



Roatch Global Lecture Series on Social Policy and Practice

2000

*The Role of Faith Communities
in Alleviating Poverty:
A Historical Perspective*

Presented by
Dr. Michael Alan Mullett

*In Memory
of John Roatch,*

*With gratitude
to Mary Roatch*



John F. Roatch



Panel of Respondents

From right to left:
 Dr. Michael Mullett, Rabbi Barton Lee,
 Monsignor Edward Ryle,
 Reverend Willard Stevens (standing)
 and Reverend Kimberly Sterner

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

It was a unique pleasure to welcome a large audience to the 2000 John Roatch Lecture on Policy and Practice at the University Club of Phoenix. Our special guest, Mrs. Mary Roatch, her son David and his wife Maryellen also honored us with their presence. The subject of Professor Michael Mullett's lecture this year was of great interest to all citizens and professionals who are concerned about issues of poverty in our society. The topic was particularly timely given the debate that has taken place nationally on this matter. It is a privilege and a befitting tribute to John Roatch to be able to share through this publication the text of the lecture and the comments that followed.

Dr. Michael Mullett, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Lancaster in England, developed a presentation that offered needed global, historical and philosophic perspectives on how faith communities, particularly those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, came to deal with their respective religious mandates to care for other human beings. A very distinguished panel of local respondents helped the audience bring home the discussion. Our respondents, Rabbi Barton G. Lee, Hillel Jewish Student Center and faculty associate in religious studies at ASU, Monsignor Edward J. Ryle, executive director, AZ Catholic Conference, Reverend Kimberly Sterner, pastor, Bethel Lutheran Church in Phoenix, and Reverend Dr. Willard "Buzz" Stevens, senior minister, First United Methodist Church also in Phoenix, added to the very enlightening afternoon.

The year 2000 also brought some changes to the sponsorship of this endowed Lecture Series. The Arizona State University College of Extended Education has become the new home of the endowment and the lecture and we were pleased to count on the support of Dean Bette DeGraw and her staff. Participants joined Mrs. Roatch and her family, Dr. Mullett and the panelists for animated dialogue at the reception which followed.

Mention must be made to Dr. Jenane Al-Dalal, who was invited to offer an extemporaneous comment based on the Muslim tradition. The lecture was enriched by her perspective. We hope this written record will do justice to the enthusiasm shared by those who attended the event. We trust the John Roatch Lecture Series will continue to grow and develop in significance for the Phoenix and the Arizona community.

Emilia E. Martinez-Brawley
 Professor of Social Work and
 Distinguished Community Service Scholar



Professor Emilia Martinez-Brawley introducing Dr. Michael Mullett.



Maryellen Roatch, David Roatch and Mrs. Mary Roatch.



Mrs. Mary Roatch, Dr. Michael Mullett thanking the Roatch family for his southwestern gift and Professor Martinez-Brawley.



“It was on a foundation of inescapable legal requirements that a structure of ethical principles stressing fraternity and justice was built as Judaism evolved and the prophets became the megaphones of social conscience.”

Dr. Michael Alan Mullett

Senior Lecturer in History

University of Lancaster

England, UK

Dr. Mullett is Senior Lecturer in History at Lancaster University. Among others, he is the author of **Early Lancaster Friends** (1978); **Radical Religious Movements in Early Modern Europe** (1983); **Luther** (1986); **Calvin** (1989); **Sources for the History of Nonconformity** (1991); **History Through Sources: The Reformation** (1996); **Catholic in Britain and Ireland, 1558-1829** (1998); and **The Catholic Reformation** (1999). He has lectured in Denmark, Israel, Germany and Canada.



Above: Mr. John Roatch and Professor Emilia Martinez-Brawley at the time the lecture series was established.
Below: Dean Bette DeGraw, Mrs. Mary Roatch and Professor Emilia Martinez-Brawley planning the 2000 Lecture.



