proposal had a catch—federal grants could not be “expended for sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization.” That gag rule evidently was needed to pass the proposal, but it overlooked something essential: Christian efforts take a bite out of poverty because of Christ, and other serious religious groups also attribute their effectiveness not to niceness but to spiritual transformation brought about by worship, teaching, and theological advocacy. Yet, those are the very functions that the proposal explicitly disallowed.

Furthermore, the proposal did not affect all religious groups equally. Churches that had become political or social clubs could readily accept government money because they had already lost their salt and become government lookalikes. But Christian, Jewish, and Islamic groups that had remained theologically tough would either turn down the money and its restrictions, or go soft also—unless they cheated by sliding money from one category to another.

Senator Ashcroft did well to spotlight discrimination in funding, but his proposal—part of the welfare bill vetoed by President

Clinton—might have led more religious groups to place their funding hopes in bureaucratic hands, instead of looking to contributors or to help from a tax credit system within which Washington never gets its hands on the money.

Grant-seeking temptations have ensnared many groups. For example, an organization elegantly named HOB0—Helping Our Brothers Out—started up in Austin, Texas, in 1987. Homeless men could get some clothes and food while also being exposed to some Bible study and prayer. The program was small and often crude, but it did some good. In 1989 and 1990, however, the HOB0 board of directors faced a choice: remain a financially challenged, Bible-based organization or hit a governmental jackpot. As Director John Porterfield put it, “We became aware of grants that we could just pick up. We knew there were strings attached, but . . . the money was there in our hands, the only question was whether we should put it in our pockets.”

The answer was not an obvious one for those who had become involved in poverty fighting because they cared about both body and soul. Board members faced a terrifying choice: supply material help to many using government funds, or supply material and spiritual help to a few and suffer nightmares about those who slipped away. HOB0 leaders chose to take the government money and drop their ministry orientation. Soon, HOB0 sported legal services, a health clinic, afternoon Sharon Stone movies for homeless men, and hot and cold showers—everything that could enable an addict or alcoholic to remain homeless. All that was gone was the pressure to change. At HOB0, God was dead and so was real hope.

The Ashcroft provision could have provided a greater degree of protection in some states, but the effect of any law depends on the interpretation of courts and the degree of enthusiasm of local and state government officials. Only when there is a welling up of citizen compassion so great that it will not take

the ACLU's frowns for an answer, and only when that bottom-up movement is supported by civic leaders' top-down enthusiasm, will change occur.

One city with a promising combination of top-down and bottom-up impetus is Indianapolis, led by Mayor Steve Goldsmith. Although his own faith is Jewish, in 1992 he had the city contract with a strongly evangelical Christian group, the Institute in Basic Life Principles, to deal with juvenile offenders. The program has expanded each year since then as tough teens “have seen and adopted values that they never would have gotten in the court system,” Goldsmith says.

Leaders of the Christian organization were amazed at the speed with which their operation got off the ground: no lengthy licensure process, permits zipping through the bureaucratic maze, health and fire inspections carried out without axes to grind. Goldsmith has also called together directors of religious charities throughout Indianapolis and asked them how his office could help them to do their work more effectively. Get the government off our backs, he was told, and we'll help the city provide the services it wants to provide.

Goldsmith has worked to eliminate the negative while accentuating the positive. He “uses the mayor's office as a bully pulpit,” says Russ Pulliam, editor of the *Indianapolis News*. “He tried to keep the vultures off Christian nonprofits.” In public appearances, the mayor praises the work undertaken by religious charities. He issues special commendations and mentions specific ministries by name all around the state. “The person who dismisses that as ceremonial doesn't understand that this is an essential function of government,” Pulliam notes. “The government will pick on such Christian nonprofits unless they see that kind of support from the top.

Indianapolis so far is an unusual situation: a well-established organization, a secure mayor, and a sympathetic newspaper edi-

tor combining to support effective compassion. Recognition of the effectiveness of the religious groups might encourage other cities to follow the Indianapolis model. Still, the goal overall should be to move from a grants economy to a charity marketplace where individual taxpayers will be able to increase support to what they approve of without being forced to underwrite what they abhor. The more Goldsmith rationality the better, but overall, the development of a national tax credit or state tax exemption system will best promote the expansion of religion-based programs in a way that raises fewest hackles. Only decentralization can drive a tunnel through the mountain of litigation that opponents of religion are prepared to bring forth whenever they feel threatened.

This is not to say that the churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship are instantly ready to replace the welfare office whenever the ACLU gives up its rearguard action. Many religious organizations inhabit the valley of the biblical prophet Ezekiel's vision in the Old Testament, where he saw "a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry." As David Caprara, director of Virginia's Department of Housing and Community Development, puts it, "By allowing government to take over the functions that are rightly the responsibility of families, religious organizations, and local communities, we have become less inclined to parent, mentor, lend a helping hand, instruct our young, and perform other important duties."

In Ezekiel's vision, God connects knee bones to thigh bones, and provides tendons, flesh, and breath so that the revitalized creatures "came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army." A key question for Americans in the next decade will be whether the modern knee bones, thigh bones, and—most important—backbones of community groups can be reconnected in their own parched valleys.

The state with the best likelihood of sorting through church-state issues may be the one where Patrick Henry and James Madison debated the question in 1784.\* Virginia Governor George Allen's Commission on Citizen Empowerment has proposed that the state emphasize its role not as provider of welfare but as promoter of community clearinghouses that could "match people in need with services available in the community." State officials are to "review all current regulations to ease restrictions on citizens" and to "engage religious and nonprofit organizations in creative community-based programs."

A church/nonprofit/government conference in September 1995 brought together 350 religious leaders, community activists, and officials from around the state to discuss ways of accomplishing that. Kay James, then Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources, noted that "we haven't achieved what we really wanted to achieve with welfare: helping poor people." She emphasized that no one is content with the current system and that the recipients themselves are among the most critical. She made it clear that the welfare battle is not an us versus them class warfare frontal assault, but a struggle to reassert values of work and family that hold for all racial and ethnic groups.

The conference also went beyond either welfare reform or welfare elimination by showcasing programs that are the seeds of welfare replacement. Church- and community-based groups that teach sexual abstinence outside of marriage, offer mentors for young mothers and for children, provide child care and housing, promote literacy and fatherhood, connect suburbanites with the urban poor, and do a hundred other things all told their stories in well-attended workshops. Conference participants noted that if volunteers do more and current welfare recipients

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\*My book *Fighting for Liberty and Virtue: Political and Cultural Wars in Eighteenth Century America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995) examines this debate.



escape dependency, government will save substantial sums. Such savings, however, were always presented as a by-product of freeing poor people sunk in dependency and welfare workers mired in drudgery.

Other states need similar meetings that will attempt to end the battle of hard hearts and hard heads versus soft hearts and soft heads, and instead attempt to develop tough-minded, warmhearted leaders; as noted in chapter one, Mississippi and several others are embarked on this journey. Significantly, a new understanding of biblical ideas about fighting poverty is developing among a new generation of church leaders. Many ministers and lay leaders had fallen for the line of the religious left: God has a “preferential option” for the poor, which means that forced redistribution of income is next to godliness and a poor person is entitled to material help with nothing asked in return. Now, however, the Biblical emphasis on challenge for both rich and poor is starting to be heard once again. (Appendix B provides a theological base for the rediscovered approach.)

The practical application of the deeper understanding comes out in conversation with new leaders such as Shelby Smith, a thirty-eight-year-old father of three and vice president of Mendenhall Ministries, a black-led Mississippi organization. “For a long time social programs, government and private, church and nonchurch, were not incentive-based,” Smith says. “That killed the desire to be productive. In the 1920s and 1930s we were productive, but now we’re consumer-oriented. People don’t want to produce, don’t want to get a job. It used to be that a person’s not working had a direct impact on his ability to eat. Now, folks that don’t work are idolized—they’re cruising around in a nice car, not having to work. We should be saying, We will help you if you help yourself.”

Smith notes that Mendenhall Ministries “has gone from giving away things to deciding how to charge for things. In

the school, for example, it’s imperative that parents pay their third—they can pay some through work, but they have to pay some cash. Just giving to them is no good. . . . At the thrift store, used to be people would come in, give a sob story, they’d get something. But we realized that it builds pride in individuals when they are able to go in and buy something at an affordable price. When you emphasize accountability, people say, That’s a Republican mentality, that’s a probusiness mentality. But that’s the mentality you need if you’re going to do better than the how-do-you-beat-the-system, how-do-you-get-things mentality.”

Those who can best teach about accountability, Smith notes, are those who model it in their own lives and then disciple others. Understanding the true meaning of commission remains essential: “Compassion comes when you’re involved in an intimate basis in a person’s life,” Kay James says. “I’ve never seen a government body that can do that.” The experience of those who have rolled up their sleeves points to an essential truth that bears repeating: when any of us complain about a spendthrift modern welfare state, we are right about the costs but are stating the problem backwards. The major flaw of the modern welfare state is not that it is extravagant, but that it is too stingy. It gives the needy bread and tells them to be content with that alone. It gives the rest of us the opportunity to be stingy also: we can soothe our consciences as we scrimp on what many of the destitute need most—love, time, and challenge.

What does that mean, realistically, for Americans as we prepare to enter the twenty-first century? Here are ten summarizing propositions:

1. We should have confidence in the American people, unless it is proven that past successes are no longer possible. When we look at past poverty-fighting successes, we need to ask: why



can't we do the same? Were Americans then a different people than we are today? Have we become so corrupted that we don't care about others? Have we become so lazy that we are unwilling to suffer with those in need? Perhaps, but it is more likely that we simply have become used to having someone else do it for us—even though we know that a professional social worker, with a caseload of 150 in "good" programs and sometimes double that number elsewhere, can't do much more than shuffle paper. Bad charity drives out good: government welfare leads potential helpers to sit back, since they are paying someone else to do the job.

