

Welfare Reform and Care for the Poor

Introduction

This paper aims to review the recent approaches that influential American Evangelicals have taken when considering poverty and the role of the state in its alleviation.

Take a moment to consider three important words in that last sentence: *evangelical*, *recent*, and *influential*:

Evangelical: There is of course some difficulty in setting up a boundary that will distinguish “evangelical” work from other work, for at least two reasons. There are orthodox Christian religious traditions that contribute mightily to the conversation about faith and culture but are not universally considered “evangelical.” These would include Roman Catholic authors like Michael Novak and Father Robert Sirico, the many recent publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the several dozen recent relevant doctoral dissertations from non-evangelical seminaries. Second, there are poverty-related authors whose personal practice is evangelical but whose work is not self-evidently influenced by this practice. In the interest of clarity and brevity, we will err on the side of a narrow definition of evangelical: authors widely regarded as evangelical (“If it looks like an evangelical...”), who write self-consciously as evangelicals (...and sounds like an evangelical...), whose writings can be identified by others as indebted to the evangelical heritage (... then it is an evangelical.”).

Recent: A full review of evangelical work on poverty and welfare would be a hefty volume indeed. But if we limit our attention to work recent enough to be informed—to at least have the potential to be informed—by the full scope of our experience with poverty and attempts to combat it, then our review condenses to a survey of the last decade. The focal point of such a survey quickly becomes the United States’ experiments with welfare reform. This of course presumes that we consider only the United States; there are, for example, evangelical economists’ associations in Australia and the United Kingdom, and an emerging group in German-speaking Europe. They could enrich our discussion, but they are beyond the scope of our assignment.

Influential: Influence is not to be sought for its own sake. It is often inversely proportional to integrity, inversely proportional to the square of quality. Yet it is probably appropriate, for the purposes of this assignment, to focus our review on work that is recognized as representative and important—influential in shaping both evangelical approaches to culture and non-evangelicals’ perceptions of evangelicals. In the interest of order and clarity, I take this to imply that we should consider books rather than scattered journal articles.

Given these guidelines, we can cover the waterfront by reviewing four representative pieces:

Three broadly visionary books that discuss how we should think about poverty and welfare: Marvin Olasky's *The Tragedy of American Compassion*,¹ Ronald J. Sider's *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*,² and John Schneider's *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions*.³

One tactical book weighing the practical things congregations can do to combat poverty: *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries that Work*, by Amy L. Sherman.⁴

1 Marvin Olasky. *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992. Because this book appears to represent such a significant number of evangelicals' opinions, and because of its apparent influence in secular political circles, any reviewer must give it prominence. Sequels have included

Compassionate Conservatism: What it is, What it does, and How it can Transform America (2000)

The American Leadership Tradition: Moral Visions from Washington to Clinton (1999)

Guide to Effective Compassion (1998)

Renewing American Compassion (1996)

Fighting for Liberty and Virtue: Political and Cultural Wars in Eighteenth-Century America (1995)

Loving your Neighbor: A Principled Guide to Personal Charity (1995)

Most readers would find Olasky representative of much of the conservative political landscape.

2 Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (with companion study and action guide). Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999. Because this book appears to represent most evangelicals who are not represented by Olasky, because of Sider's public prominence as a spokesperson for evangelicalism, and because of his iconic status among evangelicals (especially among the iconoclastic ones), we must also give it prominence. The author must be forgiven some poetic license in calling his vision "new," as the prequels included

Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger in four editions, 1977-97

Genuine Christianity, 1996

Cup of Water, Bread of Life: Inspiring Stories about Overcoming Lopsided Christianity, 1994

One-Sided Christianity? Uniting the Church to Heal a Lost and Broken World, 1993

Evangelicals and Development: Toward a Theology of Social Change, 1981.

3 John Schneider, *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money and Possessions*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. This book is more a study of the Biblical theology that is relevant to our thinking about poverty policy than a handbook on public policy. Schneider is, like Sider, a theologian, and some sections of Schneider's book appear to criticise Sider's positions. To the extent those positions have been influential, this analysis is all the more important.

4 Amy L. Sherman, *Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community with Church-Based Ministries that Work*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997. Sherman's visibility as an articulate evangelical from the political mainstream, with both scholarly credentials (Ph.D. in government) and practical experience (as a large evangelical congregation's minister of social ministry), make this book a reasonable choice as a representative of evangelical books on the sticky topic of congregations' responses to welfare reform. Other relevant works by Sherman include

The Welfare of my Neighbor: Living Out Christ's Love for the Poor (with workbook and supplemental guide), 1999, with Deanna Carlson.

Preferential Option, 1992.

Other titles in this genre include

Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development, 1993, by John Perkins

The African-American Church and Welfare Reform: Toward a New Prophetic Perspective, 1999, by Harold Dean Trulear

Kingdom Works: True Stories about God and His People in Inner-City America, 2000, by Bart Campolo.

Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together and Doing It Right, 1995, edited by John Perkins.

Since this congregational-community-development literature is growing rapidly, we mention in passing three other resources that, though not necessarily representative of evangelicalism, are relevant because of their engagement with evangelical work:

Higher Ground: Faith Communities and Community Building, 1996, by Henry Cisneros

Welfare Reform and Faith-Based Organizations, 1999, by Derek Davis and Barry Hankins

An Annotated Bibliography for Faith-Based Community Economic Development, 1999, by Elliott Wright et. al.

Each of our four authors brings a personal history and particular angle of vision to the discussion: They come from different academic disciplines (and none are economists), and they have affinities to different schools of thought regarding economics and political organization.

Olasky: The Tragedy of American Compassion

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We will start with the most widely-cited and apparently influential book, though in a sense we are a little late in evaluating Olasky's 1992 work. His position has, in broad strokes if not in all details, become the political mainstream. The United States has "ended welfare as we knew it," imposed work requirements, essentially ended general relief for able-bodied males, and imposed lifetime limits on the length of support one can receive; as a result welfare rolls have dramatically fallen. If Olasky's analysis of the harm done by the welfare system is correct, we should expect a dramatic renovation in American work ethics, marriage and philanthropy in the near future. Yet it is worthwhile reviewing the analysis that Newt Gingrich held before the television cameras at the beginning of the process, as this book is representative of the thinking that has shaped both conservative Christian opinion and general federal policy in the 1990s.

Olasky gives an account of how poverty and underclass are to be defined, what has worked and has not worked in addressing the problems of the underclass, and how poverty and the human spirit are interrelated. The core of the argument runs as follows: Poverty was more severe, yet social breakdown more rare, in an era when human needs were met voluntarily and holistically by other human beings; the way in which one is helped affects one's spirit and behavior, and spirit, not poverty, is the core cause of modern social disintegration. Bureaucratic spending exacerbates such problems, as it is fundamentally out of touch with the needs of the human spirit that drive social dysfunction. Authors who argue that the free market itself can solve the problems of poverty also fail to appreciate the crucial place of genuinely compassionate persons and groups in fighting poverty.(4) Both sides neglect pre-twentieth century moral understandings of what is required for a well-functioning social order. As a result, American cities are now in cultural, economic and moral crisis, and our political discussion of welfare is at an impasse, primarily because of the public hijacking of compassion. In sum, poverty-related problems were improving however slowly, but reliance upon public assistance has by its nature created more poverty and undermined the human spirit.

Olasky builds his case by discussing the exercise of American compassion chronologically, beginning with his interpretation of the early American model of compassion. The earliest colonial approaches to generosity stressed personal aid to the sick, home-opening hospitality to those suffering from disaster, and denial of benefits to those who were judged openly indecent or unwilling to work when work was available. In fact, the English approach of granting benefits to all, without regard to cause of poverty, was sometimes viewed as resulting in "stingy" benefits, whereas the worthy poor (such as widows and orphans) should be relieved "amply." (18)

While most support came in-kind or in the form of time, some care givers were compensated by town councils or other community organizations. The disorderly or idle could find support in strict workhouses, in which punishment for refusal to work was viewed as a way of treating all humans as members of a community with

responsibilities, rather than animals.(11) “Charity schools” were founded to teach the young good work habits and fear of God, and in the Northwest Territory justices of the peace were appointed “overseers of the poor,” setting up poorhouses maintained by the work of their inhabitants and withholding benefits from all who did not lodge and work in the poorhouse. Families were viewed as the central means of support, and “nothing that could contribute to the break-up of families, or to the loss of the family’s central role as support of its members, was encouraged.”(13) Immediate relatives who did not offer support to needy family members were fined heavily.

Olasky believes that this model of compassion, like other models, was directly related to the general cultural theology:

Cultures build systems of charity in the image of the god they worship, whether distant deist, bumbling bon vivant, or “whatever goes” gopher. In colonial America, emphasis on a theistic God of both justice and mercy led to an understanding of compassion that was hard-headed but warm-hearted. Since justice meant punishment for wrongdoing, it was right for the slothful to suffer. And since mercy meant rapid response when people turned away from past practice, malign neglect of those willing to shape up also was wrong.(8)

These theological understandings led to other subthemes in early American compassion. God’s personal involvement in the creation implied that God’s people should go beyond “clockwork charity” to give their hearts and love to the needy; the better off should know the poor as individuals with distinct characters, backing the mistreated but chastising the indolent. In fact, charity should be withheld when it would lead to a descent into idleness and dependence, with some societies agreeing that families of drunkards, who “may be without food... and wholly innocent in respect to the causes of their destitution,” should not receive money, with aid in kind only to cover “the demands of unquestionable necessity.”(20) Political hardness was based on the belief that some needed to suffer in order to be willing to change,(21) though no one was left to starve without any means of support. The belief that God’s good law informed all of life meant that the most important need of the poor who were unfaithful was to know of God’s expectations for humans; material help would fall flat without spiritual formation and God’s gracious alteration of the courses of human lives. Shame and stigma toward the voluntarily poor seemed appropriate.

There are some acknowledged flies in this colonial-and-early-American pudding. This model, reinforced by sermons and other spiritual admonitions to those able to help, was appropriate in part because “in practice, since work was readily available, there was no talk of structural unemployment;... the major type of poverty... was caused by a calamity... or crippling accident or early death (often by disease).”(11) An expanding border provided growing opportunities for able-bodied workers, at least those of European extraction. More organization was also necessary as cities grew in order to help those who were marginalized by no fault

of their own. Yet cities were generally still compact, with rich and poor living near each other and worshipping together; thoroughgoing economic segregation was rare.(17) Orphanages were established (sometimes with State support), groups provided small monthly allowances for working widows (often after checking the applicant's means and character, and availability of relatives who could help), and aid was generally given in kind rather than cash. Through the nineteenth century, most support was offered voluntarily, given in kind and with personal involvement, and aimed at those in difficult situations against their own will who were co-operating in trying to change things--not advocating equal treatment for all who were in trouble. Even so, the country stood in need of a new model by the end of the nineteenth century: "American social conditions of the past seemed almost paradisaical to charity leaders slouching through crowded urban slums" by the end of the century.(21) One is left wondering why Olasky has been singing the praises of the early American models of charity if it was such a flop at solving the problems of the emerging urban nation, the kind of nation we now live in. No doubt the difference in population density partly explains not only changes in the American approach since the last century, but also the difference between the early American model and its contemporary European state-centered relief counterpart.