The Role of Faith Communities in Alleviating Poverty:

A Historical Perspective

April 7, 2000

It might be helpful for our discussion today to begin with a definition of some of the key terms I shall use in this talk and especially of the words *faith community* and *alleviating poverty*. In using the term *faith community* for bodies such as Christian churches, I wish to emphasise the function of the group or congregation in attending to distress in its midst. Poverty is on the whole self-defining as want of food, shelter and the material wherewithal of life. You may, though, also wish to consider other forms of deprivation such as educational disadvantage, the denial of basic human rights, psychological or mental challenges or the absence of satisfactory health provision. For purposes of setting targets in the alleviation of poverty over a wide front, an American audience might well keep in mind President Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. As for the *alleviation* of poverty, the use of the term in itself simply assumes not its abolition but its relief, a matter to which we may return in discussion at the end of this talk.

Much of my attention will be devoted to the religions I know least badly, Judaism and its daughter, Christianity. I shall in part be relying on members of my audience to remedy my deficiencies of knowledge with regard to welfare provisions in, for example, Native American religions or Islam. However, Islam itself is consciously grounded in Jewish sources and for that reason, as well as because Christianity takes its cue from its parent Judaism, we begin the survey of the alleviation of poverty in faith communities with Judaism's norms and provisions.

The Mosaic law made communal responsibility obligatory rather than optional for the God-fearing Jew. It is, indeed, central to Judaism's social norms: "You may not lend on interest to your brother, whether the loan be of money or food or anything else that may earn interest."¹ As we shall see, the moral question of usury as a criterion of social justice became central to Christian (and Moslem) economic ethics. Deuteronomy further ruled on justice to the poor: "You are not to exploit the hired servant who is poor and destitute ... you must pay him his wage each day ... for he is poor and is anxious for it"²

It was on such foundations of inescapable legal requirements that a structure of ethical principles stressing fraternity and justice was built as Judaism evolved and the prophets became the megaphones of social conscience. Jeremiah was the savage critic of the wicked, whose evil ways were defined specifically in terms of social injustice: "Yes, in wickedness they go to any lengths, they have no respect for rights, for orphans' rights, to support them they do not uphold the cause of the poor."³ Isaiah also defined vice as exploitation. The wicked "[o]ppress all [their] workmen ... and strike the poor man with [their] fist[s]."⁴ However, if exploitation is the dark side of Isaiah's moral scope, his bright utopian vision is one of emancipation and justice voiced within the text known as the "mission of the prophet" which opens: "The spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me. For Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor"⁵

Footnotes

¹Deuteronomy 23: 20 (Note: All scriptural citations in this paper are from the Jerusalem version of the Bible.)

²Deuteronomy 24: 14-15

³Jeremiah 5:28

⁴Isaiah 58:4

⁵Isaiah 61:1

*“Judaism made
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Roughly around the beginning of the first millennium, the line of teaching that ran from the law through the prophets divided into two currents, that of normative Judaism and that of its daughter, Christianity. The great codification of law that still guides Judaism today was put together in two places, Babylon and Jerusalem. This happened when the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. accelerated the processes by which practical Judaism evolved into a system for the observance of ethical and behavioural precepts. These precepts were in the vast and multi-layered compilation of legal scholarship known as Talmud. It is noteworthy that Talmud simply assumed the existence of a working system of charity within Jewish religious practice, a system which included overseers of the soup kitchen,⁶ full-scale collections for the poor on Purim (the great feast of rejoicing),⁷ charity bags and treasures,⁸ charity overseers, the charity plate for Passover⁹ and so on.

Needless to say, these structures did not rest on humanist foundations but on the specific paving of religious faith and, more particularly, on the expectation of divine recognition of and repayment for deeds of charity. Judaism made the confident assumption that acts of charity were the primary good works that earned the donor reward. For example, the person who declared that the coin for charity was so “that I may merit the future world” was deemed to be “completely righteous.”¹⁰ For Judaism made clear assumptions about God and man which took for granted the operation of man's free will to perform meritorious acts required by the Almighty and to which He would respond with repayment. How far were such presuppositions operative within Judaism's offspring Christianity?