2. Our problems would be fewer if private groups could be trusted to act on proven poverty-fighting principles. Alas, independence from the state is a necessary condition for effective philanthropy but not a sufficient one, for some private charities are as bureaucratic, unchallenging, and downright foolish as their governmental counterparts. Bad charity has undermined the good throughout America: few people sign up for a program emphasizing discipline as long as they can choose another program that simply passes out checks. Most homeless men in Washington, D.C., given a choice between staying at the Gospel Mission, where they have to leave their bottles outside, and the Center for Creative Non-Violence, where drug-induced creativity has been welcome, choose the latter.

3. It is especially important that societal leaders, in their callings and in their volunteering, model the type of behavior that needs to be general. A minister should preach about the biblical model of effective compassion and then show throughout the week that the teaching goes beyond rhetoric. A business leader should work to create new jobs and train employees to move up; he should also establish policies to support employee volun-

teering and then go out himself to tutor a child. A political leader should work for public policy measures that do no harm to community institutions and promote citizen involvement. She might then provide a room in her home for a young woman going through a crisis pregnancy.

4. Americans a century ago understood that true welfare—the state or condition of being well—is most likely to occur when people are in families. The War on Poverty of recent years, however, has been in many ways also a war on family. Here's one telling statistic: 50 percent of unmarried women of all ages go on AFDC soon after having their first children, but only 10 percent of married teen moms and only 5 percent of married moms twenty or older. Marriage makes the difference; family makes the difference. But our current welfare system discourages marriage and encourages teenaged moms to leave their parents and set up "independent" households. That's a great victory, until a baby cries and cries, and a lonely young mother at wit's end responds in anger.

5. The greatest cause of poverty in America today is abandonment of children by men. Some deliberately slink from responsibility, but others see their children cared for regardless of what they do and lose the incentive to set aside immediate gratification. The current system does not even require the establishment of paternity for children receiving AFDC. That should be basic. Any system that gives men a green light to wander leads their children directly into not only material poverty but psychological, educational, and spiritual deprivation as well. Children without a father who loves and disciplines them have a hard time comprehending the nature of a God who does the same (but without making mistakes). Children deserve the wealth of having a mother and a father when-

ever possible, not the poverty of one parent or the insecurity that develops when a variety of conflicting voices attempt to replace everyday stabilizing forces. (It takes a whole village to confuse a child.)

6. Turning around the welfare ravages of seventy years will take a generation. We need to recognize that the real question about welfare—the one that opens up opportunity—is not the one most often voiced: how do we get people off the welfare rolls? A different question needs to be at the forefront: how do we keep new people from getting on? Abstinence and adoption are the keys to avoiding the single parenting that makes welfare rolls grow. Instead of compartmentalizing problems—welfare here, educational choice there, sex miseducation here, overregulation there—we need to connect the dots.

7. People change from the inside out: the crucial factor is not social or physical environment but belief, which is the basis of attitude, which is the basis of behavior. The successful antipoverty programs in American history have been based on provision of not only jobs but spiritual challenge as well. Income transfer by itself would not last unless a transfusion of values also occurred—and values are most frequently tied to religion. In the 1960s, however, liberals declared a war on poverty that was actually a war on God, since the Bible was excluded by judicial fiat from governmental antipoverty work. Now we need what could be called the New Pragmatism: religious programs receive no special preference but no special antagonism either. If a program gets people off governmental welfare it should not receive adverse discriminatory treatment, whatever its philosophical basis. A system of state-based taxpayer exemptions or national tax credits is the best way to proceed, although other devices to rise above antireligious bias are also worthy of support.

8. Decisions on welfare should be made at local levels, with the guiding principle of facilitating *suffering with*. Those who wish to lead and not just complain should give of their own lives by adopting hard-to-place children, making available rooms in homes for poor women going through crisis pregnancies and hoping to avoid entry into the welfare world, mentoring boys without dads through Big Brother programs or Little League coaching, and contributing time in other ways. Some problems—for example, mental illness and hard-core homelessness—will continue to require specialized care, but states should experiment with ways to provide ordinary citizens with small incentives to give time as well as money, and those who contribute of themselves should be honored.

9. What these propositions point to is a sense that realism today means taking into account more than material conditions. The War on Poverty defined realism as emphasizing dollars and cents rather than children's need for a two-parent family. Realism today means putting children first by finding ways to reverse the trend toward fatherlessness and family malformation. The extent of our cultural loss is conveyed in an anecdote offered by Anne Gordon, who lives with her intact family in the very poor North Lawndale area of Chicago. She recalls the visit of a woman who "came to our house one night at dinner time. She knocked on the door and we were all sitting around the dinner table eating and she said, 'Do you all do this every night?' . . . It seemed to her like a big event, whereas to us it was just part of family life and very normal." All of the improvements in North Lawndale will avail little unless attitudes change so that the tender mercies of a family dinner become normal activities.

10. Overall, keeping massive numbers of new people from entrapment in welfare rolls is not a mystery. The formula is simple: we make a societal commitment, as our forebears did, to

godly patterns of sexual practice and family development. We emphasize abstinence and personal responsibility among both males and females. We work toward an adoption-friendly society by stressing the needs of children, regardless of race, for two parents and a stable home life, and by making it financially possible for families at all economic levels to adopt. We know that good programs designed to meet these goals can work because they worked under somewhat different but equally difficult circumstances a century ago. We do need to find ways to apply these old lessons in new contexts.

## Chapter 9

### *Proclaiming Liberty Throughout the Land*

This book suggests that each reader go beyond the failed governmental war on poverty by starting his or her own. We need to show love for our own families and then resolve to help at least one other person or family out of poverty. How can we love others? Let me count a few of the ways: tutor a child. Mentor students or young adults. Be a Little League baseball coach. Counsel an unmarried mother. Be a volunteer librarian at a church school in a poor neighborhood. Teach rich and poor what the Bible has to say about wealth and poverty. Help a poor person negotiate the legal system. Employ a jobless person. Lead a neighborhood association in a poor part of town. Start a crisis pregnancy center. Give a pregnant teenager a room in your home. House a homeless person. Adopt a child.

Friends at the Progress & Freedom Foundation have kindly suggested that it might seem unfair of me to press others to action without acknowledging that I have pressed myself. Revealing such personal stories leaves me uncomfortable but the friendly comments make sense, so here goes: my wife and I have helped out a bit by doing at various times the things listed in the above paragraph, and others. Most of these experiences have turned out to be useful to poor individuals and satisfying to

ourselves, but not all. Since the introduction to this book began on a personal note, this closing chapter can begin in the same way, with a mention of two of the personal efforts—one successful foray that began a decade ago, one current attempt that at this writing is a decided failure.

The first effort involved an unmarried, Hispanic nineteen-year-old college student—call her Isabella—who became pregnant. When her twenty-five-year-old boyfriend—call him Chuck—learned she was pregnant, he dumped her. Her traditionalist father made it clear that she had shamed the whole family and was not welcome at home. Summer vacation came but Isabella could not go home or afford an apartment, so she sought help at our local crisis pregnancy center, which offered her shelter in a home—ours. She lived with us for six months until the baby was born.

Isabella became in one sense part of our family, joining us around the dinner table, praying with us, and playing with our children. At the same time, however, she was a stranger in strange terrain, often feeling the need to retreat to her bedroom and mourn there alone. She worked during most of that period at a local convenience store so as to save money for an apartment, and that was sometimes hard. A month after giving birth, Isabella moved into an apartment with two other women her own age.

The story does not end there. Chuck, after seeing the tiny being he had fathered, began to grow as fast as the baby did. He fell in love with his daughter, then fell in love with Isabella all over again. They married, and over the next several years had two more children; their marriage, while suffering some ups and downs as do others, is now well established. Isabella graduated from college. So did her husband, pushed to gain maturity.

Ten years later, my wife and I stay in contact with Chuck and Isabella. Their first daughter, who might have been aborted had

Isabella not been so determined to keep her and hope alive, and whose first home was our home, is a beautiful young lady. Isabella's husband works at rehabbing homes, a task that requires some heavy lifting at times, and he has given my two teenage sons their first outside-the-home jobs. (They have better muscles than me and have earned their pay.) All in all, a tale that is certainly satisfying to tell.

This second one is not. One day my pastor met in a restaurant a thirty-eight-year-old ex-convict—call him, creatively, John Doe—and invited him to church. John had expressed belief in Christ while serving eight years in prison and was showing discipline in reporting to a restaurant job every day, but he still had difficulty in controlling impulses and planning ahead. Church members offered him biblical teaching, financial counseling, suggestions for improving job skills, transportation, listening, and encouragement; I was one of the helpers. We always made it clear that we could not carry John to a better life: we could help, but the responsibility was his.

As it turned out, he could not handle that responsibility at that time. After quarreling with a roommate he hit the streets, working day jobs at times, drinking at times, and perhaps gaining other immediate gratifications at times, but doing nothing to set up a long-term ascent. His emotional instability did not make it appropriate for him to live in a home where women and children were present. We urged him and helped him to enter two local programs that could have given order to his life, but he did not stick with either for more than three days. On his own, John got into a brawl, went to jail, and eventually was shipped off to prison for violating parole.

John's attitude showed improvement the last time he and I talked; maybe he will be released soon and can start over again. But, to help John and others like him, the essence of his problem must be understood. There is much talk in Washington of the

need to create more low-skilled jobs, and it is true that many city manufacturing jobs have disappeared in recent decades, but finding work is not a problem for John and those like him in most cities. Many entry-level jobs that would lead to stability and a solid income, if John stuck with them, are available. Beginning workers have to put aside immediate gratification, and that is especially hard when a person is thirty-eight and eager to make up for time lost in prison, but the success of many recent immigrants shows that opportunity is still present and that patience breeds success.

We also hear about the unavailability of low-cost housing, and it is true that ill-conceived governmental urban renewal plans eliminated many single-room occupancy buildings and inexpensive apartments; it is also true that unnecessary governmental building codes and specifications keep other low-income apartments from being built, or drive up their cost. But even so, and even in Austin with its high rates of apartment occupancy, John's problem was not housing (unless it is assumed that every homeless man has a right to his own house or apartment). John's problem was finding a congenial roommate and getting along with people generally. John is intelligent and physically capable; his problem, like the problem of many Milwaukee AFDC moms who do not enter the Right Alternative program, like the problem of Washington addicts who do not stick with the Clean and Sober Streets program, has been attitude.