Olasky indicates that the future-minded who saw the emerging cities' problems looked to the British Isles' experience, and there observed the detrimental effects of "outdoor relief," aid given to individuals who continued to live in their homes rather than poorhouses. They worried that this practice would lead, in fact had lead, to dependence, support of those not truly in need, a concomitant reduction in aid to the truly deserving, and donor fatigue at seeing resources used unwisely. The relief work of Thomas Chalmers in Glasgow in the early 1820s is championed as a counter example: Receiving permission to experiment in a ten thousand-person district, he limited aid to those judged deserving (not poor through their own unaltered behavior, willing to work and save and live an upright life), and stressed small-scale personal involvement of the better-off by dividing the area into twenty-five districts under deacons' leadership. In doing so, voluntary collections increased and costs fell, such that a parish school could be staffed with the surplus. This theme--restricted access, judged by small-scale volunteers--carries through Olasky's entire analysis of the needs of America's emerging cities. Impersonal, indiscriminate, "promiscuous" charity is the villain that reduces benefits to the deserving, reduces the incentive for personal saving and insurance, and cuts everyone off from the potential benefits of personal contact and moral development. Aid was to be restricted to those whom it might physically and morally elevate, and given by persons who suffered along side the recipients with whom they had a personal interest; those who are idle or intemperate should be left to suffer the consequences.(28)

By the 1840s and 1850s societies organized roughly along Chalmers' principles were being founded in every major American city, often providing aid in kind rather than cash. The goal was "to make city relations as much as possible like those of the countryside.(29) " Olasky argues that the possibility of religious

conversion was the motive that called forth sacrifice on the part of the volunteers, and that the need for religious renovation was the underlying cause of poverty of the recipients. Professional could be facilitators of aid, bringing giver and receiver together, not major suppliers.

Acknowledging that this approach often failed--in cases of recessions that caused urban jobs to dry up, or for the hundreds of orphaned and abandoned children roaming urban centers-- Olasky cheerily suggests that the nineteenth century response was to bring the city to the country.(32) One wonders how “large cities became centers of anonymity” and “hundreds of homeless children... roamed the slum areas of... cities during the 1850s”(32) if the traditional American model of charity was really such an effective thing, But not to worry; these conditions existed “until Charles Brace and other charity leaders found a way to send the city into the country.”(32) Private organizations that subsidized mobility for adults and arranged for children to be sent westward (working on farms in return for room, board and education--in the best case, arranged by a local board that supervised the child’s treatment), or established residential schools (“lodging houses”) for abandoned children. Olasky emphasizes overcrowding, fuelled by high tax rates, as the core material causes of New York’s urban problems.

Olasky then chronicles the objections and threats to the nineteenth-century consensus about charity. The first threat, apparently imported in part from England, was calls for the provision of “outdoor relief,” that is, relief not tied to the performance of work nor life in a poor house. These calls surface in journalism of the 1840s. Earlier commentators quoted by Olasky point to the disincentive to work and saving which calls forth more paupers even as one tries to reduce their number, the inability of rationalized government to adjust support standards to the nuances that should make an individual eligible or not, and the inability of such aid to touch the personal causes of poverty (most often intemperance in this era) in the way that personal voluntary aid might. Turning a matter of love into one of litigation might also result in donor fatigue and harm the character of the well-off via jealousy and cynicism of generosity. Thus public aid might reduce, not increase, the amount of help going to the worthy poor.

But some mid-century journalists, beginning with Horace Greeley, challenged this consensus. Olasky ties his support of relief for able-bodied persons who do not work to Greeley’s universalism and belief in the natural goodness of all people. Salvation and prosperity are the right of every person, and the corrupting influences of capitalist society were to be overturned by communal associations, including redistribution through collective agencies--an “unimpeded, unpurchased enjoyment” of each person’s natural right to an equal part of the world’s wealth.”(52) In contrast to the earlier emphasis on the personal moral transformation of individuals as a necessary requirement to fighting poverty, Greeley promoted an early Social Gospel: the centerpiece of Christianity is communal living and material redistribution, to be accomplished not by churches and their members but by changing the economic environment along socialist lines

to abolish the causes of poverty. Human desires, being good in themselves, must be given full scope. The result will be “universal happiness... a perfect Society... the Kingdom of Heaven.”(54) Thus Greeley set out the moral case for universal redistribution to a large audience in the north-eastern United States. Justifications for public welfare multiplied in the 1850s, partly due to his influence. Olasky cites published reports that, by the late 1850s, outdoor and poorhouse relief was rising, primarily due to changes in donor attitudes and, particularly after the Civil War, to opportunistic legislators.

Immigration, urbanization and rapidly growing urban populations after the Civil War also resulted in economic segregation--sharply defined areas of rich and poor, with the rich riding from home to work rather than walking through diverse neighborhoods. The wealthy, and their churches, were less likely to meet the needy personally, and learned of them through the press. Voluntary aid became less tuned to the poor's actual needs. Without personal contact, social “help” became less realistic or even destructively indiscriminate. Compassion fatigue set in.

This was a context ripe for Social Darwinism to thrive, arguing that the economically unfit must be eliminated, not artificially preserved. And spread it did, throughout the 1870s into the 1880s. Olasky presents orthodox believers as engaged in beating back both Social Darwinism and the “stingy relief” of indiscriminate outdoor aid. Evangelicals sought to respond with new forms of charity that removed governments' indiscriminate, dependency-forming relief while applying to harsher urban conditions the lessons taken from earlier in the century. Olasky grants the emergence of involuntary unemployment and other sources of poverty through no fault of one's own, but maintains that open-handed charity without a work requirement was likely to worsen the problem by creating willing paupers. Compassion should instead consist of suffering with the marginalized, with donors becoming personal workers meeting more than physical needs. This becomes especially important in anonymous urban settings, where the character of recipients would be otherwise uncertain. Aid sometimes went as an interest-free loan as a further incentive to good faith, and recipients were linked to a church or individual whose work it was to move the applicant toward self-sufficiency.

By the mid-1880s the new evangelical approach had the upper hand in bookstores, but required an outpouring of volunteers to become effective. Denying that the next decade's events are too distant to be relevant to modern realities, Olasky lists dozens of urban organizations, quotes from their charters, and relates numbers of recipients to whom some form of aid was dispensed, in order to demonstrate in his fifth chapter that the outpouring of Volunteerism was significant enough to constitute a sufficient response to urban poverty. Some cities saw engagements between the needy and volunteers numbering in the tens of thousands per year.

Olasky argues that late nineteenth-century charity was marked by upward movement among the deserving poor (which he contrasts with intergenerational

dependency today). He asserts that this was no antistatist spirit, that all acknowledged that private agencies could be as bad as government ones, though the force of his argument seems to deny this concept. And he instead gives seven general attributes that fuelled the works of compassion: affiliation (fighting the tendency of men and other family members to abandon their families; rebonding the marginalized to the community), bonding (with volunteers, when no other natural tie to community could be reinforced), categorization (ensuring that charity goes to the willing-to-work or otherwise worthy, including children with one parent unable to support them), discernment (which allows categorization, through personal knowledge of the poor and “the benign suspicion that came naturally to charity workers who had grown up reading the Bible”(107)), employment (eventually if not immediately for all able-bodied heads of households, though this emphasis “would have been savage had jobs not been available”(109) and if “alternatives to begging did not exist during short-lived periods of unemployment”(110)), freedom (defined by Olasky as “the opportunity to work and worship without governmental restriction,” bribery, or restrictive licensing requirements(111)), and God (accounting for spiritual needs and sources of problems, the possibility of conversion and change, and emphasizing “suffering with” on the part of donors). These seven form the framework for asking what has gone wrong with American compassion.

For Olasky the beginning of the great descent (near the turn of the century) was the desire “to do more.” Despite contributions by personal Volunteerism, much of urban life remained stubbornly dysfunctional at the turn of the century. Olasky argues that the call for public initiatives was precipitated by a universalist, Social Gospel theology, with its denial of the fallenness of real human beings and their need for personal conversion and moral regeneration:

Underlying this demand for mass transformation was the belief that man was naturally good and productive unless an oppressive system got in the way... Ignoring the experience of the 1860s and 1870s, and harkening back to the commune spirit of the 1840s and the Greeleyite message of that era, their faith was clear: the only reason some people did not work was that they were kept from working.(120)

Hence a call for universalistic and unconditional aid, and embarrassment with evangelical emphases on personal regeneration. These emphases “became the inspiration of governmental social work programs of the 1930s and community action programs of the 1960s.”(125)

Beginning with the Theodore Roosevelt administration, Olasky documents the slow development of a Federal presence in welfare policy, and the growing emphasis on professionalism (and displacement of Volunteerism) in social work. Olasky associates this professionalization of social work with liberal theological commitments.(143-6) Donors distanced themselves from recipients, both geographically and empathically; boards of charities became fund-raising bodies, bonding was reduced to photos of grateful clients, discernment was lost in self-satisfying reports to donors. The more secularized social relief movements (such

as the settlement house movement) tended to lose their initial stress on personal contact. Large-scale social change was stressed over personal involvement and conversion. Many religious programs had become functionally secularized; there seemed no reason but “conservative stinginess” to oppose massive new governmental systems,(149) especially when private agencies had difficulties responding personally to the mass needs and reduced donations of the 1930s. Thus, through theological liberalization and long-term impersonalization of charity, the stage was set for large-scale change under The New Deal.

Slowly, over the decades since 1930, Olasky envisions cold public entitlement displacing effective voluntary compassion. Olasky acknowledges that the unemployment of the ‘30s was different than before, with long-term layoffs not due to personal problems in need of individual care. Yet stigma persisted against public relief (which Olasky applauds), aid was generally only given when no relative could support the needy, and federal programs were proposed as short-term solutions primarily aimed at widows/disability-ridden homes and orphans, not enduring entitlements; the alternative of choice, the Works Progress Administration, tried to provide income while maintaining a work ethic. In the process the social work profession organized itself, emphasizing professionalization of compassion and permanence for their programs. It gained influence in the Roosevelt administration. Olasky also identifies three subtle changes that directed America toward a universalistic welfare system with no work requirements: a decreased sense of personal responsibility and increased emphasis on collective action, a trend toward impersonal urban service over successful personal contact and true suffering-with compassion, and an ideological leftism among social workers that trivialized individuals and viewed income as entitlement and did not value work or fear pauperization. Olasky dismisses studies during the following twenty years that claimed stipends do not harm independence and self-respect, or that found federal involvement reduced administrative abuses, inefficiency and political control.(163-5) He finds little popular support for universal entitlement, throughout the ‘40s and ‘50s, and concludes that the New Deal’s primary effect was to establish an organizational basis for social revolution, not the revolution itself.