Jesus based His initial mission statement on Isaiah's option for the poor, which He proclaimed in the Nazareth synagogue at the beginning of His ministry. He read out the passage cited above from Isaiah and commented, “this text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.”¹¹ Indeed, Jesus may be seen to have inherited the prophetic tradition of the advocacy of sharing and of social justice directly from John the Baptist, who had demanded: “If anyone has two tunics, he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same.”¹² Whether or not Jesus actually idealised the poor – “How happy are the poor in spirit” – for the religious tradition He founded He left a voice that distrusted wealth: “You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.¹³ ... It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁴ He also exalted giving: “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor”¹⁵ The remainder of the New Testament was suffused with such thinking. The Acts of the Apostles provided a classical presentation of the early Christian church as a welfare association:

Footnotes

⁶The Babylonian Talmud Seder Nezikin:Vol. 4. (1935). (I. Epstein, Trans.). London: Soncino Press

⁷ibid., p.452

⁸ibid., p.89

⁹ibid., p. 575 ff.

¹⁰ibid., Vol. 2, p. 35

¹¹Luke 4:22

¹²Luke 3:11-12

¹³Matthew 5:3

¹⁴Matthew 19:24

¹⁵Matthew 19:21

*The faithful all lived together and owned all things in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed ... they shared their food gladly and generously ...*¹⁶

*The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; no one claimed for his own anything that he had, as everything they had was held in common ... None of their numbers was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any members who might be in need.*¹⁷

“Jesus based His initial mission statement on Isaiah’s option for the poor, which He proclaimed in the Nazareth synagogue at the beginning of His ministry.”

Two narrations, one edifying and the other cautionary, concretised the more general outline. The simple story of the Levite Barnabas who “owned a piece of land and ... sold it and brought the money, and presented it to the apostles”¹⁸ described a pattern of actual conduct traceable from Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 19:21 through the Apostles’ own instructions. In contrast, Ananias and Sapphira, having “agreed to sell a property,” conspired to retain part of the sale price. Exposed and rebuked by Peter, both fell down dead and “this made a profound impression on the whole Church and on all who heard it.” Much of the tenor of the passages cited from Acts unfolded a Christian community of goods, a conceptual advance in the topic of the alleviation of poverty. However, in the Epistle of James, a sermon from the infancy of the Church and of distinctive Judeo-Christian provenance, we may see something of a reversal from models of pooling of wealth to Jewish religious concepts of charity on the part of haves towards have-nots: “Pure, unspoilt religion ... is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it”²⁰

The discourse proceeded to exhort reverence for the poor, “rich in faith,”²¹ and then moved on to examine the soteriological implications of good works, which were defined in terms of rescuing members of the brotherhood in need of food and clothing. Without such good deeds, faith alone was useless in presenting men and women before God as being just. Depending on variable dating of the Letter of James, it may be possible to construe it as a specific rebuttal to claims made by Paul, in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, to the effect that faith sufficed for the justification of sinners.²² Alternately, James’ corrective stress on the necessity for work alongside faith may be seen as adjusting the sense of Paul to complete his meaning. However, whether the author of James was combating or supplementing Paul’s understanding of the relationship between grace, faith and good works, there is no mistaking the emphasis that Paul places, above all in his Letter to the Romans, on the all-sufficiency of faith for justification — and

Footnotes

¹⁶Acts 2: 44-5, 47

¹⁷Acts 4: 32,34-5

¹⁸Acts 4:36-7

¹⁹Acts 5: 1-11

²⁰James 1:27

²¹James 2:1-9

²²Romans 3:28

“Gregory the Great ..., a man who had himself given his wealth away to the poor, applied an elaborate casuistry not only to the act of giving but also to the motivation and state of mind of the giver.”

on the need for those good works which are specifically equated with acts of mercy. In fact, no less than in Judaism's structures, Paul seemed to have envisaged almsgivers as key members of the community of faith, but mercy was an obligation on all and “[i]f any of the saints are in need you must share with them; and you should make hospitality your special care ... make real friends with the poor.”²³

In this letter, Paul cited the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament by commending the giving of alms of food and drink to one's enemies.²⁴ Clearly, then, if there was any difference of understanding between Paul and James on the operative role played by works of mercy and charity in achieving the justification of sinners, there was no opposition between these principal teachers of the early Church on the absolute necessity of practical Christian love expressed in the Church's deeds of compassion.