After all, think about what Marsh Ward of Clean and Sober Streets learned after years of thinking that the poor were imprisoned within societal walls: Ward saw that when attitude changes, a formerly homeless alcoholic or addict finds a hole in the wall and *goes right through*. Ward saw that attitude and behavior, most of the time, make all the difference. Is it true that, if all attitudes changed, the economy would be unable to provide or grow jobs for all? It probably would, but macro questions of that sort are

irrelevant to the decision of any particular poor individual: if attitude changes there is a hole in the wall, and *he goes right through*.

More Republicans in Washington and around the country need to stress the historical and current evidence that shows there is a hole in the wall for those whose behavior changes. More Democrats need to understand that governmental programs work poorly because their tendency over time, even when they start out solidly, is to substitute entitlement for challenge, bureaucracy for personal help, and the naked public square for faith. Our predecessors made use of the seven principles of effective compassion summarized in chapter four; we can even simplify them into an emphasis on help that is challenging, personal, and spiritual.

We can teach fellow citizens to remember the basics in the same way that millions of Americans now know the meaning of the letters CPR. They know that when death is near, as with the four-year-old submerged in the swimming pool, cardiopulmonary resuscitation may restore normal breathing. Similarly, now that American society is in dire straits, we need to teach CPS: compassion that is challenging, personal, and spiritual. (Those three letters also begin the three syllables of the word "com-pas-sion.")

Lifesaving CPR has three defined elements, and the first is heart massage by the exertion of pressure. A person using CPR does not press down faintly on the chest of a person close to death. He challenges the heart to respond, and it is important that the push in CPS also be hard. A century ago, homeless shelters were not enablers that maintained alcoholics and addicts in their lifestyles and asked little or nothing of them. Instead, they followed the challenging advice that the apostle Paul gave in his epistle to the Thessalonians: if an able-bodied man does not work, he shall not eat.

An emphasis on challenge at the present time suggests that we need to stop talking about “the poor” in the abstract and start distinguishing once again between those willing to struggle and those just looking for an enabler. Just as our national and state public policy measures should promote economic growth, so should our individual and community efforts emphasize work, not make-work or excuses. Industrious women on AFDC and men desperate to support their families deserve concentrated help, not the pittance they receive when they are lumped in with those who merely want to work the system. Alcoholics, addicts, drifters, and irresponsible parents must be challenged to change their destructive behavior; if parents abuse their children, adoptive parents are ready to take them in.

When we think of the second element of CPR—clearance of air passages to the lungs—an intense image may come to mind: the volunteer performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, occasionally stopping for a second to half-mutter, half-pray, “Breathe . . . Breathe.” Effective compassion needs a level of *personal* involvement almost as great, and that’s what the second letter of CPS stands for. In many poverty-fighting situations, lives and values also have to be resuscitated, and people learn more from an individual they respect (and perhaps love) than from a textbook.

Here again there are lessons from the past: a century ago, charity volunteers usually were not assigned to massive food-dispensing tasks, but were given the narrow but deep responsibility of making a difference in one life over several years. A typical magazine story reveals how one “demoralized” woman was helped: “For months she was worked with, now through kindness, again through discipline, until finally she began to show a desire to help herself.” For months: “Breathe! Breathe!” Today, it is hard to buy the level of personal involvement that is needed to be next to an addict as he is going through with-

drawal pains—but at Victory Fellowship chapters and similar organizations, a person who recently escaped addiction himself and wants to help one other person do the same sits by a kicking addict’s bedside.

Similarly, the cost of providing the professional support needed to stand by all the unmarried, pregnant teenagers who are going through the pain of abandonment by boyfriends and parents would bankrupt governments. But true, personal help arrives when a married couple with compassion for a tough-talking but frightened teen gives her a room in their home and a place at their dinner table. We should participate in and support programs that emphasize one-to-one approaches. We should not overlook bonds that, even if torn, already exist. We should support attempts to reunite aid seekers with families and friends, for as history shows and Psalm 66 states, “God sets the lonely in families.”

The third element of CPR is use of appropriate medications. The idea is to take what is of proven effectiveness and apply it immediately. No one doing CPR goes to a medicine cabinet and tries whatever the snake-oil salesman of the week has peddled. In the same way, there is a medication of proven effectiveness for the poor who see themselves as worthless: successful antipoverty work, past and present, has given the poor self-esteem not by offering easy, feel-good praise, but by reminding them that a wonderful God made them in His image and has a purpose for their lives. “True philanthropy must take into account spiritual as well as physical needs,” poverty fighters a century ago noted, and that is why the third letter in CPS stands for “spiritual.”

Sadly, the federal War on Poverty of the 1960s presented a rummaging around in the medicine cabinet. Religious teaching, instead of being embraced by bureaucrats at least as a way of helping roaming individuals to think about their purpose in life,



was excluded by judicial decree and administrative design. Instead of letting Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, and others all compete in doing good—over time we would see who is the most successful—they were all excluded unless they were willing to embrace in daily practice a philosophy alien to their beliefs. We've discussed in several chapters ways to overcome that error; there is nothing more essential than to seek God's help once again, and to fight a war on poverty that is personal and spiritual.

CPS: it's easy to say, but let's not pretend that the type of change proposed here will be easy. We need to reject the notion of material redistributionists that change is as easy as passing a bill or writing a check. Every successful person in society can look back at the human and spiritual capital that has been invested in him. Grandparents, parents, teachers, mentors, and others have successfully communicated values of discipline, planning, and long-term commitment; sometimes, God has touched and altered lives. Without the intervention of God and man, all of us fixate merely on short-term gratification, and that is the path to poverty, regardless of how much money we have at the start.

The good news is that radical transformations of individual lives do occur, and in abundance. Furthermore, we should realize that the amount of compassion in a society is not fixed. In 1995, newspapers emphasized the demand side, speculating on enormous needs versus the limited ability of current charities to fill them. We now need to focus on the supply side, realizing that giving increases as contributor confidence concerning the wise use of funds and the need for commitment grows.

Overall, the evidence indicates that when charity is challenging, personal, and spiritual, antipoverty work can be effective. The crisis of the modern welfare state is a crisis of government, but it is also a crisis of individual giving and nongiving. All of us

need to learn how to apply CPS: some will have more time to give; some will have more dollars; but everyone can do something that will help and not hurt. Everyone can do something.

*He goes right through.* That statement could characterize the way that the American welfare system, which for thirty years defied serious reform, suddenly changed in 1995. Serious change brings with it not only opponents but skeptical participants; as the Israelites walked through the Red Sea, some probably muttered, It's all an optical illusion. But welfare reform, if pushed even harder over the next several years so that it moves from reform to replacement, is no illusion. Nor is it an illusion for people concerned about poverty whom I met during 1995 in New York and Virginia, Michigan and Wisconsin, Mississippi and Texas and Oklahoma, Colorado and Arizona and California, and other states. They are hopeful about welfare for the first time in many years because they can see the opportunity to go right through.

More people are capturing the understanding that the major flaw of the modern welfare state is not that it is extravagant but that it is too stingy, giving the needy bread and telling them to be content with that alone. More people are saying, in the words of the Bible that are inscribed on a bell in Philadelphia, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof." If more Americans during the next five years give of themselves to accomplish just that, many of the poor will be free men and women as they enter a new millennium. And what about "John Doe"? He too can have true liberty, if he lives by the principles that the Bible and American history teach, and is not satisfied to be either a lone wolf or a paternalized pet.

This book has been written for the sake of my friend in prison, and others like him.



## *Appendix A*

### *A Pledge to Action*

Sometimes, when we finish reading a book that proposes action, we know exactly what we can do; sometimes, we do not know where to begin. If you want to help and are already involved in a truly compassionate activity, go to it. If you are not sure where to begin, though, read the following pledge that summarizes the principles of effective compassion, take the brief self-diagnosis quiz following the principles, and check out the organizations in your community that operate in your areas of interest. Then let the Center for Effective Compassion know what you find out; there is a form at the end of this appendix, and an address to which it may be sent.

#### *Preamble*

The tragedy of America's underclass is chronicled daily in our newspapers and on the nightly news. Today we watch, seemingly helpless, as generation after generation of children are condemned to lives of squalor, violence, and, all too often, premature death. We know it is wrong—deeply, fundamentally, morally wrong. But we seem powerless to do anything about it.

Why are we failing? Some argue that the government has not

spent enough on antipoverty programs. And yet, the trillions of dollars we've spent on welfare programs over the past thirty years have failed to alleviate poverty. Indeed, the big government approach appears to have made many of our most pressing problems, from joblessness to family disintegration, even worse. The destruction of bonds among givers, receivers, and mediating organizations has laid waste to once productive communities of helpers and helped.

Some reformers call for private charities to step in and shoulder more of the burden. That's the right idea, but much of our private assistance network—like a muscle that's too long been unused—has begun to atrophy. Fund-raisers for charities complain of “compassion fatigue”—dwindling donations from people who are either overwhelmed by the size of our problems or assume that they're the government's responsibility. (What else are they doing with my taxes? they figure.) The understanding that people should make charitable contributions to organizations in which they volunteer or about which they are knowledgeable has often been lost.

It's time to transform the way we help those in need. On one point the country has reached consensus: we need a major overhaul of the welfare system. And yet, we must be clear about the reasons for reform. Governmental welfare programs must be confronted not because they are too expensive—although, clearly, billions are being wasted—but because they are inevitably too stingy in what only individuals can give: time, love, and compassion.

The welfare state should be abolished not out of fiscal responsibility, but out of moral responsibility. The casualties of America's war on poverty have been the poor themselves. The evidence of history can no longer be ignored: the welfare state is cruel, not merely misguided. As Americans, we can and must do better.