That revolution came in the mid to late 1960s. Olasky affirms that, even through the early ‘60s, “many of the old values were retained both by welfare workers and recipients.”(167) Workers in New York were still told that withholding assistance was often as important as giving relief; applicants had to verify eligibility; often unwed mothers had to promise not to have male callers under improper conditions. Shame was still a healthy motivator. “As late as the mid-1960s, only about half of those eligible for welfare payments were receiving them.”(168)

This means that Olasky’s analysis of the 1960s is crucial to the case he is building that American compassion has taken a tragic turn for the worse. The core of his case is this: Olasky credits the 1960s for a sea change in *attitudes*. “The key contribution of the War on Poverty (was) the deliberate attempt to uncouple

welfare from shame by changing attitudes of both welfare recipients and the better-off.”(174) “Great Society legislation, not so much by extending benefits as by funding advocates to change that consciousness, helped sever welfare from shame in the minds of many dole-holders.”(175) Public doles became not a humiliation, but (in recipients’ eyes) a way to preserve dignity. A war on shame was waged, underlaid by “the theologically liberal tendencies within social work (and related fields).”(169) There was a decline in support for the validity of categorizing individuals as “deserving” or “undeserving,”(169) and activist for state intervention was fuelled by a combination of philosophical materialism, economic relativism, and progressive sentiment, combining to conclude that eliminating poverty was merely a matter of passing out dollars to bring all households’ income levels above the poverty line through subsidies.(170-72, 174) Mainline churches approved of the open-handed attitude toward impersonal support, holding to a social cause and therefore a social solution for poverty. In the process many of the traditional private social agencies were compromised in their commitment to principles of mutual obligation.(176) The legal profession fuelled the movement away from categorization and discernment, for self-serving reasons,(181-2) seeing that it became difficult or impossible to declare recipients employable and therefore ineligible, or require that recipients not have a “man in the house.”

Thus President Johnson’s expansion of public welfare through the Great Society programs, a sudden replay of the New Deal from a position of economic strength,(173) showed a rosy disregard for real-life effects, and was based ultimately on a faith, a social gospel walking on earth,(173) and attempted to replace shame with a conviction that the system was the enemy.(178) The result was a dramatic increase in the number of recipients from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. “The major change was that a much higher percentage of those who were eligible suddenly decided to take advantage of welfare benefits;”(183) “The Great Society’s War Against Shame was a success.”(183)

Olasky finds several big losers from the entitlement revolution by 1980. Social mobility declined, not due to lack of opportunity but presumably by the change in attitudes Olasky attributes to the 1960s. The remnant of private, challenging organizations was marginalized. And marriage declined as a viable bond of mutual obligation. Olasky argues that “government entitlements... did influence heavily the choice of whether to choose parenting or adoption, whether to marry or not, and whether to live at home or in an apartment.” He gives no citation of the claim, but says that marital obligations decreased as governmental obligations increased, making it logical to raise children alone.

Olasky ends with a discussion indicating how personal compassion can make a difference in the difficult poverty-related problems of homelessness and abandoned women and children. Here I think he will find few critics for the notion that personal, costly compassion, when feasible, is preferable over mass-produced impersonal relief. We may be left wondering if such personal compassion is truly

feasible on a large enough scale, and how every-day churches might begin to point the way toward such compassion now that the political system has essentially accepted Olasky's analysis. On these topics Amy Sherman writes to provide a practical guide to the things churches can and do achieve in providing compassionate, personal involvement with real persons.

The many potentially serious weaknesses in Olasky's book have been thoroughly explored elsewhere. Some have emphasized the apparent absence of documentation or data to support many of the central theses, aside from quotations from various journalistic sources making pronouncements about the (then) contemporary state of affairs. I would like to add a word about the more principal philosophical/political inclinations of the book.

I wonder about Olasky's emphasis on the necessity that relief must involve personal conversion and moral renewal. Of course these things are of terrific importance, and no doubt they are the ultimate answer to many of the problems of the poor. But do we require the same emphasis in the other social institutions by which we live each day? Does anyone criticize the local grocery chain for not emphasizing the fact that we do not eat by bread alone? Perhaps if they did America would not be the world's most obese nation. Do we fret that gas stations do not lobby their patrons to quit speeding? Or would we champion a human resources department of a major corporation if it withheld salaries of employees until there was evidence that the employee is tithing? No. Isn't this because our common sense teaches the difference between the common grace institutions that make civilization possible between persons who are not redeemed, and the special grace institutions that press forward the gospel into culture? If so, I would need a careful argument that the institutions by which we assure care for the marginalized should by nature be considered special grace institutions. Otherwise I suspect we could construct a case against any organization of society that does not preach while it works--groceries, gas stations, governance, news anchors, anything. No doubt each might "work better" if it considered spiritual sources of dysfunction, at least if it did so well. But our experience is that even well intentioned practitioners often get it wrong; hence our tendency toward pluralism and our reliance on common grace institutions for daily-bread-items, surrounded by special-grace institutions to help us keep our wits about the world. Personal renewal absolutely must happen, but does this imply that the institutions of income support must be involved in the renewal?

I suppose yes, if public charity always displaces private compassion and erodes the moral sensibilities of the recipients. That is Olasky's claim. But it is not enough to say that this happened in the particular historical circumstance of the United States in the twentieth century; Olasky is claiming that this is a universal truth--we must choose one approach or the other. Why should this be so? Why, for example, can't the two be complimentary? I think of driving around my medium-sized city. Safe and efficient travel absolutely depends on hundreds of small voluntary acts of charity, self-discipline and empathy on the part of the drivers surrounding me. Do

we somehow displace this private philanthropy when we ordain posted speed limits, enforcement police, weather advisories and road repair crews? We could, after all, just rely on the innate philanthropic goodness of drivers to patch up roads on their own, voluntarily limit speeds to safe levels, and so forth. But that would be silly. Public enforcement of policies in the interest of the public welfare, in this case, make more private charitable acts possible. It would be impossible, I believe, to exercise civility while motoring if driving conduct were left entirely to a spontaneous social contract. Why might this not be true in other cases of the basic fabric of our lives?

Sider: Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America

We turn from the leading spokesperson for evangelicals who are politically conservative to the leading spokesperson of much of the rest of the political spectrum. Ron Sider's community and work will likely be familiar territory for those who follow America's Evangelical public intellectuals. During the last generation, his widely-discussed Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger has gone through four editions with various publishers. From his academic post (professor of theology and culture) at greater-Philadelphia's Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary he presides over Evangelicals for Social Action, which might be thought of as a think-tank supported (mostly) by evangelicals who would not identify themselves as politically conservative.

Though Sider is best known for his opinions about poverty outside of North America, this volume concerns the United States. Its organization and approach mirror those of Rich Christians: First comes writing that sets out the author's direct, personal connections to poverty and paints vivid pictures of the daily lives of people in poverty; then several chapters aiming to expound Scripture's vision for the poor and God's strategy for their restoration; then several chapters developing a detailed policy agenda; and finally a rousing call to action. The forward indicates that Sider is aware of two of the great weaknesses of this approach—viz., that an author might presume to read policy directly from Scripture without bothering to actually study the world of natural revelation, and that one might claim *ex cathedra* authority for a favorite faddish policy. In response, Sider acknowledges the possibility of errors in the Biblical exegesis, and claims even less authority for the social analysis and policy prescription. Clearly stung by past criticism, he asks that others not call him names and expects to be treated fairly, though a critic might sense that, even in the preface, the sometimes-flamboyant prose self-portrays a fair writer in contrast to others' name-calling, daring unfettered thinking in contrast to "the current ideological impasse." (For example, Olasky is said to stress "the misguided choices and destructive behaviors of the poor with hardly a hint that structural, economic factors might also be important." Have we been reading the same Olasky?) Above all the book consistently presents itself as a new comprehensive strategy that is neither conservative nor liberal, to correct a situation that is unnecessary and immoral.

The first two chapters present, through data and anecdotes, a sobering vision of what life might be like at the poverty line—low wages, broken families, lack of health care insurance, poor education, general insecurity and a lack of options. Along the way a number of stereotypes about American poverty are challenged: only 12 percent of the poor live in urban ghettos; only 27% are African-Americans; 20% of poor families include an adult working full-time year-round, and over one-third are headed by a married couple. Sider also argues that America's rich have become richer while the poorest have become poorer, and that there is no more social mobility in America than in France, Italy or Scandinavia. But Sider does not dodge topics that de-romanticize poverty—the possibility of substantial unreported incomes, or the importance of short-sighted and immoral personal choices. In the end, Sider argues that poverty has four broad causes: structural causes (such as falling low-skill wages, falling union membership, racism), poor personal decisions (drug use, poor school performance, violence, pre-marital sex), sudden catastrophes, and permanent disabilities. This web of causes requires a holistic approach.

Sider's chapters on Biblical theology strike themes that will be familiar to readers of his other work. While humans are to revel in the goodness of the material world as its stewards, this means that a "generous sufficiency of material things is essential to human goodness. Any economic structure that prevents persons from producing and enjoying material well-being violates our God-given dignity." (51) Labor can not be subjected to capital, and programs for social change must consider both material reality and spiritual transformation. While "our communal nature demands attention to the common good" such that "individual rights, whether of freedom of speech or private property, can not be absolute," it is also true that "since persons are free, their choices have consequences," such that "completely equal economic outcomes are not compatible with human freedom." (52) Sider generally seems to affirm that at least this much freedom is a good thing, perhaps a natural right.

Sin has entered the creation and affected both individual persons and the economic structures they create; therefore justice will involve more than fair procedures (procedural and commutative justice), requiring some notion of a fair distribution of power and resources (distributive justice), and, sometimes, communal action to redress distributive injustices—legitimate claims of ownership need to be restored, and restored with the force of law rather than via voluntary charity. The search for a practical summary of the requirements of distributive justice takes Sider through the Old Testament texts addressing Joshua's conquest (Joshua 18, Numbers 26), the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25, which Sider still takes to be a radically redistributive teaching), the sabbatical year (Exodus 23) and various other legal provisions of ancient Israel. In the end, Sider takes Scripture's standard for justice to be this: "Every person or family has access to productive resources (land, money, knowledge) so they have the opportunity to earn a generous sufficiency of material necessities and be dignified participating member of their community." (67) People should "normally have the opportunity to earn their own

way,” (67) and this was assured (in Israel) by methods that “encouraged work and responsibility, strengthened the family, and helped the poor return to self-sufficiency.” (70) This standard of justice involves more than lifting the poorest to a minimal level of sufficiency, since differences in wealth can “become so great that great inequalities of wealth and therefore power lead to oppression;” (75); thus a relative (not absolute) definition of poverty and need is called for. While the state should “enable other institutions... to carry out their responsibilities” (73), sometimes “the depth of social need exceeds the capacity of nongovernmental institutions” (73) such that the state “rightly acts to demand patterns of justice and provide vital services.”