In the post-Apostolic Church, the guidance on charity provided in the New Testament canon was regarded as a key feature of the traditions of the Christian community. Thus in the late second century, the virtue of a bishop of Rome, St. Soter (c. 167-175), was acclaimed by St. Dionysius of Corinth as being exemplified above all in charity, a trait that was an integral feature of the apostolic heritage of the Roman Church:

*From the beginning it has been your custom to do good to all the brethren in many ways, and to send alms, to many churches in every city, refreshing the poverty of those who sent requests, or giving aid to brethren in the mines by the alms which you have had the habit of giving from of old, Romans keeping up the traditional custom of the Romans.*²⁵

The fourth-century Council of Gangra, in its refusal to condemn “wealth enjoyed with uprightness and beneficence” and commendation of “the exceeding charities done by the brethren to the poor,”²⁶ confirmed that all this was in accordance with the traditions of the Christian Church. The great teacher and bishop of Rome, Leo the Great (c. 390-461), though, adapted the ‘tradition’ of the care of needy to the Church's expanding regime of collective fasts. To him, such seasons were in fact spiritual jubilees and provided opportunities for giving on those occasions when “[t]he hungry are nourished, the naked are clothed, the sick are visited and men seek not their own but ‘that which is another’s’.”²⁷ In fact, Leo's admonitions applied to the practical conduct of the penitent faithful Christ's words spoken in Matthew's gospel: “I was hungry and you gave me food ... naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me”²⁸ Jesus had in that passage simply promised reward for doers of good deeds and condign punishment for those who sinned grievously by default in not giving to the poor. And Leo saw charity as both blessed and blissful, for giver and beneficiary alike, and misery was relieved by the

Footnotes

²³Romans 12: 8,16

²⁴Roman 12: 21

²⁵*The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline and History of the Catholic Church* (1908). (Vol. 3). London: Caxton, p.144

²⁶Percival, H. R. (Ed.). (1900). *A Select Library of Post-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian: Vol.14 , Second Series* Oxford: James Parker, p. 101

²⁷*ibid.*, Vols. 12, p. 199

²⁸Matthew 25:35-6

actions of cheerful givers. In fact, Bishop Leo's guiding verb in his reflections on gift-giving was "rejoice."²⁹

However, one of Leo's most noteworthy successors in the bishopric of Rome, Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), a man who had himself given his wealth away to the poor when he entered a monastery around 575, applied an elaborate casuistry not only the act of giving but also the motivation and state of mind of the giver. For him, giving to the poor was more than commendable: it was obligatory and a duty of justice rather than mercy, "for when we administer necessities of any kind to the indigent, we do not bestow our own, but render them what is theirs; we rather pay a debt of justice than accomplish works of mercy."³⁰

Gregory thus prescribed that liberality was no more than duty. Recast in the form of moral theology, his analysis focused on charity not only as action but as action along with disposition. Indeed, for the giver — and since any work of charity was in fact an obligatory act of justice, one that had the moral neutrality of necessary actions — any virtue in an act of kindness might lie not in the external action itself but in the donor's internal disposition and state of heart. Thus charity would be particularly meritorious if the giver humbly recognised the moral equality of the donor and the recipient:

For those who already give compassionately are to be admonished not to lift themselves up in swelling thoughts above those to whom they impart earthly things; not to esteem themselves better than others because they see others to be supported by them.³¹

"Humility ... was the essential accompanying characteristic whose presence might upgrade a duty [giving compassionately] into a virtue."