Private charities can do a better job than government. The history of American philanthropy is one of our country's greatest legacies. And yet, some private programs or partnerships do a pale impersonation of the government initiatives that have so dismally failed. Some private charities also suffer from bureaucratization, centralization, the mass production of benefits, and an exclusive focus on the material nature of poverty. We need to focus once again on moral questions, on the processes that build character. Charity that treats the capable as incapable robs people of capacities.

### *Seven Principles*

To renew American compassion, we commit ourselves to the seven principles of effective compassion contained in this pledge—principles that can help revitalize the volunteer community, resolve our most pressing social problems, and restore the moral authority of our country as a beacon of freedom for the world.

#### *Principle #1: Affiliation (Connect With Families and Community)*

A century ago, when individuals applied for material assistance, charity volunteers tried first to “restore family ties that have been sundered” and “reabsorb in social life those who for some reason have snapped the threads that bound them to other members of the community.” The first question asked by charity was, Who is bound to help in this case?

Today, before creating new antipoverty programs or contributing to a private charity, we too must ask, Does it work through families, neighbors, and religious or community organizations? For instance, many homeless alcoholics have families, but they do not want to be with them. When homeless shelters simply hand out food, clothing, housing without asking hard

questions, they run the risk of enabling an addiction while furthering the alienation at its root.

To renew compassion, we must help reconnect those in need with their brothers, sisters, spouses, parents, children, and community. We also need to help the helpers: it is hard for a family to take in a relative with a drug addiction problem, and our compassion needs to be directed to courageous families as well.

A radically new approach to our problems must recognize that effective compassion is a far more complex and richly woven responsibility than simply tossing a few coins at a street person or pulling the ballot lever for the political candidate with all the answers. Effective compassion asks whether our efforts help reinforce family bonds and strengthen community ties or whether they perversely serve to increase an individual's isolation.

Effective compassion also asks whether a program of aid to an unmarried teenage mother increases the likelihood that she will be reunited with those whom she actually depends on, whether she admits it or not (e.g., parents, the child's father), or offers a mirage of independence. It is good to give Christmas presents to poor children, but effective compassion asks whether the gifts are given to parents to wrap and place under a tree—or whether parents watch on the sidelines while Santa doles out the goods.

Concerning this principle and those that follow, various organizations may have different means to the same end. A homeless shelter and a tutoring/sports program for teens both need to connect recipients of help with families and communities, but their means are very different. The Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago probes the family backgrounds of homeless men and tries to make connections, while Voice of Hope in Dallas requires parents of children in the program to show up periodically and help out. But both are devoted to seeing those they help as members of families and communities, not as lone wolves.

### *Principle #2: Bonding (Help One-By-One)*

When applicants for help are truly alone, effective compassion means working one-to-one to become, in essence, new family members. Charity volunteers a century ago usually were not assigned to massive food-dispensing tasks but were given the narrow but deep responsibility of making a difference in one life over several years.

Today, when a boy is growing up without that combination of love and discipline that only a father can provide, a volunteer at a Big Brother program can show him a different model of manhood than the fighting-and-impregnating version that dominates some barren cityscapes. When an unmarried pregnant teenager is dumped by her boyfriend and abandoned by angry parents who refuse to be reconciled, a volunteer family working through a local crisis pregnancy center can provide her a room in their home and a place at the dinner table.

Sure, it may be easier to give someone the phone number of the right agency; that might ease our conscience with the illusory gratification of having "helped." But effective compassion recognizes that one size does not fit all—only a personalized, face-to-face approach tailored to the individual (or sometimes the family) offers any hope for turning lives around. Institutions should be bond makers, not bond breakers; Alcoholics Anonymous is a prime example of creating a community that is not geographic or economic and promoting bonds within that community.

For Father Clements, a Roman Catholic priest, this approach began with his adoption of one homeless child and blossomed into the aptly named One Church-One Child—a program that spread to thirty-nine states and resulted in the adoption of 40,000 children. The program was such a success that he has now applied its community-intensive, individualized strategy to

tackling the problem of substance abuse by launching One Church-One Addict.

Father Clements demonstrates the spirit of the Talmudic expression, recently recalled in the movie *Schindler's List*, "He who saves one life, saves the world." To renew American compassion, we must apply this wisdom to each person we approach.

*Principle #3: Categorization (Treat Different Problems Differently)*

The individualized approach of effective compassion recognizes that two persons in exactly the same material circumstance but with different histories, abilities, and values may need different treatment—ranging from material help to new skills to a spiritual challenge and a push. Historically, this approach is one that produced results. Those who were orphaned, elderly, or disabled received aid. Jobless adults who were "able and willing to work" received help in job finding. And "those who prefer to live on alms" and those of "confirmed intemperance" were not entitled to material assistance.

Volunteers used "work tests" to both sort applicants and provide relief with dignity. For instance, when an able-bodied man came to a homeless shelter, he often was asked to chop wood for an hour or two or to whitewash a building. In that way, he could provide part of his own support and also help those unable to chop. A needy woman generally was given a seat in the "sewing room" (often near a child-care room) and asked to work on garments that would be donated to the poor or sent through the Red Cross to families suffering from the effects of natural disasters. The work test, along with teaching good habits and keeping away those who did not really need help, also enabled charities to teach the lesson that those who were being helped could help others.

To renew American compassion today, we must stop talking about "the poor" as an abstract phenomenon haunting society and start talking in practical, ground-level, concrete, individual terms about how to help. What do you need? What can you do? Where have you been? By asking such questions, we can begin again to distinguish between those who truly want help and a second chance and those who want an enabler.

Work tests can provide some early indication of a willingness to accept responsibility. Why shouldn't able-bodied homeless persons remove graffiti, clean up streets, and pluck weeds at parks? Why shouldn't a new church that worships in a ballroom and needs to put up and take down chairs each Sunday ask a homeless person to help in that effort, and stay for the service and dinner afterwards, instead of sending him on his way with a few dollars?

The question to ask is twofold: what do you need, and what can you do? By putting people to work, effective compassion helps create workers. By giving applicants something to care for, it helps create people who care. By treating people as unique individuals rather than stray pets, it helps restore humanity and dignity.

*Principle #4: Discernment (Give Responsibly)*

Block grants may work on a governmental level, but they do not work on the streets. Effective compassion does not simply hand out blank checks—it discriminates between those who are truly hungry and those who are looking for a free lunch. If individuals have habits or are engaged in practices that are contributing to their own downfall, material assistance may only speed their progress toward oblivion—just as a broken engine is not fixed by simply fueling it with more gas.

A century ago, poverty fighters trained volunteers to leave

behind “a conventional attitude toward the poor, seeing them through the comfortable haze of our own intentions.” Aid given with “no strings attached” and “no questions asked” may feed the ego of the giver as he contemplates his largesse, but it can often hurt more than it helps. Indeed, one of the most deep-seated misunderstandings about effective compassion has been the ironic equation of indiscriminate, anonymous giving with the values of equality and dignity. Even today, we see bumper stickers and tee shirts urging us to “commit random acts of kindness.” That is a vast improvement on random acts of violence. But kindness is not random. Kindness is specific.

Providers of effective compassion always recognized that barriers against fraud were important not only to prevent waste, but to preserve morale among those working hard to remain independent. The same applies today to the need for tough standards within compassionate institutions. For example, Clean and Sober Streets is a haven within the District of Columbia for drug and alcohol addicts who are trying to pull their lives together. Addicts receive the close attention and caring that are unlikely in a government institution. At the heart of the project's success are recovering addicts who have successfully completed six weeks of treatment and act as mentors to new arrivals. But the program also has a big stick: residents who drink or use drugs on the premises are immediately kicked out. Rule-bound government shelters have difficulty ejecting addicts who backslide or assault fellow residents—and as a result, they make it harder for those who want to turn their lives around.

Today, lack of discernment in helping the poor is rapidly producing an anticompassion backlash, as the better-off, unable to distinguish between the truly needy and freeloaders, have an excuse to give to neither. To renew American compassion, we must help wisely—giving with our heads as well as our hearts.

#### *Principle #5: Employment (Demand Work)*

If a grown son needed a place to stay after, for instance, losing a job or house, we would undoubtedly want to welcome him back to his old room—perhaps even kept intact with his old football trophies or high school yearbook. We probably would ask him to help out around the house, maybe to do the grocery shopping or mow the lawn—and we would expect him to look for work. It would be inconceivable, no matter how much we loved him, for us to advocate his staying on indefinitely, to discourage him from lifting a finger around the house, to forgo any mention of a job search, and to subsidize his idleness with free food, unlimited television, and a rules-free environment. Families do not operate that way.

Many charities and welfare programs do. Historically, practitioners of effective compassion have recognized simple rules of supply and demand: if individuals are paid not to work, unemployment multiplies, chronic poverty sets in, and generations of young people grow up without seeing work as a natural and essential part of life. Government aid programs are most vulnerable to falling into this trap: because they operate outside the market, government assistance is often seen as flowing from a practically inexhaustible source. Like air or water or sunshine, assistance comes to be regarded as a right, as a permanent pension implying no obligation.

Today, programs that stress employment, sometimes in creative new ways, need greater emphasis and deserve our support. For example, more of the able-bodied should receive not housing but the opportunity to work for a home through “sweat equity” arrangements in which labor constitutes most of the down payment. Some who start in rigorous programs of this sort drop out with complaints that too much sweat is required. But one applicant who completed a tough program summarized what his new

home meant to him: "We are poor, but we have something that is ours. When you use your own blood, sweat, and tears, it's part of your soul. You stand and say, 'I did it.'"

Special efforts need to be made in helping the physically disabled or the mentally below par, but even for these harder cases, work is useful. For example, one program has trained those with IQs below the Forrest Gump level to work well as supermarket baggers; occasionally they start putting gallons of milk on top of bread and need some retraining. And the movie itself, fictional though it is, displayed in its portrayal of the double-amputee Lieutenant Dan the important fact that even those without legs can find appropriate tasks, and in doing so regain their dignity.