Sider then turns to building a policy agenda. He endorses the idea of civil-society approaches as a “third way” between statist tinkering with the structures of society and anti-statist emphases on personal moral choices or dysfunctional government programs. Whereas both (political) liberals and conservatives have “thought that all we had to do to get the right behavior was switch the economic incentives and change the external environment,” (21) Sider portrays a moment in American history in which a holistic, multi-institutional approach is possible, “in which ... faith communities, businesses, the media, and government all contribute what each does best.”

Thus his solution includes a role for civil society, particularly for faith-based organizations; they teach “the attitudes of heart and mind that both prevent poverty in the first place and also help the poor escape poverty once they have fallen into it,” and they also could administer poverty-related programs that would be evaluated and (largely) funded by government. In addition to faith-based initiatives, most of the rest of civil society is addressed:

- Businesses are castigated for paying low wages, not offering health insurance to all employees as a benefit, promoting consumerism and sex via advertising, not assuring that jobs are offered to everyone, undermining family life by inflexible work rules, and generally treating workers “as merely an economic input.” (88) Several employee-friendly businesses (Service Master, for example) are held up as better models.
- Strong unions are promoted as a way to balance the corruption of power: “Top business executives (have) enormous power (that) offers vast opportunity to use it for selfish advantage unless other power counterbalances corporate power,” whereas “individual employees are mere ants.” (89) Whereas unions have at times misused power, they “have often been effective tools.”
- The media are faulted for becoming “often the primary moral teachers for our children,” while promoting consumerism, sex and violence.
- Universities, while conducting helpful poverty-related research, generally harbor a culture of agnosticism that leads to “a biased neglect of the role of religion” in their work. (90) Yet Sider relies upon their research capability to provide “solid, reliable program evaluation” of the relative value of faith-based poverty-related programs: “Are faith-based programs usually more successful than secular ones? Are Buddhist and New Age programs as effective at drug

rehabilitation as Jewish and Christian ones? Are thoroughly faith-based programs more successful than nominally faith-related programs? ... We need honest, objective answers to these and other questions.” (91)

What of the proper role of government?

When a social problem emerges, the first question should *not* be, What can government do? The first question should be, What institutions in society have primary responsibility for and are best able to correct this problem... Government must play a significant role in alleviating poverty, but not the only role, and in many cases, not even the primary role. Our society cannot long survive unless the family is renewed, and government can play only a modest, supportive role here... When government does act, the first question should be, What institutions in society are best able to solve this problem? And second, How can government strengthen rather than weaken these institutions? ... There are some things, however, that only the government can do: (Oversee nongovernmental providers with) guidelines, demand, fund and publicize careful evaluations, and provide much of the finances... rewrite divorce laws... act as a last resort when other institutions do not or cannot care for the poor... tax us all so it can provide funding... (become the catastrophic) insurer of last resort... (91-93)

The rest of the book, with chapters on family incomes, family structure, health insurance, education, and direct welfare payments, takes up the task of showing how a properly-constructed welfare state might succeed at these duties. Since “neither economic changes by themselves nor behavioral changes in family life by themselves can solve contemporary poverty,” (102) Sider proposes changes on both fronts:

- On the economic front, any family in which a total of forty hours per week is spent in paid employment should be assured of an income of 130% of the poverty level, (with subsidized health insurance for those under 150% of the poverty line). This is accomplished by some combination of 1) an expanded (refundable) earned income tax credit (which has better work incentives than direct welfare payments), 2) increases in the minimum wage, and 3) expansion of the food stamp program, with the mix among these three to be determined by economists (107). This should be supplemented by expansion of a refundable low-income dependent care tax credit, a refundable child tax credit, and (for those unable to find work elsewhere) a guaranteed government job (preferably in partnership with civil-society organizations, with a wage a bit below the minimum wage to discourage dependency, in consort with job training programs). Together these initiatives raise the forty-hour-per-week after-tax income to the desired target.
- For changing family life—particularly the absence of one or both parents, which is “the best predictor of who will become poor”—all segments of society are called upon to “promote the norm for a family assumed by virtually all civilizations for millennia: a mother and father united in lifelong marital

covenant, with their children, surrounded by a larger extended family.” (123) Since “business and government have undermined marriage and parenting in the last several decades,” (126) Sider advocates an end to the marriage tax penalty (while discouraging an assured child support payment to single parents, as this penalizes two-parent families where at least one parent is working—better to use a tax-credit system), and a redirection of the home-mortgage deduction toward lower-income families (including a refundable home ownership tax credit).

Socialized health and unemployment insurance complete the just compensation package. Though government should guarantee health-insurance coverage, it might not operate the delivery system; the decision between a single-payer plan, mandated job-related insurance, or mandated worker purchases of private insurance are left to specialists, “who must carefully assess the relative merits of each and clarify the options for us.” (146), though Sider is quite sure that medical savings accounts are not a just option (148-9), as they would siphon off the healthiest from conventional insurance and might create tax breaks for the wealthy.

Turning from compensation to general social policy, we have three chapters of proposals:

- Education: Urban schools should be made better, through some combination of increased funding, ending racism, reducing drug use, improving dysfunctional families, improving nutrition, shrinking administrative bureaucracies, improving teachers’ unions, and altering peer pressure (156ff); parents should be allowed to choose the kind of education that is best for their children, every religious tradition should be treated equally in the process, and there should be a common curriculum in the basics with standardized testing. To this end, Sider proposes that we “invest several billion dollars in a massive five-year test” that would pit voucher-based reform against comprehensive, incremental reform of the public school system. Only this kind of social experiment will yield the information we need in order to make an informed decision about which approach is best.
- Welfare: Recent changes in the entitlement programs should be adjusted: nonworking healthy adults without children should be offered an entitled job rather than a payment, while faith-based organizations should be more active in shepherding those making the transition from welfare programs, and welfare-payment policy should be altered so that mothers could keep more of an absent father’s support payments, as an incentive for those payments to continue. Given the existence of guaranteed government jobs, the current time-limits for TANF recipients would be justified, and receipt should also require job- and financial-planning training. For healthy adults with serious, long-term problems, in a “very small number” the time limits might be extended, but “we certainly should not design the welfare system around their needs;” (191) for the vast majority Sider advocates essentially the same standards for all recipients: “Many people who think they cannot work will

discover there are jobs they can do... Mothers and fathers so addicted to drugs or alcohol that they cannot keep a job are likely unfit to care for their children. However painful at the beginning, adoption or foster care would probably be better for the children in the long run.” (191)

- Miscellaneous other issues: All neighborhoods should be safe; a long list of initiatives, from gun control to community policing, is offered. Taxes, portrayed as relatively low in the United States, should be paid gladly for funding anti-poverty measures, where most VAT or flat-tax proposals are criticised for their regressive structure. Social Security must be strengthened but not privatized, because “of course” currently-guaranteed benefits would have to be cut, the size of pensions would not be guaranteed, and political support for low-income benefits would be eroded. Government-subsidized “individual development accounts,” stock/bond investment/savings instruments, are advocated as a way to build capital among the poor. Changes in zoning laws and metropolitan incorporation/annexation habits are encouraged to create more metropolitan-wide governance and tax bases. And faith-based organizations are called upon to engage in direct community organizing to help neighborhoods shape their future.

A final, relatively hopeful chapter summarizes Sider’s vision of the current opportunity and the roadblocks in its way. The secular policy elite is open to faith-based options, the cold war has ended, and various Christian groups seem to be softening their evangelism-only or social-action-only instincts to come together around common concern for the poor. The economy has been booming, and there are many models of successful ministry to be learned from. Sider raises three remaining obstacles in the last three pages of the book:

- Can we afford everything this book has proposed? Sider suggests that these proposals amount to a redirection, not increase, in welfare spending, to be financed out of \$125 billion in “corporate welfare,” \$33 b in mortgage tax credits to those with incomes over \$100,000/year, \$60 b tax benefit to middle-/upper class people via untaxed health insurance benefits, along with savings on social programs as the poor are empowered.
- Can a long-divided Christian community come together to work on a common agenda? Sider offers anecdotal evidence that a consensus is forming.
- Do enough Christians really care about the poor? “Suffocating materialism and narcissistic individualism have wormed their way into so many Christian hearts and congregations. Fearfully, I wonder if most Christians may not sleep through one of the most amazing opportunities in our history.” (220) The book closes with encouragement to pray daily, minister with the poor at least an hour weekly, study further at least monthly, and do a personal-reflection retreat yearly on the topics raised in the book.

I will offer some brief comments on the book, organized around the final three concerns bulleted in the last paragraph:

Regarding the financial sustainability of these proposals: The book's proposals will remind economists of similar discussions in the Netherlands around the turn of the last century, in Scandinavia between the world wars, and in America during the negative-income-tax experiments around 1970. Each of the European experiments was, in its way, creating a welfare state that relied upon a partnership between church and state to maintain moral character while alleviating poverty in the context of a policy impasse. The Dutch experiment explicitly endorsed a version of the kind of religious pluralism Sider envisions. All three experiments, but especially the American NIT experiments, raise serious questions about the effects upon work incentives of an EITC of the size Sider is proposing. It would be helpful for the book to revisit those experiments, particularly the European strain that in the end produced highly secularized societies with social programs that, by many accounts, were not sustainable. What went right there, and what went wrong? How are the current proposals similar, how are they different? Prudential considerations like these deserve more than half of page 219.

Here's one quick example of a lesson from the NIT experiments: Let's say we adopt Sider's proposed target of 130% of the poverty level for minimum-wage earners, and also accept the idea (which he advocates if I read correctly) that the tax code should be no less progressive nor harder on work incentives than it currently is. I take that to mean that those receiving support should not face a higher effective income tax rate than 15%, the current middle-income rate. Taken together, this implies (relying on Table Three, page 115) that minimum-wage earners (in four-person families) would receive a subsidy of \$10,643 per year; at the national median household income (\$42,467) families would still receive a subsidy of \$5,981 per year. In fact everyone up to an income of \$82,340 would pay no taxes and receive a subsidy. The total national subsidy (rough-figured from Table Two, page 42) would be about \$377 billion, paid for entirely by the top fifth of the income distribution (those with incomes above \$82,340). If you are willing to raise tax rates to 40% from 15%, subsidies would extend up to incomes of around \$31,000, at a total cost of around \$165 billion. In other words, after a point there is no way around the trade-off between supporting incomes and maintaining incentives to work. If you want to raise support while making the system affordable, you have to raise effective tax rates, and that discourages work effort, which makes the system less affordable. That paradox is worth some consideration.