Humility, then, was the essential accompanying characteristic whose presence might upgrade a duty into a virtue. Even so, Gregory's stress on the giver's subjective state of mind and spirit might be seen as an exaltation of disposition that contained within itself the capacity to turn spontaneous open-handedness into a web of introspection, self-scrutiny over motive, and, above all, anxiety — "anxious thought," "anxious heed." So, Gregory wrote, "fear" should "depress" dispensers of aid, because they had so much to consider in their giving, since the act of giving was now subject to complicated moral assessments that discriminated, for example, between play-actors, who were undeserving recipients of rich men's handouts, and sinners who were poor and to whom one donated not to their sin but to their poverty.³²

When St. Gregory abandoned his property to enter a cloister, he marched in step with the Christian Church's increasingly important monastic movement. That movement was seen as the repository of the purity of the early Church, encompassing the perfect charity set out in Acts, but carried over into a world of compromise with those mundane realities of property and power which, in the medieval centuries, took in the political authority and great wealth of the Church itself.

Footnotes

²⁹Percival, H. R. (Ed.). (1900). *A Select Library of Post-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian: Vol. 14, Second Series* Oxford: James Parker, p. 101

³⁰*ibid.*, p. 47

³¹*ibid.*, p. 44

³²*ibid.*, p. 45-6

“For Bernard [of Clairvaux] charity was an adjunct of humility, Christ being the model Who ‘willed to suffer so that He might know compassion; to learn mercy He shared our misery.’”

A saintly ascetic and an ecclesiastical statesman who acted as the counselor of popes and princes, the Cistercian monk St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was the most articulate spokesman of the values of medieval monasticism and of the place of charity within them. Whereas with Gregory humility must be the state of heart in which one performed works of mercy, for Bernard charity was an adjunct of humility, Christ being the model Who “willed to suffer so that He might know compassion; to learn mercy He shared our misery.”³³

We seem now, to be moving some distance away from the simple topic of the alleviation of poverty and distress and to be entering a medieval world of thought that venerated the willing adoption of them both, in the Christ-patterned spirit of Bernard, and, more especially, of Francis who “in all acts of his life was conformed unto Christ the blessed one [and who, like Christ,] chose ... companions, possessors of the deepest poverty.”³⁴

But if destitution voluntarily chosen was the highest, because it was the most Christlike, of the virtues — “the treasure of holy poverty which is so noble, that thereunto did God himself become a servitor”³⁵ — what dynamic remained, we might ask, to alleviate what seemed to have emerged as the highest of spiritual states, poverty? Conversely, what potential lay, within the Franciscan doctrine of holy poverty, to alleviate in practice the poverty of the poor?

An *exemplum* told of St. Francis and a band of robbers, and in fact, provided an object lesson on how the profession of holy poverty made over the worst kind of exploiter of the poor into an ideal of altruism.³⁶ In this story, Francis converts a youth, “tender and noble,” to the profession of holy poverty and to the Franciscan vision. Indeed the young man was so hopeful a friar that the master made him a guardian of the brethren’s house at Monte Casale and gave him the name in religion of Fra Angelo. However, Angelo had not in fact absorbed the real Franciscan spirit, for when “notorious robbers” of the region came seeking food he drove them away with harsh reproof. In fact, it was only on Francis’s return from a journey, carrying a little bread and wine, that the integral ethos of the friar’s minor was re-affirmed. Francis reprovved the reproving Angelo, sending him out with the small flask of wine and the bits of bread to track down the robbers, to give them the food and drink they had asked for and, most sensationally, to beg their forgiveness for his earlier “cruelty.”

The incident takes to its highest point the sort of directives Gregory had given to the effect that the donor avoid esteeming himself as morally above the recipient. The scene with the robbers became a quasi-sacramental encounter, for the paltry supply of wine and bread could hardly satisfy the physical, as opposed to the spiritual needs of thirsty and hungry outlaws. But the materials involved in the handover of food and drink should in fact be decoded as symbols of a kind of holy communion, a sort of eucharist of the Christlike Francis’s own founding and capable, like a sacrament, of achieving miraculous transformations through the power of penitence and prayer. The

Footnotes

³³Bernard (1980), ‘The Steps of Humility and Pride’ in *Bernard of Clairvaux Treatises II* Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, p. 35

³⁴*The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* (1904). (T.W. Arnold, Trans.). London: J.M Dent, p. 1