*Principle #6: Freedom (Reduce Barriers to Compassion and Enterprise)*

Thomas Jefferson coined the axiom that "government can do something for the people only in proportion to what it can do to the people." Our founders firmly grasped the inverse relationship between state power and individual freedom—they knew that government-provided services, no matter how well intentioned, inevitably carried a coercive virus of rules, regulation, and numbing bureaucracy. Perhaps this was the wisdom behind charity workers' past reluctance to ask government to come in and take charge of the poor; they chose instead to show the needy how to move up the ladder while steering clear of perpetual dependency.

Freedom was the opportunity to drive a wagon without paying bribes, to cut hair without having to go to barbers' college, and to get a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder even if wages there were low. Freedom was the opportunity for a family to escape dire poverty by having a father work long hours and a mother sew garments at home. Life was hard, but static, multi-generational poverty of the kind we now have was rare.

The twentieth century has witnessed the march toward greater and greater politicization of life. Big government, once viewed with suspicion, came increasingly to be seen as omniscient, omnipotent, and infallibly beneficent. We are more inclined to redistribute wealth than to give people the tools to create it. We are more inclined to march on Washington than to walk into inner cities ourselves, offering our services.

By viewing the free market as the creator of poverty, we have regulated and restricted it, impeding one of the most reliable vehicles to independence. Today, in our eagerness to hoist those at the bottom of the ladder out of poverty, we have raised its lowest rungs out of the reach of many of those left on the ground.

Regulations designed to protect workers on the job, for example, increasingly make employers reluctant to hire those with drug backgrounds or other indications of potential instability. Small businessmen who desire to be compassionate in their hiring need to be free to take on workers without clean records; they need to be able to do drug testing and to fire workers (without legal or financial repercussions) during an initial trial period if they misbehave. Liberating small businessmen will create more opportunity for the poor to begin climbing the ladder.

*Principle #7: God (Reliance on the Creator and His Providence)*

Some people think of poverty fighting like they think of dinner table discussions: it is a violation of etiquette to emphasize the importance of religious beliefs. But the facts leave us no choice: successful antipoverty work, past and present, has allowed the poor to earn authentic self-esteem not by offering easy, feel-good praise, but by pointing them to God. Most successful programs in America have stressed biblical religion. Some have spoken of a less-defined "higher power," but all have reconnect-

ed poor individuals—who may only have been thinking about the next meal or the next fix—to life's spiritual dimension and higher purpose.

Antipoverty workers of the past understood that self-respect is based on having a purpose in life, on understanding that we are created in God's image and thus have value. They knew that those who were not committed to running a consistent race over a long period of time would most likely worship the gods of immediate satisfaction, including drugs, alcohol, and adultery. Given that understanding, they knew that the antidote to poverty was an infusion of new values, not cash, for an irresponsible person and his money soon would be parted.

The federal government's gradual entrenchment in America's public service sector created an increasingly inhospitable environment for charity's religious elements. Too often today, the spiritual inspiration fueling much of our country's grassroots volunteer work is branded as sectarian and (if it applies for taxpayer dollars) banned as unconstitutional. When religion was banished, a variety of experimental social programs were ushered in, but none touched the pessimistic core values of the welfare mentality. Antidrug programs without a spiritual base, for example, have success rates in the single digits. Such programs contrast starkly with those that provide God-centered medication rather than simple bandaging of wounds.

Lots of programs ask people to have faith in themselves or the latest social work doctrines, but in general nothing changes until faith in God transforms values. Moms getting off AFDC through the help of organizations like the Right Alternative Family Service Center in Milwaukee are witnesses to the way value changes lead to behavior changes that allow individuals to hold a job and build a cohesive family. Government programs often emphasize job training, but unless the basics are first dealt with, long-term success is rare.

The same pattern pertains to children at risk, as Hannah Hawkins shows daily in Anacostia. She gives an eternal gift that government cannot provide—Bible lessons showing the difference between right and wrong—and in so doing begins to construct a foundation strong enough to resist the temptations of street culture. Given all the evidence of the importance of spiritual approaches in fighting poverty and drugs, even those who do not believe in God should appreciate the social utility of allowing religious groups of every kind the same opportunity to develop and fund programs that secular groups now have.

### *A Call to Dedicated Action*

Americans can be proud of our nation's long history of compassion for those in need. But the condition of our cities, the epidemic of drug addiction and violent crime, the crisis of teen pregnancy, the crushing poverty and endemic homelessness—these are all causes for shame.

In recent decades, we have allowed true caring to be replaced by the myth of institutional compassion—the idea that we can fulfill our sincere desire to help those in need by writing a check to some institutional charity (government or private) that will do the rest for us. The cost of that myth is measured daily in the lives of three generations of children who have grown up in a culture of poverty.

It is time to dispense with the myth and substitute for it the principles of effective compassion that Americans long have known. For more than two centuries, those principles guided our efforts to provide opportunity for those in need. It is time to reclaim wisdom only recently forgotten. The renewal of American compassion will not occur immediately, and I know that revitalization will not be easy. But each year of delay is a year of increased suffering.



The good news is that the revolution has begun. Individuals, church groups, and volunteer associations are rediscovering the principles of effective compassion that have historically made American generosity a shining example for all the world. People have caught on to the folly of relying on arbitrary benchmarks of spending or numbers served and have begun to count compassion the only way that really matters: one person, one family at a time.

What's needed now is personal dedication. Therefore, I pledge to practice the principles of effective compassion in my own life by identifying, volunteering at or contributing to, and informing others about at least one nonprofit organization that practices effective compassion; an evaluation sheet is shown on page 166. My specific goal is to help one person or one family over the next year; that means taking personal, hands-on responsibility (perhaps shared with friends, relatives, or colleagues) for one person, one problem, one littered edge of America's community square.

## SELF-DIAGNOSIS QUIZ

Helping people who are poor may require you to move outside your comfort zone. At the same time, with the host of problems that demand action, it's important to pick an area of endeavor that emotionally resonates with you. These questions may help you to pin down areas to pursue.

1. The most moving, or most troubling, personal encounter I've had with someone in poverty was  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. The last news story I read or saw about some aspect of poverty that made me want to do something was  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Concerning the problems that have moved me, I feel capable of volunteering in this way:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Organizations in my area that work on those problems include  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. Organizations in my area worth visiting, in light of the four questions above:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## EVALUATION SHEET

Please mail to Director, Center for Effective Compassion, 1301  
K St NW, Suite 650 West, Washington, D.C., 20005.

Name of organization:

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Address:

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Contact person, telephone number:

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Brief description of organization's purpose:

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How does the organization emphasize affiliation?

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How does the organization promote bonding?

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How does the organization practice categorization?

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How does the organization show discernment?

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How does the organization demand employment?

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How does the organization promote freedom?

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How does the organization rely on faith in God?

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Overall: Ask yourself if the organization offers compassion that is challenging, personal, and spiritual. If it falls short in any of those areas, please note that below and explain why it might still be considered a model worthy of replication.

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And, before you sign up, two more questions are vital:

Judging from management reputation, budget, apparent level of efficiency, etc., does the organization seem to be well run?

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Is there an established and satisfactory procedure for training volunteers?

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Your name, address, and telephone number:

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## Appendix B

*A Biblical Base*

The Bible was cited often during Congress's 1995 welfare reform debates—and often inaccurately.\* The religious left has often twisted Scripture to make it conform to modern liberal ideology, but the Bible is a much deeper document. What follows is a quick survey, first of the Old Testament, then of the New.

*Old Testament*

Let's begin with something on which religious left and right can agree: throughout the Old Testament we are commanded not to sit back when there are poor people among us. God's redemptive work in bringing Israel out of Egypt provides a motivation for mercy ministry. Deuteronomy 15 notes, "If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs."

\*See, for example, March 23, 1995, *Congressional Record*, 104th Cong., 1st sess., p. H3713.

Similarly, Psalm 82:3 prompts us to "defend the cause of the weak and fatherless," and Isaiah 1:17 similarly commands, "Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." As God is merciful to us, we are to be merciful to others, and in the process learn the truth of Proverbs 22:9: "A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor."

God promises blessings for obedience, but never an all-expenses-paid vacation. Here it is important to understand the biblical concept of labor, both before and after the traumatic events in the Garden of Eden. If work were something that had to be done only because of man's sin and fall from grace, we would be right to treat it as something to be endured only until "Miller time" arrives—but Genesis 2:15 (pre-fall) tells how "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Adam had a good combination of intellectual and physical labor: it was his job to name the animals (a name was supposed to reveal the essence of the creature, so finding the right name required hard thinking) and also to work the garden. Adam's work was not endlessly frustrating, as work sometimes is today, for then it was without thorns. He enjoyed perfect dominion over the earth.

That all changed with man's independent and rebellious grasping for the knowledge of good and evil and consequent expulsion from the garden. Genesis 3:17–19 summarizes the outcome: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food. . . ." Man must now do tiring work to live, but the pre-fall nature of work shows us that man does not work for bread alone: we miss one of God's gifts to us when we do not seek productive work.

Work now is painful but useful both for survival and for

character development: work is a tuition-free education in diligence. Throughout the Bible, and in Proverbs specifically, character and economic success go together: “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. . . . He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment. . . . Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor. . . . Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare” (Prov. 10:4, 12:11, 12:24, 20:13). That there are annual exceptions to these general rules is clear—farmers may work hard throughout the summer and lose their crops to a sudden storm—but over a lifetime their applicability is equally clear.

The moral value of labor is emphasized in the way Proverbs lampoons the lazy: “The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth. . . . The sluggard says, ‘There is a lion outside’ or ‘I will be murdered in the streets.’” (Prov. 19:24, 22:13). For the most part, though, God’s writers contrast the present-mindedness of paupers with the willingness to delay gratification that is the engine of economic progress: “A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks and finds nothing. . . . The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty. . . . He who loves pleasure will become poor. . . . In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has. . . . The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work” (Prov. 20:4, 21:5, 21:17, 21:20, 21:25).