Regarding the possibility of bringing together Christians of various political predilections: The book presents itself, quite self-consciously, as a third way between conservatism and liberalism. This is done, as much as is metaphysically possible, by including everything from both agendas. For example, "it is time to get beyond the silly argument between liberals and conservative about whether it takes a village or a family to raise a child. Hillary Clinton *and* Kay James are both right. It takes both." (218) Of course, there are some cases in which the two instincts can not be commingled. In these instances Sider is consistently a social

conservative (except perhaps on gun control; he is anti-pornography, anti-abortion, pro-traditional-marriage, critical of Hollywood morality, generous toward faith-based initiatives, respecting the power of personal virtuous moral action); he is also consistently a political/economic liberal (advocating a welfare state that might make Ted Kennedy blush). Of course the welfare state's most egregious incentive-corrupters have been amended—tax credits rather than direct payments, for example—in a strategy that mirrors that of New Labour in Great Britain and the former New Democrats in the United States. Whether this conglomerate is sturdy enough to form a consensus I do not know. But I expect that there are many more political/economic liberals who have discovered the virtues of social conservatism than there are social-and-political conservatives who will be persuaded by the call for an expanded welfare state, unless a much more serious analysis of previous similar attempts is put forth. Judging by the contents of the ideologically-diverse forward and jacket comments, the book seems to arouse more polite respect than committed assent.

Regarding the need for Christians to care more: This seems to be the central claim of the book. Actually constructing policy to solve poverty is presented as a technical detail to be worked out by the economists, once we all care enough to do something. This allows a book that is short on serious policy evaluation or consideration of other historic welfare-state initiatives, but long on condemnation of self-absorbed middle-class Christians in America who do not live in the right neighborhoods or volunteer for the right causes or see the world in the right way. No doubt there is a sleeping Mainline-denomination giant that may never be roused; but the book's evangelical audience is, by the objective academic studies with which I am familiar, the most generous subpopulation of volunteers and financiers that one could reasonably hope for. Show them that you have addressed prudential concerns about how the poor are best helped, then give them latitude to use their own gifts rather than yours, and they will respond.

And finally, since this review involves consideration of evangelical resources, a word about the resources that went into the writing of this book. The Acknowledgements chapter cites a funding foundation, a personal administrator, two editors, two research assistants, eight Evangelicals for Social Action staff, twenty shadow-writing academics (who wrote the volume from which much of the social analysis is nominally drawn), and forty intensive reviewers at academic centers and think-tanks. The Olasky book was produced at a Washington think tank, using I would suppose a similar entourage. Perhaps my admiration for Lincoln-esque simplicity is out of place in the post-modern world. But I do still wonder if the right person holding a few well-considered words scratched on an envelope might, with malice toward none and charity toward all, go farther in redirecting a culture.

Schneider: Godly Materialism

Our last broadly visionary book does not focus on prescribing a particular strategy or assuming an overt political posture. The author instead presents a theological analysis of many of the ideas that emerge when poverty is discussed, and in the process has something informative to say to all of the other voices in the debate. While most of Schneider's writing has consisted of scholarly efforts in theology, his Godly Materialism was directed to a more popular audience. It rounds out our discussion of economics, aiming to be more directly a biblical study than a consideration of public policy or economic history or best practices.

Schneider writes "to reach Christian people who have more than enough money but not enough sense of direction in their economic lives,"(8) out of the conviction that many "rich" Christians suffer from an identity crisis, a crisis of guilt over being believers with money and privilege in an age of suffering. His book is therefore first of all pastoral, and directed by his preface and epilogue to an audience of well-intentioned middle- and upper-class students who have been "shelled out" by other popular books about Christian responsibilities in economic life. Schneider writes that in Scripture, God seems to identify and side with the poor, which many extrapolate into some form of a condemnation of capitalism as a system structured for evil, requiring that we practice downward rather than upward mobility. Yet there is something right and good about a system that encourages and liberates people to work hard and be productive, to dream and pursue dreams; something good about safe neighborhoods and solid schools, a secure house and home, taking delight in material goods. (14-15)

The resulting paradox leaves many Christian struggling with unresolved conflict and guilt over their economic identities. Middle- and upper-class life's delights are often pitted directly against the life of radical social and economic compassion in the contemporary literature of the church. "For many Christians, delight is always hollowed at the center by the powers of guilt."(15) So Schneider sets out to explore the question: "Is there a kind of delight that also embraces justice? Is true godliness possible for people... who enjoy the good things of life in a world of hunger?"(17) Schneider believes there is a "godly materialism," and sets out in search of it on a course that is essentially a chronological study of Christian experience (possessions as understood by the Church throughout history) and Biblical revelation (considering in sequence from Genesis through the book of Acts).

Schneider identifies three models of Christian economic identity that have emerged throughout church history as the most plausible interpretations of Scripture on economic life and the ownership and acquisition of wealth: Historic Catholicism, Historic Protestantism, and New World Theology, which emerges after the democratic, scientific and industrial revolutions that the other two did not foresee, in which wealth and freedom were generated for many more persons and power and control over life were generally held at lower levels of the social ladder.

Historic Catholicism, rooted in the work of St Augustine, may be thought of as three pillars. In the first pillar, basic affirmations, Augustine affirms the goodness of the creation, the God-given dignity of work, commercial activity, productivity and possession of property. This pillar has rarely been challenged, though it has come under some scrutiny by twentieth-century theologians who are attracted to communism.(32)

The second pillar established “utilitarian” moral reasoning about the use of wealth. Augustine distinguishes between enjoyment and use of material goods. He argues that the things of this world are to be used, not enjoyed, used that we may comprehend the eternal and spiritual, but not enjoyed in themselves, lest we be distracted by this from our heavenly home. Thus luxuries, goods for enjoyment, are not appropriate. Simple, unqualified delight is replaced by an instrumental view of physical activities; the pleasures associated with the simple goods like food or drink indicate a fixation on the world, not joy in God’s good gifts. Living and working in the world, and possession of property, are acceptable, if we distinguish between needs and wants, and avoid things that are not necessary needs. “When you possess the superfluous you possess what is not yours.”(31) Hence the emphasis on utilitarianism, stressing social utility in meeting the greatest needs and condemning the enjoyment of luxuries while others are poor.

The third pillar elevates poverty to a higher station than being relatively rich, by the notion of supererogation. Rather than pit monastic life against ordinary life, Augustine affirms both as necessary, but orders them as higher and lower goods. Ordinary life is good, but the monastic life its the ideal. All Christians must meet certain obligations, but acts of supererogation, not required by biblical law but morally good, improve our moral standing before God. Thus those who must live a common life within the culture are not condemned, but those who freely choose to follow Christ’s example of poverty and communal ownership in the monastery, perform an act toward spiritual perfection and sainthood.

Historic Protestantism essentially accepted the first two points of Historical Catholicism, but vigorously challenged the third.

New World Theology forced a radical re-examination of the second pillar of Historical Catholicism, the utilitarian principle. New institutions of government, learning and business had done the unimaginable: liberated whole populations from tyranny and poverty, by making it possible to gain without doing so at the expense of others, in fact while actually serving them. This new order brought a powerful shift from viewing material goods as mere instruments for seeking spiritual realities to goods to be enjoyed as blessings from God, to be delighted in as expression of human dignity and Christian prosperity in the faith.(36) The acquisitiveness and credit-dependence and speculative investment of the middle-class lost its moral stain. Private Property gained theological status through its connection with personal liberty and an expression of bodily life in this world as

something to be shaped in the image of the owner, as an expression of that owner's imaging of God Himself.

The basis in scripture for this revolution was a rediscovery of the teaching of the Old Testament.(38) There was rediscovery of the vision of human domination on earth and this-worldly blessing; a theology of guarded, morally rigorous triumph displaced the classical theology of the cross. This world was the Christian's true home and domain, not a passing stage, and charity toward the poor was to be shown in actually alleviating poverty one day, not merely giving alms and seeing poverty self-perpetuate.

To bring the discussion down to the present, we find ourselves in a debate between two extremes: Some within popular American religion have evolved from the New World theology to the triumphal position that the American system is God's presumed system, that true faith brings worldly success, without nuances. These voices rarely discuss how the righteous may suffer, or the world's real inequities, or the evils that perpetuate them, or the obligations of the wealthy toward them. Others, especially in intellectual circles, fiercely react to the New World theology, reviving the traditions of austerity and utilitarianism (and sometimes large-scale communal ownership), often through a Liberation Theology that emphasizes redemption of the poor. More often than not this comes with hostility toward the middle class and its vision of the good life.

With this scene as backdrop, Schneider considers Scripture directly for the remainder of the book. The creation accounts sharply distinguish creator from creation, and sets humans apart with supremacy in dignity and value. The material realm and bodily life are affirmed as very good, including human work, cultivation, productivity and the enjoyment of life. Taken together, the Genesis emphases point us toward an understanding of just what kinds of enjoyment might be "selfish materialism." Humans are made in God's very likeness, with dominion and commands to be fruitful, fill and subdue the earth. This elevates each person, unlike the ancient pagan understandings of king or queen as incarnate presence of god, god's very image, embodying the power of the sun and stars, with other humans at a lower plane of being. Instead, all humans bear a royal identity, with royal obligations. Each one represents God's rule over the earth, with a God-derived freedom, dignity, power and royal effect over the whole earth and its inhabitants.(51)

And how does this God govern? "The God of Genesis first creates out of sheer delight in the goodness of his creation...when he creates he both enriches himself and glorifies everyone and everything else.(52) His delight is other-centered; He rules with great compassion. Thus we are to be co-workers, in mutual respect, taking delight in the goodness of God's world and gifts through productive work, abundance, and flourishing. "The whole person, who works, conserves, cultivates, nourishes, protects, but also does so as the one who rules, orders, dominates and simply enjoys at his or her good pleasure, is the original, majestic human

being.”(55) God granted a vast, superfluous horizon of freedom for delight in the beginning, not just conditions for functional existence but for majesty. True delight “summarizes the right relationship between human beings and the world, our guiding vision while seeking liberation for the poor.(57) The “luxuries” and “superfluousness” that might be condemned by utilitarian ethics may in a sense be considered necessities,(58-59) essential for healthy self-esteem and an expression of God’s glory, human dignity and the goodness of life in this world.