³⁵*ibid.*, p. 39-40

³⁶*ibid.*, p. 77-83

prayer in question was Francis's, the penitence that of Angelo and then that of the robbers who were effusively repentant on their reception of the little food and wine. Born again, those thieves, who were in their earlier life the very epitome of exploitation by robbing others of the fruit of their labours, became models of self-abnegation and of fasting. One of them, selected to follow Francis to heaven, had a particular insight into the avarice that exacerbated poverty, for an angel gave him an infernal vision of his godmother burning in a flammable corn-measure: "Because at the time of the great famine that St. Francis predicted aforetime, my husband and I falsified the measures of the corn and grain that we sold"³⁷ The whole discourse of the robbers is thus about forms of theft, and the ways in which robbery, the fullest expression of avarice in action, might find an antidote in its antithesis, holy poverty.

Francis's robbers pursued food and drink. But in the period of commercial and industrial expansion of twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the European economy was increasingly sophisticated and cash-driven, it was money that could be depicted as the primary commodity of theft. For money was surely the most effective medium for the transfer of resources by which, notoriously, the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. This was the case in no field more dramatically — and in the view of most commentators, more culpably — than in the sale of money itself as a commodity, the lending of money at interest: usury. For this practice the standard teaching of the medieval Catholic Church had nothing but condemnation to offer, based on a string of Old Testament injunctions beginning with Exodus 22:24-25: "If you lend money to any of my people, to any poor man among you, you must not play the usurer with him; you must not demand interest from him."

On such foundations, the Church fathers including Tertullian (160-220) and Augustine (354-430) developed a critique of exploitative money-lending at interest, which was fully inherited by the magisterium of the Church in the middle ages. In 1139, for example, the second Lateran Council consigned those who lent money at interest to excommunication without Christian burial and the medieval Church's most influential theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), reaffirmed the by-now traditional moral casuistry was all levying of interest on loans was usury, and hence a sin:

*Charging for the loan of money is unjust as such ... it is in principle wrong to charge for the loan of money, as is done in usury. A man is obliged to restore money obtained in this way, just as he must make restitution of any other ill-gotten gains. Men are not bound to make loans, but if they do they are bound not to make profit from them A man paying interest on a loan isn't doing it voluntarily but under pressure; he is forced by his need to borrow from lenders who won't lend except as interest.*³⁸

"... In a period of commercial and industrial expansion of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries ... money was surely the most effective medium for the transfer of resources by which, notoriously, the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer."

Footnotes

³⁷The Little Flowers of Saint Francis. (1904). (T.W. Arnold, Trans.). London: J.M Dent, p.1

³⁸McDermott, T. (Ed.). (1992). *St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae A Concise Translation* London: Methuen p. 396-7

“For a Kempis, an act of pure piety (a ‘good work’) was exceeded in value by a deed of charity, but the deed of charity was itself worthless without the underlying and motivating love that God recognised and rewarded.”

Two particular observations flow from Aquinas’s moral absolutes on money-lending. The first was that it was robbery, like that of St. Francis’s robbers in their unconverted state — as is evident in St. Thomas’s demand that its profits be subject to restitution, like the fruits of theft. And the second deduction was that usury was intensely exploitative, battering on utter and desperate need. The axis of quasi-robbery and greed-through-need was certainly reflected in interest rates, as high as 40% in Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century. Preachers’ tales which were constantly reiterated in that country and period popularised with the most theatrical exempli the stark moral principles set out by Aquinas: An example is the story of the money lender whose would-be expiatory chapel-tomb was uprooted by devils on the night before his funeral. Even so, usury was as morally ambiguous as it was indispensable. For one thing, it was not morally marginalised or consigned only to Jews outside the Christian body, but was an acknowledged practice on the part of the most reputable Catholics. For example, professors at the university of Bologna loan-sharked to students the cost of their books, and the artist of the saint of poverty, Giotto, was an entrepreneur who made a 120% profit from renting looms to weavers.³⁹