The folly of some among the poor, however, does not mean that they can be treated as subhuman, for poor as well as rich are created in God’s image. The Old Testament anticipates the New in noting that wrong action toward the least of God’s people shows a lack of faith in their creator: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (Prov. 14:31). This passage and others

nowhere suggest mandatory redistribution of wealth, but they do emphasize God’s abhorrence of dishonesty, legal shenanigans, and other tendencies to twist the market to gain unfair advantage. Proverbs condemns those who “share plunder with the proud” and states flatly that “the Lord detests differing weights; dishonest scales do not please him” (Prov. 16:19, 23:23).

Amos 5:11–12 provides the clearest statements of this sort: “You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. . . . You oppress the righteous and take bribes, and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.” Amos’s withering criticism is aimed at those who use governmental power to force the poor to do what they would otherwise not do, often by building public-private partnerships that enable those with wealth to get more by wielding tax and courtroom power. Honest business pursuits are no vice, but “skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales” tramples the needy (Amos 8:4–6).

Those with wealth are to provide opportunities for the poor to rise out of poverty; the typical starting point in the Old Testament was gleaning. As the book of Ruth most clearly shows, landowners were to leave the corners of their fields unharvested and the upper branches of fruit trees unpicked, so that those willing to work hard would not starve. Character counted: Boaz married Ruth for several reasons, but he began to pay attention to her when he saw that she worked hard all day long. (She may also have been pretty, but we are not told that; we are told that Boaz and Ruth, a Moabite woman who came to believe in God, became the great-grandparents of King David and thus ancestors of Christ.)

The institution of gleaning offered opportunity to aliens such as Ruth who had no land, and also to those within Israel who had lost their inheritances. The Old Testament also mentions several other devices, including the sabbath year and the jubilee

year, that God gave as a way of offering new opportunity. Israelites could buy and sell freely everything except land, which could be offered only for long-term lease, with rental payment varying according to the length of contract; once in fifty years (the jubilee year) all contracts were to conclude so that land would revert to the families of the original owners, and thus allow a new generation new opportunity.

In situations where there was no opportunity for people to earn bread by the sweat of their brow, God did provide—but in a manner that always provided a spiritual lesson along with material help. In Exodus 16:31, God gives the Israelites manna that is not only life-sustaining but tasty, “like wafers made with honey.” The next phase of God’s providence was not so pleasant, however. When people were not content with their daily bread but demanded daily meat, the Lord provided another feeding connected with teaching—but this time, with people not crying out from necessity, God answered their petitions and kept answering: “The Lord will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the Lord . . .” (Numbers 11:18–20). Disease followed.

In this passage and others, God shows us that he will ordinarily supply our needs but not our wants. Significantly, God’s people are not immune to the results of spiritual disobedience. In this passage and others, disobedience always has consequences, and when an entire society embraces ungodliness, even those who have had tough lives are not excused. We have to work hard to earn more than the basics, and we have to behave decently to retain even the minimum: when Israel goes foul, God declares that He will not “pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks villainess” (Isa. 9:17). Part of the tithes that God’s people are com-

manded to give may go to help the poor, but the poor always have responsibilities as well.

Above all, there is no “preferential option” for either poor or rich. God is a theological determinist, and belief is more important than status. Representative Glenn Poshard of Illinois stated, “If there is one thing evident in the Scriptures, it is that God gives priority to the poor”—and yet, what is evident is that God says that we should not give class-based preferences. “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong,” Exodus 23:2 states. “When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.”

Passage after passage shows that biblical justice means the offer of a fair hearing: “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits” and “do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (Exod. 23:6, Lev. 19:15). Justice means the upholding of contracts; God is on the side of the poor when the rich use political power to place themselves above the law: “Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor” (Jer. 22:13–17).

This theme receives particularly pointed examination in chapter five of Nehemiah, where the emphasis is on not using courts to oppress working people and on lowering taxes: “Neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver [about one pound] from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall” (Neh. 5:14,15).

Where do these passages and many others, correlated with

each other, leave us? Quick summary: we're told to defend the rights of the poor, particularly widows, orphans, and aliens. We're told that work is good, although now impeded by thorns. We're told that the provision of food should be coupled with the provision of spiritual lessons. We're told that justice means giving the poor full legal rights, but not treating them as more worthy than the rich just by virtue of their class position. We're told that the poor should be given opportunity to glean and that provision through tithing should be made for some, but that God condemns laziness. We're given examples of the affluent and powerful, like Nehemiah, who voluntarily give up some of their perks to help rebuild the walls of a once godly culture that was almost down the drain.

Now, to the emphasis that the New Testament provides, and the example set by Christ himself.

### *New Testament*

An old rhyme explaining the relationship of Old and New Testaments goes "The New is in the Old contained, the Old is by the New explained." That is certainly true regarding poverty fighting, as the New Testament carries through on the themes of the Old.

Concerning work, for example, Ephesians 4:28 states that "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." The apostle Paul's injunction to church members is particularly strong: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle. . . . we gave you this rule: 'If man will not work, he shall not eat.' We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.

Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat" (2 Thess. 3:6, 10-15).

Some New Testament books directly parallel in their message some of the Old. For example, James matches Amos's condemnation of those among the rich who use governmental power to exploit the poor: "Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?" (James 2:6). Employers and employees can negotiate whatever wages they wish, but an agreement must be honored: "Listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. . . . Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you" (James 5:1,4).

God also does not provide entitlements in regard to provision of food generally: as in the Old Testament, material sustenance has a spiritual purpose. The famous feedings (reported in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) of four and five thousand men, plus women and children, came after many hours of Jesus's teaching, with people in a place (like the desert in Exodus) far from food supplies; the multiplication of loaves and fishes fed many and also showed Jesus's divine power.

Since the Bible repeatedly emphasizes the importance of helping widows and orphans, both of whom are in a difficult position through the mysterious workings of God's providence, it is striking to see that great care should be taken even in aid to widows. "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need," Paul writes to Timothy; "really in need" means lacking family, for "if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God" (1 Tim. 5:3,4).

When widows have no children or grandchildren, Paul continues, they are eligible for aid, but he emphasizes that "no

widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds." Paul then notes, "As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list," and explains why: "They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander" (1 Tim. 5:9–11, 13–14).

This passage is especially striking because Paul is talking about the class of suffering people who are nearest and dearest to God. And look at the precautions he takes when recommending even aid to widows within the church: first, family responsibility; second, help only to those over sixty; third, help only to those well-known for good deeds. From all this we learn much about the particular problem of helping widows in the church, but we should also draw a logical conclusion: how much more careful should we be before putting others on the list? And how careful should we be in making up a list of those to be aided by government?

Other parts of the New Testament similarly show that God is not obligated to help even widows when ungodly belief and behavior has come to dominate a culture that arrogantly assumes God's favor: Jesus, warning the residents of his native area of Galilee, explains that "there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon" (Luke 4:25–26).

The New Testament also parallels the Old in prodding the better-off to help those in need. Need is defined as it was in the desert—be thankful for manna rather than yearning for meat—in passages such as I Timothy 6:8: "If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Redistribution for the sake of material equality, therefore, is not called for; charity to people who are truly destitute is. (This is particularly true when spiritual debts are involved, as Paul noted [2 Cor. 8] when requesting the Christians of Greece to come to the aid of those in Jerusalem.) Just as Nehemiah voluntarily gave of his economic abundance so that the walls could be rebuilt, so Christians who owned substantial real estate sold some of their holdings so that the truly needy could also be part of building a new community in a hostile place (Acts 4:32–37).

The New Testament intensifies the Old, however, in several crucial ways. First, and most obvious, is the clarification of the meaning of compassion. *Suffering with* (the word's literal meaning) is central in the life of Christ: God came to earth to suffer with us and die for us. Matthew 8:17 suggests the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "He took up our infirmities, and carried our diseases." Matthew 16:24 shows what those of us who profess to follow Him are charged to do: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Taking up the cross involves crucifying the flesh—killing sin in our lives—and learning to suffer with others. Christ's life and parables taught true compassion: probably the most famous parable, that of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), tells of how a priest and a Levite crossed to the other side of the street when they saw a mugging victim, but a despised Samaritan "took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two



silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expenses you may have.'"

The Samaritan did not go to the other side of the street; nor do we have any record of his lobbying to set up a governmental department of Travelers' Health and Human Services. Instead, he suffered with a person in need. Christ's followers are to do the same. Paul wrote to his supporters, "If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer" (2 Cor. 1:3-6).

The New Testament also reemphasizes the Old Testament's connection of God's compassion to personal change, a process God sovereignly sets in motion. In the Old Testament, crying out to God is essential: "When they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers" (Neh. 9:27). Turning back to God is essential: "The Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him" (2 Chron. 30:9). Many prophets explain that God is not a sugar daddy who hands out sweets regardless of behavior; Isaiah calls Israel "a people without understanding; so their maker has no compassion on them" and Jeremiah quotes God as saying, "You have rejected me. . . . I can no longer show compassion" (Isa. 27:11, Jer. 15:6).

The New Testament makes the process more vivid in Christ's healings and stories. In chapter twenty of Matthew's gospel, those with sight overlook the evidence that Jesus is God but blind men do not, and when they cry out for mercy they receive it: "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him" (Matt. 20:30-34). The prodigal son who squanders his wealth and hits bottom also changes his thinking and decides to cry out: "I will

set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father." The father was "filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-21).

Another great emphasis of the New Testament is that God's grace is for all who believe, not just members of one ethnic group. Again, some ingathering was present in the Old Testament: many non-Hebrews joined the exodus from Egypt, and for a millennium thereafter aliens such as Ruth or the Hittite soldier Uriah were welcomed into Israel. King Solomon also spoke of God's extending the covenant to other nations, and the book of Jonah shows how Assyrians devoted to evil could change: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (Jon. 3:10). But in the New Testament that understanding is made explicit: the apostle Peter says, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34).