Yet with good gifts came limits and responsibility, to which humans proved not equal. Humans wished to become autonomous, and pulled themselves away from God and goodness in sin. Yet the Genesis account surprises the reader with the theme that humans and creation have not entirely lost their goodness, and that God is still redeeming the creation. In the Noah narratives God re-establishes the essential order of the creation, albeit with several accommodations to life as it is after the fall rather than life as it should be; Yet the ground is again established as good, humans as blessed with the duty to multiply and fill, and humans are reaffirmed as bearers of God’s image. The possibility of servant dominion and delight are still real. One’s basic instinct should therefore not be toward separation and counterculture, but toward engagement.

The Exodus carries on the theme that the physical world matters to God, that physical circumstances are real and essential to the moral order, not just unpleasanties to be endured or ignored. It teaches that evil is sometimes expressed through social institutions and systems. God liberates through the shaping of just societies, and God’s people must represent Him in this work.

But just what is a just society? What are we to be liberated to? Schneider considers Israel’s law as the pattern for an answer. The laws’ constant refrain is God’s compassion for powerless people; concern for the poor and powerless is in the very soul of the law, essential to the biblical vision of delight and shalom.(68-9)

Schneider gives a thoughtful response to theologians who presume that this drive toward justice compassion presupposes socialism or a welfare state that loosens private property rights. The focus of these claims has been the sabbatical and related laws, often interpreted to teach that God ultimately owns everything and persons are “only” stewards, which Schneider takes to radically weaken our personal right to use and enjoy wealth, while strengthening the rights of the community to distribute wealth as it wishes. Schneider answers by pointing out that there was not an initially equal division of property in the promised land, that redistribution was not according to need but actually excluded many of the poorest, that there was no jubilee expectation of the rich to sacrifice their “luxuries” to serve the needs of the poor but actually a restoration of land to the old landed families, whether they needed it or not, and that jubilee did not make rights to land relative but permanent and absolute, only temporarily suspended by leases between jubilees. The jubilee also comes in the context of laws that affirm banking, lending and general productivity, which make little sense apart from

affirmation of commercial enterprise and property rights. “The purpose of the release was to protect the Israelite families from poverty and to empower them for both lives of redemptive action and delight in the abundance of the land.”(75) The theme of delight is actually reinforced by the tithing laws, which do not promote simpler living to share with the poor, but actually mandate a party of lush thanksgiving, involving “whatever you desire” with a tenth of one’s income each year, in which the poor of the land are to be included. The continual subdivision of the land would also tend toward democratic political order with diversified power.

Thus, while the laws give restrictions that limit licentiousness and protect everyone from the damaging effects of being poor, while we are warned of the dangers of arrogance and autonomy that can come with wealth, these do not destroy the basic goodness of Israel’s dominion and delight; “the basic unit of ... liberation was *personal* liberty for most Israelites, including... an invitation to dominate, cultivate and enjoy the fruits of the land.. We ought not to think very long about the possible liberation of the poor apart from this affirmation of life and liberty through the possession of fruitful property.”(76)

Schneider then turns to the prophets and wisdom literature. Drawing a distinction with Acton’s adage that power corrupts, he sees in the preceding texts the message that, when hedged with compassion, the power of dominion and delight is essentially good. Yet in the prophets we have warnings about the negative power that brings destruction and death. In the exile, about which the prophets comment, comes a reversal of the exodus: the slaves have become merciless oppressors, and are sent again into captivity and dependence. The main reason for this exile was economic immorality.(84) The prophets’ teaching expose the nature of this immorality, and apply the lessons both to Israel and the surrounding nations.

From the prophets, Schneider focuses on Amos. The message comes at a prosperous time of religious observance in Israel. Yet Amos accuses and judges more harshly than their pagan neighbors. Compassion had left, and the sacred life of liberation, dominion and delight had been twisted into sated, harsh, narcissistic exploitation of the weak. Yet Schneider finds in the prophesies not a moral judgement against enjoyment of fine things, even in times of hunger, but a judgement of demonic self-absorption. He is content to say that

it takes real depth, wisdom and spiritual discernment to know the difference between true delight and demonic narcissism...The root of their evil..(is) that they ‘do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.’ Their whole spirituality expresses a lack of proper, sacred grief for the suffering around and about them... They have lost touch with brokenness and thus have lot their own souls.(88)

I do not wish to say that the evil is only spiritual and not a matter of lifestyle...But Amos wisely does not fall into the trap of legalism, ... Righteousness is not a matter of scraping away “luxuries” until a core of “necessities” has been reached. No, it is a matter of finding one’s true humanity.(88-9)

Thus a properly grieving spirit leads those who have been given liberating power to the obligation to be a liberating power in the world.

Schneider's consideration of the wisdom literature turns on the question of whether and why the righteous suffer. He argues against both a simple reading that righteousness produces wealth and poverty is a punishment for evil, and against the simple alternative that the world system is so corrupt that righteousness generally results in poverty, such that the poor are the true people of God. Proverbs does portray being rich as good, and God does want His people to prosper; to say otherwise is to "weaken the whole Christian vision of dignity, worth and rights for people." (93) Yet the world does not always operate by such straight justice, at least in the short-run, before the ultimate judgement. "We cannot predict with certainty that faith will bring material flourishing and delight." (95) Wickedness often pays in this world, too, and as the book of Job teaches, poverty is not necessarily the result of wickedness.

Ours is not to judge in any final sense, but to act in humility and love toward the fallen... In such cases, the presumption of grace should be with the poor. God will take care of the rest... (When) circumstances are so deeply fallen that virtue becomes sin,... God is with the poor and against the rich... not because they are poor but because they have kept their integrity and suffer for it. God identifies with neither the rich nor the poor apart from moral situations in real life. (96-7)

Schneider then turns to the life of Jesus and his followers. He argues that our view of Jesus generates a system of social values and a kind of spirituality; thus a misconception about Jesus' basic place in Palestine's social culture is a serious problem for our understanding of economic life.

In stunning contrast to the typical council that Jesus identified with the poor and was himself voluntarily poor by birth and social circumstance, and surrounded by the poorest of ancient culture, a man of the righteous poor who opposed the unrighteous rich, Schneider argues that Jesus, his circle of disciples, and most of the early church were drawn from a diverse lot who primarily represented the "small businesses and trades that belonged to something like the Palestinian "middle class." (103) "Businesspeople were the backbone of the church, not objects of its contempt." (117) No one in his own culture would have classified Jesus as poor, either economically or socially. (109, 110) He in fact had many advantages--a first-born male inheriting a firm that supported an apparently large family, a guaranteed education as a result, a stable home life rather than orphaned life on the streets, good health, an inheritance, to mention a few--which most of his contemporaries lacked. Thus the poor to whom Jesus came to proclaim release are those poor in spirit, a condition all of these social groups share with those poorest economically; "the poor are simply those whom Jesus blessed and to whom he proclaimed the good news." (120) Jesus' identification with persons seems to be an identification with the ordinary, uncomplicated, hardworking, productive, humble and happy around him, (120) leading the relatively privileged into new lives of

economic redemption and redemptiveness, placing them in contact with the suffering world in a new community of grace; the result was not egalitarian levelling, but a new life of economic dynamism and renewed compassion.(121)

This is the social identity that Jesus deliberately chose, and it tells us something about the character of God, and about his life as a human person in the world of culture. He had no shame as part of the middle class, relatively sheltered and privileged to enjoy good things, even as others suffered. This is a welcomed counterpoint to the popular Christian authors who routinely condemn American middle-class life as a polar extreme from Jesus' incarnation.

It shows that there is something right and good about growing up in a healthy environment. (He could have) identified himself with the really poor. But he did not. The loving heavenly Father took care that his Son had an environment where he "became strong" and was "filled with wisdom."(112)

Furthermore, it is very likely that Jesus' wealth was in large part due to the public works projects in his area commissioned by Herod Antipas.(110, 113) He took his place within the moral conditions of his historical web-work. To those who would raise "structural evil" to a level morally indistinguishable from "personal evil," that we are responsible for our involvement in world systems in the same way as our involvement in others' individual lives, this raises a strong word of caution. Working in a fallen system cannot be sinful; we all, even God's own Son, benefit to some degree from sinful systems without directly trying to change them, and often have no way to even know about them. Jesus did not speak out against these great structural evils even when given opportunity to do so, and associated with those tax collectors and others deemed most typical of cultural godlessness, while condemning others for their lack of grace toward these persons.(115) Otherwise, the greater our involvement in the world, the greater our guilt, and the less our ability to influence these systems for positive change.(114) This guilt by implication would leave us unable to be involved in the world with integrity; it is a counsel of separatism. We should instead give our righteous protests against evil a different moral shape. While some systems are so essentially evil that involvement in them is ruled out (selling drugs, prostitution, pornography and the like), we should not accept the notion of guilt by implication through co-operative work within systems that include and profit from evil.(116)

Schneider then struggles with the "two Jesuses" sometimes drawn from the scriptures: the Jesus of radical condemnation and negation regarding wealth and comfort, and the Jesus of compassion and delight who was criticized as a celebrative drunkard, accused of being an indulgent who enjoyed life rather than observing the Torah, arrested as the wanton disobedient son who should be put to death (Deut. 21:20). Schneider argues that we have here a single, integrated personality. Proper grieving comes through to celebration. In his negation statements, Jesus prepares his followers as no humans before or after them to initiate the kingdom of Christ on earth,(141) to teach them lessons of dependence

on the power of God alone and prepare them for dark times after His crucifixion. Jesus' need to teach the disciples both profound meekness and extraordinary bravery explains the theme of physical deprivation and separation from the cares of the world in their lives. Their adopted life with Jesus was aimed eventually at dominion and rule with the Lord.

Schneider then examines four of the central parables in Jesus' teaching about wealth and poverty. "When all our sifting is done, his message to the rich is essentially the same as that of Moses, the prophets and Wisdom... Its object is not to destroy the rich, but to save them, and to shape them into the great power for good that God has ordained and blessed them to be."(146) The foolishness of the rich fool is in his philosophy of life, the disposition behind his otherwise prudent actions, not in the actions themselves; he is motivated by greed and lonely isolation, not creative and redemptive love. The rich man who gave only cool indifference to Lazarus is condemned for not hearing Moses and the prophets, for not representing the vision of the exodus; through compassion, the rich must enter into the world of the poor and touch it with liberating power, though Jesus does not provide a template explaining exactly how.(152ff) This is left to our imaginations. Schneider also argues from this parable that the obligations of those with power fall most heavily on those "near" them:

The obligation of the rich...(which limits our freedom and delight) is itself limited by God's gracious blessing on our freedom to be what he created us to be...The peculiar nature of our creatureliness limits our realm of freedom *and* responsibility... Our obligations are strongest, and our moral tests most severe, where they are nearest... Each of us needs a clear vision of our unique realm and its boundaries. This is crucial to knowing our real obligations--and freedoms.... God does not normally require that we move outward in economic life beyond our capacities for productive action and delight in life. Messianic crusading can do terrible damage to ourselves, our loved ones and our witness in the world. It is often anxiety and desperation (or even arrogance) transparently masquerading as faith and love.(156)

The story of the dishonest manager teaches that, at moments of anxiety that might launch us into isolation, hoarding and hiding from the world, faith must drive us to engage others instead, to open up and give. The parable of the ten pounds teaches us of God's desire for creative, redemptive uses of economic power, even in situations that seem insignificant. The parable honors courage and strength of those who are faithful in worldly realms of power, and judges the timid who live economically fruitless lives rather than accept the stresses of responsibility in the world of business.(162) The servant's obligations are not connected with empowering the poor, but with enlarging the master's power and dominion. When obligations for godliness are met, the creative, productive economic life becomes absolutely true to our humanity and the identity of God.(163) We are to enlarge and dignify whatever realm God has given us.