Even so, it was from the Franciscan well, and from the moral reservoirs of its sanctification of voluntary poverty, that an alternative to the cycle of impoverishment endemic in the economics of usury was drawn. The fifteenth century witnessed a massive restoration of pristine Franciscan values in the shape of the Observance movement, headed by such leaders as the Italian St. Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444). And it should be regarded as no coincidence that the saintly and ascetic Bernardino, in his total commitment to pure holy poverty, pioneered the movement of the *monti di pietà*, the zero-interest loan banks for which there was a craze in Italian cities in the 1410s and 1420s. During the ascendancy of the Dominican reformer Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98), in the city republic of Florence between 1494 and 1498 the practical welfare institution of the *monte di pietà* was re-introduced. Nor am I concerned for the moment with the distasteful side of the experiment, its unmistakable targeting of Jews, but rather with the way that this community mechanism on the part of Savonarolan Florence as a renewed religious community set out to alleviate poverty. “An imaginative platform for reform,” writes Miri Rubin, the *monti di pietà* called “for inner conversion among the patrician urban groups, and proposing an alternative to the usurious indebtedness of their lesser neighbours.”⁴⁰ The venture represented a remarkable experiment in welfare-through-faith and drew on the distinctive attitudes to poverty and wealth evolved in the Franciscan order in the course of the middle ages.

By the end of the middle ages, the single most popular manual of piety for laity and clergy, *The Imitation of Christ* by St. Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471), provided a kind of retrospective of the development of Christian thinking on welfare over the course of several centuries. For a Kempis, an act of pure piety (a ‘good work’) was exceeded in value by a deed of charity, but the

Footnotes

³⁹Origo, I. (1960). *The Merchant of Prato* London: Jonathan Cape, p.150-1

⁴⁰Rubin, M. (1999). *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* New Haven: Yale University Press, p.126

deed of charity was itself worthless without the underlying and motivating love that God recognised and rewarded. The motivation of altruistic love, without seeking recompense for the deed performed, was indispensable:

... to help someone in need, a good work may sometimes be left, or a better undertaken in its place. For in so doing, the good work is not lost, but changed for what is better. Without love, the outward work is of no value; but whatever is done out of love, be it never so little, is wholly fruitful. For God regards the greatness of the love that prompts a man, rather than the greatness of his achievement.⁴¹

“Martin Luther was born and raised in a religious culture that was deeply concerned with the questions of motive, action and merit in the moral life of Christians.”

Within just over a decade following a Kempis's death, Martin Luther was born and raised in a religious culture that was deeply concerned with the questions of motive, action and merit in the moral life of Christians. Did external acts, whether those were going on pilgrimages, acquiring indulgences, and for that matter, performing the routines of mercy, merit justification or acceptability in God's sight? In Luther's theology, which matured out of his reading of St. Paul during the second decade of the sixteenth century, it was personal disposition — the whole set of mind and heart towards the Almighty that Luther assembled conceptually under the caption of faith — that availed for salvation. As Paul wrote, “ ... a man is justified by faith and not by doing something the law tells him to do.”⁴²

By 1520, when Luther had put this doctrine of salvation by faith alone in place, he was ready to express its social consequences. The primary objection he had to surmount was that justification by faith alone, known as solafideanism, rendered all good works nugatory, with “some people saying, as they do, that when we preach faith alone good works are forbidden.”⁴³ Luther's antidote to that false conception of solafideanism was a treatment of the Commandments outlining how the faithful obeyed them. It was when he came to the Seventh Commandment of the Decalogue “Thou shalt not steal” that Luther expounded its meaning in terms of what “in German is called ‘selflessness’, a willingness to help and serve all men with one's own means.”⁴⁴

In a masterpiece of that same year, *A Treatise on Christian Liberty*, from the period when Luther was working out the ethical, practical and social implications of justification by faith alone, he propounded the view that justification proceeded not from but towards good works: “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works.”⁴⁵ Those good works were emphatically social and in the literal sense philanthropic since “[a] Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all” and “a Christian man lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour.”⁴⁶ Luther's concept of serving neighbour and neighbourhood led to the new structures