Grace, compassion, and fair treatment from God; faith, labor, and spiritual challenge among men: these are all New Testament emphases that clarify those of the Old. God does not show favoritism and neither should we: individuals from every nation are acceptable to Him and should be to us. The crucial question for economic help is whether aid will be used rightly and effectively. Again, as Paul states in First Timothy 5:16, the goal is not to throw more water into the soup, but to make sure that "the church can help those widows who are really in need." That is the challenge for today: to help those who are really in need, and to give them the type of help that can set them on the path to escaping future need.

Along this line of thought, one quotation frequently taken out of context may point us in the right direction. In Matthew 5:42, as Jesus is telling his disciples how to respond to adversaries, he says, "Do not resist an evil person," and goes on to state (in reference to a Roman rule that soldiers could force innocent bystanders to do short-distance carrying for them), "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you. . . ." To wrench that last line into a call for undiscerning handouts is extreme textual manipulation, but some good can come of the attempt if it leads us to a broader question: when a person does ask us for spare change, what are we to give?

The answer may be suggested by the response of Peter in Acts 3 to a crippled beggar's request for a handout: he did not give money (the liberal solution), nor did he proffer a job as if that alone would solve deeper problems (the secular conservative solution). Instead, he told the man to arise and walk in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; the man does so and is transformed from a helpless person who looks at passersby hoping to get something from them, to a tiger who walks and leaps through the temple courts and stands before the Sanhedrin, praising God.

A similar change, although not always one as physically dramatic, comes among poor persons (and rich) who gain faith in Christ. The gospel does have material effects: among many poor persons who become Christians, it leads to a change in values, which produces a change in behavior, which normally leads to a job, which leads to material improvement. There is no guarantee that spiritual change will lead to material change, and the process should not be regarded mechanistically—but there is a general principle at work here.

Applying the principle requires discernment. Representative Poshard quoted early in 1995 one of Jesus's most famous teachings: "He said in the day of judgment: . . . 'When I was thirsty

you gave me drink, when I was hungry you fed me, when I was naked you clothed me, when I was in prison you visited me.' And we will say in that moment, 'Lord, when did I do those things?' And he will say, 'When you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'"

That is a terrific passage, but if we are to deal with it fairly we need to understand that today's poor in the United States are the victims and perpetrators of illegitimacy and abandonment, family nonformation and malformation, alienation and loneliness and much else—but they are not suffering thirst, hunger, or nakedness, except by choice, insanity, or parental abuse. When we lack discernment, we give money to panhandlers that most often goes for drugs or alcohol. Christ does not include in his list of commended charitable acts, "When I was strung out you gave me dope."

What are we truly doing to homeless men when we enable them (through governmental programs, undiscerning nonprofits, or tenderhearted but weak-minded personal charity) to stay in addiction? Here's the reality: when I was an addict you gave me money for drugs; when I abandoned the woman and children who depended on me you gave me a place to stay and helped me to justify my action; when I was in prison you helped me get out quickly so I could commit more crimes.

If we take seriously Christ's words, "When you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me," giving money that goes for drugs is akin to sticking heroin into Jesus's veins. The Bible, however, points us to a life that is disciplined in work and worship, living and giving. It teaches us to glorify God and to enjoy his providential workings, both in this life and forever.

## Appendix C

*Alternative Welfare Replacement Methods*

There are at least four ways to use government to promote the delivery of resources to programs that can provide effective compassion. One, shifting tax power along with programmatic authority to the states, is discussed in chapter seven. A second, giving religious groups equal access to funding under the Ashcroft provision, is discussed in chapter eight. This appendix touches on two more: massive federal tax credits and social service vouchers.

*Tax Credits*

My philosophical preference is for states rather than Washington to call the shots—but if it turns out that Washington is ready to move ahead and states are not, then a change in the federal tax code could provide the resource base for a rich harvest of new programs that would help the poor and allow for the free exercise of religion. That would be worth fighting for.

Currently, individual income taxpayers can deduct from their taxable income the contributions they make to a wide range of religious, charitable, and educational organizations. This is good, but not good enough. If leaders in Washington are serious about

replacing government welfare programs with private charity and do not choose to wait for state action, they can accept the Coats proposal discussed in chapter seven and then go one step further by establishing a massive system of tax credits for funds sent by individuals to groups within a new tax-exempt category. That category would include organizations that provide direct social services to the poor (as distinct from the many educational and religious organizations that can receive tax-deductible contributions).

Here's my proposal in its simplest form (and we'll deal shortly with the complications and drawbacks): individual taxpayers could take a tax credit of 90 percent of the value of their donations to nonprofit poverty-fighting organizations, up to a maximum of 50 percent of their tax liability. For every dollar sent to such trampoline-building organizations by credit-receiving taxpayers, expenditures for the federal safety net would decrease by a dollar. In 1993, federal welfare spending totaled \$234 billion and total individual income tax receipts amounted to \$510 billion; if this system had been in effect in 1993 and all taxpayers had used the maximum amount of their credit, \$230 billion that came to federal coffers would have gone to the poverty-fighting nonprofits.

In economic terms, this reform would amount to a massive redistribution of poverty-fighting expenses. Now, nearly all of that money is going to the U.S. Treasury and then trickling down to the needy, in the form of cash or in-kind services, after passing through a complicated maze of bureaucracy. When it finally arrives at its destination, it is spent according to a complex set of regulations in ways that are widely recognized to be extremely ineffective. Under the tax reform proposed here, most of that money would be distributed to poverty-fighting organizations according to the individual preferences of millions of taxpayers.

On the other hand, if taxpayers did not use their credit—and some would not because of resistance to paying out of their own pockets 10 percent of the total amount going to an organization, or because of a belief that government will do a better job than a private organization—funds would be left for government-run programs, which would then have more popular legitimacy than they do now. Since the poorest states would (in dollar terms) be adversely affected by the end of federal redistributionism, a “compensation fund” could be created; some \$26 billion would compensate those states.

The system would work for an individual taxpayer in this way: over the course of the year he contributes a certain amount to qualifying charitable organizations. In preparing his tax return, he follows the same procedure as now (unless, of course, a flat tax comes in). If he itemizes deductions, he may still deduct the amount he contributes to his church, to a medical research organization or environmental group, to a college or museum, or to other nonprofit organizations that do not have a poverty-fighting mission. Then, when he calculates the amount of tax he owes, he subtracts from the amount of tax due 90 percent of the amount he has given to qualifying charities.

Here’s an example: if a taxpayer owes \$4,800 in taxes and has made \$2,000 in creditable contributions, he subtracts \$1,800 (90 percent of \$2,000) from his tax due, so that he owes only \$3,000 in income tax. The amount credited may not exceed 50 percent of the tax due (or \$500, whichever is greater), so if the hypothetical taxpayer above had made \$3,000 in contributions, his credit would only be \$2,400 (50 percent of \$4,800) instead of \$2,700 (90 percent of \$3,000). It is probable, as the public became accustomed to using the charitable tax credit, that most taxpayers would send enough to charities to take the maximum tax credit.

The tax credit approach diminishes the government’s role as

a service provider or even fund allocator, but allows the government to promote the general welfare. The actual provision of services would shift toward privately run charitable organizations, which would be able to place more emphasis on helping the needy in ways that are personal, challenging, and spiritual. Decisions about where funds shall go would no longer be a function of political struggles over the budgets of government agencies, but would result from the decisions of millions of individual donors. And the already large contributions Americans make to charitable organizations will grow over time to several times their current level.

### *Vouchers*

If the “new tax” exemption plan proposed in chapter seven does not gain steam, there is a way that a welfare choice campaign based on vouchers could still work at the state level. Vouchers are often proposed in relation to schooling, but there is a great difference between parents who are generally responsible and deeply concerned about the education of sons and daughters and welfare recipients who vary greatly in degree of responsibility. Some recipients would do fine with vouchers that they could use for any social services, but it would be irresponsible to place unconstrained vouchers in the hands of addicts, alcoholics, and others who are not committed to changing their lives.

However, there are ways to bring into action the fundamental principles of paying for performance and rewarding success. What if a voucher could be redeemed by a participating organization only as the social service client showed progress toward self-sufficiency? For example, a homeless person could present a voucher that would pay service providers nothing for warehousing individuals, a small amount for getting individuals established in transitional housing, and the full amount only

when a client had a permanent home in which he had resided for a year.

Other needs could be dealt with similarly. A welfare mother's voucher could be redeemable in stages as she achieved certain thresholds in becoming independent: obtaining a high school diploma, marrying or getting a job (and holding it for a year), and so on. An organization that helped an addict would receive payment only if he were tested a year after completing the program and still was clean. We should emphasize achievement rather than programs that continue to get funding regardless of what happens to the people they are supposed to be helping. That goes against the current standard procedures, but those procedures have produced built-in incentives to keep clients dependent: a big caseload is a good argument to use for a budget increase. Those incentives need to be reversed so that rewards come not for maintaining people in dependency but for liberating them.

## Appendix D

### *Connecting the Dots*

Problems of poverty, crime, education, and family formation are interrelated. Instead of circling one dot and moving on to the next, legislators should go dot to dot and draw a picture. They should assess statutes and regulations for their effect on the opportunity and incentives for individuals to help others. Environmental impact statements have become bureaucratic nightmares and charity impact statements probably would fare no better, but thinking about interrelatedness is a practice that should be fostered.

Government's ability to promote compassion rather than provide services is directly connected to improving its performance in areas that are at the center of its mission. Again, look at the preamble to the Constitution: "ensure domestic tranquillity" means preventing a civil war within the nation, but it is also a reminder of the need to prevent civil war in the streets. When an angry pimp is trying to break down the door of the Children of the Night shelter in Los Angeles to snatch back a teenager who has been his meal ticket, and the police get a squad car to the shelter and a helicopter over it within five minutes, government is doing things right.

Government is rarely doing right by poor neighborhoods,

though, on questions of crime. Criminal activity is the norm in many poor neighborhoods; victimization rates are many times higher among the poor than among those who are more affluent. Criminal behavior poisons every aspect of life in those communities where it is dominant. Voluntary action of the kind promoted by numerous neighborhood watch groups or organizations such as Mad Dads in Omaha can help make streets safer in poor neighborhoods. Antigang activities like those pioneered by some church and youth organizations can help. But such efforts need to be spearheaded by tough but fair police activity—which is yearned for by most residents of poor neighborhoods—and backed up by a judicial system that actually convicts criminals and a penal system that actually punishes them.