Schneider concludes by considering the early church's economic life, primarily by study of the early chapters of the book of Acts, along with Paul's engagement in collections for the Palestinian believers and James' exhortations about wealth. Schneider takes the remarkable transformation of economic life among Jerusalem's believers, which broke the "strongholds that deprived people of decent food, clothing, shelter and simple human delight,"(167) to be a story not so much of the poor and their liberation as about the rich and their role as liberators. The rich stood as brave liberators, and their reward was a good deal of public trust.(168) Schneider sees here no whiff of decapitalization among Christians in general, nor indictment of private property or capitalism. This was not an experiment with disinvestment and communalism. The system clearly respected personal freedom and control over property. Having "all things in common" did not mean abolishing private property, or setting up communal mechanisms of ownership. There was no system of moral intimidation or guilt manipulation. Profits from sales of property remained in the sellers' hands to distribute. It was the voluntary nature of the system that made the actions of Ananias and Sapphira so disgusting; their sin was not ownership, but deceit and hypocrisy, a cancer in the church. The text tells us nothing about what proportion of wealth people gave away, and the church itself did not behave in a utilitarian manner in its distribution of donations: Giving was limited by "nearness," within which freedom and delight might abound for everyone; giving goes to other believers, with "not a trace of moral panic about the world outside, the global poor."(177) Thus the rich became "powerful liberators without destroying their power to liberate."(177) The church remained a place of celebration and delight.

Schneider then turns to a general indictment of what he sees as the utilitarian instinct of many commentaries on these passages. By utilitarianism Schneider means "the view that enjoyment of superfluous wealth is morally wrong in a context where others have unsatisfied basic needs. Utilitarianism is, and must be, always suspicious of what we have called delight."(171) These texts deny a utilitarian reading: Human need is a bottomless obligation, such that utilitarianism leads to an obsession with moral justification of all actions and enjoyment. It provides no coherent strategy for liberation: "To whatever extent we become poorer we create degrees of poverty and (in one fashion or another) we foster the powerlessness that comes with being poor. Oddly, by so identifying with weakness, we reduce our power to liberate... If (liberation) destroys the condition of being rich, then the power to liberate ... is thereby lost."(174) The biblical vision of personal freedom, delight and blessing, dignity and dominion, of intuition for "nearness" that forms boundaries around our zeal and protects us and those around us from our own messianic tendencies, is lost.

Thus obligations toward the poor arise not from a system of "need," but a vision of royal abundance in life and a discerning awareness of the needs within a compelling nearness to our situation. Obligation to the poor does not erase God's blessing on our delight.(174-5) We might add that the common empirical finding

that delight and self-reported happiness are rarely correlated with income also weakens the utilitarian case.

This is bound to leave us a bit wanting of rigor. How are the rich to balance the calls to delight with the calls to sacrifice? It is a paradox. “If we are seeking a more controlled and clearer guidance system than this, I do not think we will find it in the sacred story. And the fact that the Christians throughout the empire, from very early on, felt intuitively free to apply these principles in very different ways from what Luke pictures in Acts only strengthens this judgement.”(178)

In James, Schneider takes the object of pointed references to the wealthy, placed in the context of the Prophets and Wisdom literature, to center on the use of wealth, rather than on the evil of riches themselves. “Riches are evil on the conditions that people make them absolute ends of life, and especially when they become an altar on which to sacrifice the poor... But none of this implies that James denies the possibility and goodness of riches in a context of faith and righteous action.”(179) Likewise Paul’s comments on sharing wealth with Jerusalem’s Christians during famine are taken not as general rules for Christian economic living, as these were not collections for world relief or even the world church. “His main concern was... with the connection between Israel and the church, with saving the relationship between the older covenant and the newer one. ‘This act of charity became for him a way of repairing the strained relationship between two wings of the church.’... For Paul, this special crisis was a matter of nearness. It was not suffering in the abstract that generated his moral appeal, but rather this particular poverty that was so very close to the heart of his life and mission... Thus, this text ought to guide us more in times of peculiar crisis than as a paradigm for all of economic life.”(181-2) And even in this case, there is no utilitarian levelling to a common base of poverty; “The end of sacrifice... is not levelling, poverty or degradation, but that we may ‘reap bountifully.’...words of blessing and prosperity for further redemptive action.”(182) And all giving was to be done voluntarily, genuinely, authentically; “The last thing he wanted was a system of legalistic compulsion, such as is required by the manna of utilitarianism...the response...was voluntary, not even morally necessary: ‘Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion.’”(183-4)

Schneider has given anyone in the conversation about wealth and possessions a great deal to think about. He avoids the mistakes that have been associated by others with some of his positions, such as promoting a health-and-wealth gospel or building a case that excludes compassion and sacrifice.

One might argue that Schneider’s book has done more to clear old rubble than to construct a compelling alternative. Surely we don’t believe that the New World experiments with economic orders are so utterly unprecedented as to require an entirely new theology, with little to learn from Calvin, Luther, or the rich resources

of others who have considered these questions. There have always been markets; gain was always possible, in some forms, without patronage and tyranny. And none of the New World experiments are so pure that all forms of modern wealth acquisition can be equally approved as God's blessing for dignity and delight. Thus there's a great deal of nuance yet to be explored.

***Sherman: Restorers of Hope: Reaching the Poor in Your Community
with Church-Based Ministries that Work***

Broadly visionary books, like the three we have considered, do well to remain closely tethered to the actual realities they attempt to analyse. With so many churches finding themselves in a new world of welfare reform and charitable choice, there is a great need for well-informed practical advice on navigating the sea change in American social policy. We now turn to the best of these guides.

In her Ph.D. thesis, published by Oxford University Press, Sherman chronicles her field work in Central America, investigating the effects of Evangelical conversion on economic culture. Sherman's interests migrated toward domestic poverty during the course of her graduate work, and upon completion of the Ph.D. she sought out a position as director of neighborhood ministries for an evangelical church in a moderate-sized city. The book we consider here is the first publication that reflects on this work, and others' similar work, in engaging the problems of American poverty at the level of grass-roots Christian ministry.

Sherman documents the work of many ministries that are doing exactly what Olasky advocates, reaching out to broken people and places with the transforming love and mercy of Christ. These congregations, which she calls "restorers," unlike most government agencies, many secular programs, and even some well-intentioned but misguided churches, treat needy people personally, flexibly, and creatively. Restorers build friendships..., challenge "can't-do-it" attitudes, ... counteract cultural messages of hedonism, promiscuity, and moral relativism,... build self-esteem, wield moral authority, and care for people in ways that encourage self-sufficiency rather than prolonged dependency.

Sherman argues that the public debate about welfare policy has swung around to a position that leaves many Christian churches wondering how they can participate in ministries of restoration. An earlier generation emphasized the materialist viewpoint that economic or structural factors (discrimination, lack of investment in schools security and medical care) are ultimately behind behavioral problems. But grave disappointment with such material-aid-only welfare programs has led even secular commentators to affirm the place of spiritual matters in the causes and perpetuation of poverty. At the other extreme, some over-emphasize moral-cultural factors (an entitlement mentality, illegitimacy, bad work habits, substance abuse, materialism, negative attitudes toward learning) as the ultimate causes of poverty.

Sherman acknowledges that there are many and varied reasons for persistent poverty; “ideologies that recognize *only* structural factors or *only* moral-cultural factors miss the mark.”(18) Recent welfare reforms have tried to acknowledge the possibility of moral-cultural factors in persistent poverty, imposing penalties for irresponsible parenting or poor work habits, while addressing some of the real structural difficulties, like the high cost of day care for working poor families. Yet even positive reforms that acknowledge a moral-cultural side to poverty, though necessary, are insufficient. “Public policy changes alone cannot reform behavior; personal transformation requires more than legislative reforms. It requires “holistic ministry”--that is, attention to a person’s “whole” being (his/her emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual state).”(20) This new consensus about the nature of poverty raises doubt that long-term hope exists when moral and spiritual issues are neglected; government must reduce its expectations of what can be achieved through public aid, and faith-based ministries must play a greater role in social welfare.(20-1)

Sherman sets out to show churches how they can implement an effective, life-transforming mercy ministry among the poor, by describing and analyzing the work of several effective, orthodox, “distinctively Christian” church-based ministries from a variety of circumstances in the United States. All emphasize God’s love in both word (proclamation, evangelism and discipleship) and deed (meeting physical, social, and emotional needs). All believe that poverty is ultimately rooted in sin--both personal(moral failings) and social (institutional greed, racism, and materialism).(29)

The first section of her three-section book describes why successful ministries are working. A short review like this one can not do justice to the lush garden of cases and exemplary ministries that Sherman sets before us, but we can at least try to fairly summarize the thinking of her book. In her typology, successful ministries counter ghetto culture with biblical values, deliberately incorporate evangelism and discipleship into their outreach efforts, and “enlarge” the world of inner-city residents. Sherman’s analysis of the “street” culture that challenges holistic ministry, which is by no means the only way of life for residents of ghettos but does influence life for everyone, identifies several destructive themes: Street culture is lived by “the code,” rooted largely in inner-city residents’ profound distrust of the police and criminal justice system. Residents feel justified in taking extraordinary measures to protect themselves and seek respect. This respect is viewed as a zero-sum commodity, which reinforces violent activities. “The Code” also grows out of an overwhelming sense of alienation from mainstream society, via racism, lack of work opportunities and poverty that lead to a rejection of mainstream society or the hope of entering the mainstream. Mainstream values like educational achievement, respect for authority, or hard work are viewed as irrelevant to *their* world. A third source undergirding the code of the streets is “the media’s constant proclamation of American society’s ‘consumerist gospel’: health, happiness, and status through material possessions. The pervasive low sense of self-worth felt by many ghetto residents makes them even more vulnerable to this

message,”(41) and the inner-city’s isolation and alienation drown out other voices that tend to breed some healthy scepticism of consumerism and nihilism in more balanced neighborhoods. Street culture is characterized not only by its own code and oppositional values, but often by a culture of dependency, entitlement and stasis, partly engendered by years under the federal welfare system. This mind set inhibits normal motivations for exiting the system. And all of these tendencies are amplified by “concentration effects:” through a combination of forces, urban neighborhoods that formerly included families from a variety of economic classes are now often home to only the most marginalized. This all combines to mean that even the many families in inner-city situations who attempt to live by a higher standard than “the code” find their ability to challenge street culture limited, in neighborhoods where concepts like marriage, work and fatherhood are losing their plausibility and the nonpoor rarely enter in.

Restorers seek to transform this culture from the inside out, by avoiding the extreme views of poverty as exclusively a personal-behavioral issue or exclusively a social-structural issue. Their prescriptions are inclusive: The behavior and worldview of street culture are challenged (by strengthening families, shoring up neighborhood schools, exposing the myths of the consumerist gospel, breaking down the demographic isolation of the ghetto, and countering dependency by refusing to help in a way that discourages personal responsibility(48-56)), in a personally supportive way that leads people to Jesus Christ and real repentance and personal responsibility and self-worth, not a vague self-constructed “spiritual component.” As belief and self-concept change, so do attitude and behavior toward sexuality, work, and other dysfunctions of street culture.

Simultaneously, the structural problems that contribute to the persistence of poverty--crime, unemployment, substandard housing, poor schools--are addressed. Street culture is isolated--cut off from the institutions and opportunities common in mainstream culture; residents’ aspirations are truncated; and social life is atomized, with social contact restricted through fear, violence, and crime. In response, Restorers aim to enlarge ghetto residents’ worlds. Physical and emotional safety can come as Restorers provide sanctuaries that are drug- and crime-free; local residents are included in the design of programs; ministries provide participants with an alternate form of group affiliation; geographic isolation can be overcome by group travels outside the ‘hood. Aspirations can be enlarged by providing alternative peer pressures, building confidence, creating higher ambitions through education-enhancement and tutoring initiatives that make college and a decent job reasonable goals that are reinforced with positive peer pressures and personal supports and affirmations. Atomized neighborhoods can be rewoven into communities by providing for volunteer organizations, recreational clubs, block clubs that build friendships among neighbors and set policies (such as noise, loitering, or drug sales) for the block, home rehabilitation and ownership initiatives, prayer marches , anti-drug and -crime campaigns, and simply providing places where neighbors can meet together safely for mutual support and encouragement, helping participants feel they are part of a new family

rather than isolated individuals.

Part Two of the book offers practical “how to” advice to churches strengthening their own outreach ministries. This involves reinvigorating the church’s deaconal vision for the biblical imperative to serve the poor and the Bible’s teaching on faithful mercy ministries, overcoming some common barriers to outreach ministry, and emphasizing relational, long-term ministries over “commodity-based” ministries.

The essential foundation for ministries of restoration involves engaging the congregation in understanding why it is taking such a step (because an outward-focus on loving others, especially the poor, is central to the Christian life and God’s great passion), what it hopes to accomplish (God’s intention for those we serve is a personal relationship with Himself, right relationships with others, walking in God’s ways, being good stewards of our gifts and engaging in fruitful labor, all served by real personal relationships with His people), and how to begin (with right motives and attitudes, by giving ourselves, with special obligation to brothers and sisters in Christ, with deliberation and thought, by meeting both spiritual and physical needs, by respecting participants and treating them as humans capable of change and improvement). Taken together these imply that new ministries will focus on serving a small number of families well.

After laying foundations a congregation will likely face some barriers to be overcome, both internal (fears of the unfamiliar, weariness, selfishness, time pressure) and external (class and cultural differences). Sherman navigates the difficult terrain between reaching out to others and honestly confronting sin and expecting change when personal choices are harming others. New ministers of restoration need to get exposed to neighborhoods they might otherwise avoid, learn the experiences and histories of minority groups, face their own prejudices in prayer and repentance, make racial reconciliation personal and specific with real individuals, and fight the battle of their own busyness to make room for relationships of restoration.

Congregations will then be in a position to consider shifting to a relational ministry from an inward-looking or commodity-based ministry. People with longer-term complicated needs than natural disaster are often not effectively helped by food pantries or clothing exchanges; such ministries may even entrench needy families in dependency, and they generally don’t build personal relationships of ministry. Some commodity-based ministries can be reformed to diminish potential for abuse and increase their opportunities for relationship building, or even making commodity-based programs part of a larger ministry; Sherman discusses many different variations on this theme, using case reports of particular congregations’ experiences. She gives extended descriptions of three national movements in restoration ministry that have worked out models for a transition to holistic, relational ministries which can be adopted by establishing local “chapters” of the organization in one’s own church.

While carefully avoiding the mistake of implying that beginning a new ministry is merely a process of lovelessly working through a checklist, Sherman concludes the second section of the book with a discussion of ten practical steps a congregation can take toward building a community ministry that targets a particular neighborhood: assess the congregation's strengths and weaknesses, learn about the community, identify what others are already doing, begin building relationships, gather a core community team within the neighborhood of the ministry who embrace its vision, determine your unique niche (vision and mission statements) and don't overextend, learn from other models while defining goals and strategy for the ministry, determine basic organizational policies (administrative structure, hiring practices, fund-raising, relationship to governmental agencies, behavioral expectations, enrollment policies, and so forth), establish a system for recruiting/training/placing/affirming volunteers, and establish an evaluation system.

Part Three considers the larger context in which churches conduct outreach efforts--public policy issues and the possibility of public-private collaborations. It's an important issue, as private institutions are perpetually in need of fund-raising and welfare reform initiatives increasingly point to the possibility of collaboration. With characteristic even-handedness, Sherman examines the potential benefits and pitfalls of collaboration, and distills wisdom from collaborations that are already under way.

The potential benefits include increased resources, cost-effective fund raising, predictability of funding, matching-grant approaches that encourage private donations, cross-learning from non-private organizational cultures, improved staff discipline from writing proposals and reports, regulatory relief, influence on public policies, and seeking to see tax dollars reinvested in one's own community. Positive partnerships are characterized by several elements: long-term, result-oriented, respectful collaboration, a hand in policy formation, outcome-based evaluations that do not interfere with ministries' holistic approach to need, and private agencies marked by strong leadership, a clear purpose and vision, an attempt to help the public sector rather than just draw from it, and a diversified donor base that is not dependant on government funds.

The pitfalls to collaboration with government spring in part from the nature of governmental institutions--inherently bureaucratic, sometimes overly process-minded rather than results-minded, sometimes condescending toward small faith-based nonprofits. Some nonprofits report the drive toward standardization and inflexibility stifle their creativity; unrealistic and expensive regulations are sometimes imposed, sometimes putting ministries out of business when they seek collaboration; public assistance programs change from year to year, making ministries that try to bridge-build among opportunities and public programs very insecure; it is sometimes difficult to identify the appropriate official with whom to speak about a particular matter; reimbursements can be delayed, with devastating

cash flow results for the private organization; some ministries suffer impersonalization through paperwork requirements or advanced degree requirements; public funding may reduce private donations and, ultimately, the congregation's commitment to the vision behind the initiative; public financial support may even erode the credibility of the ministry in the eyes of the recipients; private organizations may then drift from the private donors who kept them accountable to their mission, as the state does not evaluate the transformation of lives in the qualitative way a private supporter would; church-based ministries come to resemble secular welfare agencies rather than emphasizing what they can most uniquely offer--spiritual transformation and moral challenge. Sherman then examines several cases of recent public-private collaborations as models of the steps both sides can take to build healthy, workable partnerships that avoid the usual pitfalls.

Sherman concludes the book with a consideration of how reaching out affects those doing the reaching. Whole churches are transformed, as financial stewardship and accountability improves and congregations become more diverse. Individuals and families are transformed as the spiritual richness of persons who might not otherwise have met is shared and "donors" are driven to acknowledge their own prejudices, materialism and fallenness; the witness of the church is confirmed before a world watching to see if we will walk our talk in an era of welfare reforms; civil society is reinvigorated as holistic, relation-based ministry sparks renovation of civil institutions like family, church neighborhood, and conceptions of the common good; and individual restorers experience reinvigorated worship as they experience the amazing power of God in servanthood to bring others to relationship with Himself and restore things that seemed unredeemable.

There is much to commend about Sherman's work. She is modest in her claims and judicious in her proposals, and has produced a strong resource for churches wanting to draw on the experiences of others for both a coherent vision for deaconal work and practical advice about how to pursue it.

One might contrast Schneider's theme of "nearness" with Sherman's attitude to the dispossessed. As the jingle goes, charity begins at home, and Schneider argues that a proper sense of the "nearness" of our primary responsibilities will impose prudential limits on our exhaustion and messianic tendencies. Sherman takes a more generous attitude toward the claims of others on our time and energy. Here is a representative paragraph, coming at the end of a discussion of Elijah's experience in famine:

Sometimes we feel as though our physical energy--the proverbial jar of flour--is all used up... We hear the call of God to sacrifice for another, and we take stock of our own provisions and find them wanting. God may sometimes make what appears to us as unreasonable demands. He promises, though, that He Himself will replenish our jars of flour and jugs

of oil... If we are self-protective--holding back what time, energy, and material resources we have--we will miss the blessing of God's own rich provision. (133)

I wonder how self-indulgence is to be avoided within an emphasis on dominion and delight, and how burnout and cynicism are to be avoided within an emphasis on self-sacrifice. Whereas Sherman's emphasis seems to set few limits on self-sacrifice, Schneider sets the limit by an appeal to individual discernment, wisdom, and a sense of "nearness," saying we aren't going to get a more detailed agenda from scripture. But the persons and problems we find ourselves "near" to are themselves matters of choice. How should we decide what to get "near" to? I wonder if we couldn't get at least some wisdom on the topic, if not from scripture then from the experience of the Church.

A second area of potential contrast between Sherman and Schneider concerns delight and the dangers of materialism. Schneider is delighted with delight. Sherman, on the other hand, faces the daily grinding anti-normative sludge that results, in part, from delight gone uncriticised, a ghetto materialism that faces little competition from the common distractions of suburban life. Thus Sherman identifies "delight" (the wrong kind of delight, perhaps; say, delight in \$200 tennis shoes, but still delight) as a major moral problem.

I expect this may be resolved fairly easily by reference to the intended audience for each author's message. Jesus did not particularly stress "delight" when talking with his own disciples, as Schneider points out. In the same way, Sherman is aware of a particular pastoral need in a particular sub-population, and thus emphasizes dangers of misdirected delight. She is aware that books have particular intended audiences and other limits, and points out as much in her introductory chapter. Schneider is likewise writing to a particular sub-population with a particular pastoral need, and so stresses the dangers of utilitarianism, as his prologue and epilogue point out. His book may not be what the projects need to hear. Sherman manages to present a book that, despite its emphases, might speak effectively to many audiences.