A reasonably high proportion of criminal cases—especially those involving violent crime—are closed with arrests. But even among those criminals who are apprehended, there is a very good chance that they will evade conviction and an even better chance that they will receive no punishment, even if convicted. As a result, crime is perceived—often accurately—as a low-risk activity that pays off better than work. Anyone who complains about “welfare queens” should speak out more vociferously about crime kings.

Enforcement of drug laws is particularly vital. Proposals to decriminalize drug use are now frequently heard; drug use is so widespread that enforcement would inevitably be arbitrary and ineffective, some pundits say. Such statements are not only counsels of defeat in the face of large-scale criminal activity, but counsels of despair with respect to lifting the poor out of dependency. Alcoholism and addiction are proximate causes of much of the unemployment, family disintegration, and criminal activity so epidemic among the poor. To permit the twin boa constrictors to continue to crush human lives is irresponsi-

ble, especially since their backs can be slashed by the many excellent treatment programs—such as Teen Challenge—now in existence.

In at least one instance it has been shown that the mere threat of criminal prosecution is sufficient to motivate drug users to seek and stay with treatment. During the mid-1980s, physicians in Charleston, South Carolina, were concerned about the number of crack cocaine-addicted babies they had to care for. They had warned the mothers during pregnancy that their children would suffer serious damage if they did not stop using drugs, but these warnings were to little avail: the teaching hospital in Charleston consistently had about thirty crack babies a month.

That miserable situation changed in 1988, when doctors asked the local prosecutor to back up their medical warnings with a legal warning: expectant mothers who were using drugs could choose between going into treatment or going to jail. The mere threat was sufficient. Without ever having to prosecute a single mother, enrollment in drug treatment programs became routine and the incidence of crack babies was cut by 80 percent. Sadly, after a few years of successful operation of this program, the federal government moved in and ordered the prosecutor to stop threatening to enforce the law: since more black moms than white moms were affected, the ACLU had sued on grounds of racial discrimination; a judge had thrown the case out of court, but in 1994 the Department of Health and Human Services in Washington threatened a cutoff of all federal health money to South Carolina if the program continued. The 800-pound gorilla won. Mothers no longer stayed in treatment programs. The number of crack babies went back up.

In other realms as well, government is doing little to ensure domestic tranquillity, even in areas where it has created problems. Sequestering the poor in public housing where residents are not required to be responsible is bad enough, but the situa-

tion becomes intolerable when—and this, amazingly, is now standard—residents cannot be expelled for being drug dealers. If there is to be any government-subsidized housing, the privilege of living in it should be contingent on maintaining the standards proper to a good neighbor: keeping the house or apartment reasonably clean and orderly and not using it as a headquarters for criminal activity. If drug dealers demand a right to public housing, they should be accommodated in penitentiaries.

The impact of crime in poor neighborhoods is exceeded only by the impact of miseducation. Public schools in many poor neighborhoods feed poverty and crime by giving up on discipline and learning and becoming holding cells. Some poor parents make extraordinary efforts to earn the money needed to pay private school tuition; most try to make the best of a terrible thing. Some poor children try to overcome an environment in which teacher expectations are low and any attempt to meet even those expectations produces scorn among classmates; most succumb.

The public education safety net has failed and the failure is particularly obvious when public and private schools in the same neighborhood, and drawing students from similar socioeconomic groups, are compared: the inner-city private schools are trampolines. Children in such schools, of course, have parents who care enough to make sacrifices, so the comparison may be unfair to those public school teachers and administrators who have not given up. And yet, how many more parents could be challenged to care more if they, like parents who are reasonably well off, did not have to scramble so hard to place their children in a better school?

Poor parents, unlike their affluent counterparts, generally can afford neither tuition nor residence in a better neighborhood. They have to take schools without discipline and without learn-

ing, where mere attendance may be physically dangerous and where graduation may not necessarily signify basic literacy. Schools like that are able to exist only because they have a captive clientele, students who are there only because they are not able to go anywhere else. There is one way to get rid of bad schools like that, and it's simple: give parents the power to decide freely where their children shall go to school. When it becomes a matter of survival for schools to attract students, there will be discipline, there will be learning, and there will even be innovation and perhaps excellence in every school.

School choice also has another advantage, which is generally not noticed, and that is its good effect on parents. Many poverty-level parents (often young unmarried mothers who did not complete their own education) feel intimidated by the responsibilities of parenthood, especially in comparison with the well-dressed, educated teachers their children encounter. But when those same parents have the power to make the final decision—not just to “have input”—about what school their children attend, they are given a renewed sense of their own dignity and worth as persons and their rights as parents. The exercise of responsibility builds the capacity for responsibility.

Vouchers have been the main tool seized upon by proponents of school choice, but the poverty-fighting tax exemptions discussed in chapter seven would work better. Here's the process: taxpayers could receive tax exemptions for making contributions to children's educational opportunity funds (or similar organizations) that provide poor students with partial or full scholarships. Poor parents could use those scholarships to place their children at a wide variety of private or church schools. Vouchers are a step up from our current system because they give parents choice, but many Christian school leaders worry about strings attached. The introduction of tax



exemptions would not eliminate those concerns, but they are three steps further removed from state control because government officials never get their hands on the money, unlike with vouchers.

Furthermore, educational contributions/tax exemptions could build more of a sense of citizenship than vouchers and be less open to charges that advocates are interested only in activities that benefit their own families. The new pool of capital for scholarships would help the least among us, those who currently are deprived of a decent education. The exemption would not help middle-class parents, but most are not in the desperate situation in which poor parents zealous for their children's education find themselves. The best way to help middle-class parents would be a dramatic increase in the federal per-child tax exemption and the inclusion in any flat tax plans of a similarly child-friendly base.

For mothers with younger children, the cost of child care is often seen as an overwhelming impediment to work and additional child care funds are regularly demanded, but the answer to the problem lies within the cohort of the poor itself: if goals of reaffiliation and bonding are kept in mind, crises become opportunities. The average welfare mom has two children; three welfare moms could form a child care group within which one would take care of the children, either in homes or in play areas provided within housing projects, and the other two would go to work. The child care provider could be subsidized with "new tax" funds as long as she provided that useful service for two other mothers.

Of course, as noted before, the long-term goal would be a revival of the two-parent family; while public policy measures cannot accomplish this, they can promote the general welfare through establishment of a family-friendly environment. Numerous studies show now what those on the cultural left would not admit during the 1992 political campaign when Dan

Quayle raised the subject: a strong family structure is anti-poverty insurance. A solid family can compensate for many of the disadvantages of simple material deprivation. Family members encourage one another and share a mutual sense of responsibility. And, of course, intact married-couple families have more ways of earning and more ways of saving money, which is one reason why poverty is unusual among married couples but rampant in those mother-child family fragments we call single-parent families.

Families, of course, are not created by the government, and strong families can exist under any form of government. But governmental innovations have, for example, created no-fault divorce, a concept that renders every marriage unstable. In a civil sense, marriage is a contract between a husband, a wife, and society to establish and maintain a family. Under traditional divorce law, society held the husband and wife to that contract unless it could be proved that one party had seriously violated it; society was on the side of maintaining the stability of marriages. Only in recent years has either spouse been allowed to withdraw from the contract unilaterally, for any reason, without suffering disadvantage.

Now, the law tolerates stable marriages, as long as neither spouse objects, but is on the side of dissolving marriage whenever a conflict arises. The consequent lack of marital stability is a major cause of poverty. So is another consequence of the devaluing of marriage: the rise of governmentally approved sexual activity outside of it. Instead of passing out condoms (which are often successful in preventing conception on any given occasion but not over a period of several months or a year, because sooner or later the condom is not used, misused, or faulty), abstinence programs that have proven their success should be in place in every school.

Programs such as Elayne Bennett's Best Friends in Washing-

ton, or those offered by Carenet-affiliated crisis pregnancy centers, have demonstrated that the abstinence message can be communicated successfully even to children from extremely disadvantaged backgrounds. Early sexual activity and the accompanying high rates of teen pregnancy are not inevitable. Reducing teen pregnancy by changing teenage behavior patterns not only alleviates one of the major direct causes of dependency, but also builds the character strengths needed to succeed in school, at work, and in taking on family responsibilities.

And as we make connections between areas of public policy and society that often are compartmentalized, we should note that criminal activity also plays a part in the surging incidence of illegitimacy. A study of 46,500 births by California teens in 1993 showed that in 71 percent of the births to teens aged eleven to eighteen, the father was on average five years older. A Seattle survey of 535 moms aged twelve to seventeen found that the mean age of the father was twenty-four. The age difference raises the question of why statutory rape laws are not enforced. Just as we need to get tough with adults who corrupt kids with drugs, so we need to enforce laws against adults who corrupt kids with sex.

Overall, proper public policy measures can help to liberate children to be children, students to be students, and citizens to be citizens. If government helps to establish a sound environment for citizenship, productive change can come. During the next few years, state governments rather than the federal government may be able to take on the primary responsibility for providing social services and the means to compete in innovation. With more latitude to experiment, diminishing financial assistance from Washington, and incentives to strengthen the private charitable sector, most states will change the way they deliver social services, if the proposals of welfare decentralizers are enacted.

At the same time, we should resist the temptation to look to public policy for salvation. Those who truly help the poor will continue to be not public policy planners, no matter how smart they are, but compassionate individuals on the front lines. They perhaps will be given new resources under a new system. They should certainly be given the opportunity to suffer with others without looking over their shoulders at a government trying to push ahead so as to get in the way.

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For more information, contact:

**The Progress & Freedom Foundation**

1301 K Street, NW

Suite 650 West

Washington, DC 20005

E-mail: [mail@pff.org](mailto:mail@pff.org)

<http://www.pff.org>