Footnotes

⁴¹Kempis, T. (1979) *The Imitation of Christ* (L. Sherley-Price, Trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p.43

⁴²*Romans*, 3: 28

⁴³Atkinson, J. (Ed.). (1966). *Luther's Works, Volume 44 The Christian in Society I* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, p. 34

⁴⁴*ibid.*, p. 106

⁴⁵Lambert, W.A. (Ed.). (1943). *Three Treatises by Martin Luther, A Treatise on Christian Liberty* Philadelphia, PA: The Muhlenberg Press, p. 271

⁴⁶*ibid.*, p. 251, 283

“As Protestantism evolved, it extended its range of philanthropy. It took in the comprehensive welfare provisions of the Quakers or Society of Friends. Methodism, too, developed its works of love on both a practical and spiritual level ...”

of Reformation civics. The concept of neighbourly good deeds was communal, for it was linked, for example, with duties towards the state including the payment of taxes. It needed to be discerning in its application and not conducive to social deterioration through unselective good works, which could encourage pauperising beggary. Unselective good works might be, at least superficially, good for the beggar but were undoubtedly bad for the community. In his 1520 Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation on the Amelioration of the Christian Estate, Luther set out the mechanisms of discernment that needed to be rigorously applied, especially so as to sift the deserving from the undeserving poor, aiding the former, forcing the later to work. “No one living among Christians ought to go begging. It would be an easy law to make, if only we dared, and were in earnest that every town should support its own poor.”⁴⁷

The involvement of city authorities meant that the state in the Lutheran scheme of things acquired a new scope of oversight in the regulation of welfare. In and from the sixteenth century, as the Reformation was implemented in towns, cities and territorial and national states in Europe, it reflected the needs of the community rather than those of the individual. It sought holy poverty less and the extinction of poverty more and aimed, above all through education and work, for amelioration. As Protestantism evolved in plural forms, it extended its range of philanthropy. For example, it took in the comprehensive welfare provisions of the Quakers or Society of Friends. Methodism, too, developed its works of love on both a practical and spiritual level, in ways perhaps best expressed by my fellow Welshman, partly of Jewish extraction, Hugh Price Jones: “Let us once realize the sacredness of every human being, however poor, however ignorant, however degraded, and tyranny becomes impossible, lust becomes impossible, war becomes impossible.”⁴⁸

Footnotes

⁴⁷Dillenberger, J. (Ed.). (1961). *Martin Luther Selections from his Writings: Address to the Christian Nobility*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, p. 460

⁴⁸Davies R.E. (1963). *Methodism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p. 149



(Above)
Left to right: Wayne Mitchell,
David Roatch and Mrs. Mary Roatch.

(Left)
Left to right: Dean DeGraw,
Mrs. Mary Roatch and
Professor Martinez-Brawley.

(Below)
Left to right: Professor Martinez-Brawley,
Mrs. Mary Roatch and Dean DeGraw,
previewing the publication.



(Right)
Left to right: Rabbi Barton Lee and
Cheryl Lee in animated discussion.

(Below)
Left to right: Mrs. Mary Roatch presents
plaque to Dr. Michael Mullett.



(Below) A moment
at the reception.





(Above)
Dr. Mullett and
Aneesah Nadir
exchanging notes.

(Left)
Left to right:
Mrs. Mary Roatch,
Dr. Mullett and Professor
Martinez-Brawley after
the plaque presentation.



(Right)
A moment during
the discussion.



(Below)
Left to right: Reverend Truett Baker,
Monsignor Edward Ryle and student
participant in animated conversation.

(Above)
The panelists and the lecturer
pose for the camera.



Respondent Rabbi Barton G. Lee



***Rabbi Barton G. Lee** has been the rabbi for the Hillel Jewish Student Center at Arizona State University since 1972. He also serves as a faculty associate in the ASU Department of Religious Studies. Prior to coming to ASU he taught at Phoenix College and at Hebrew Union College. He is a graduate of Stanford University and he holds both a master and doctorate in Hebrew Letters and an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Lee's community service includes president of the ASU Interfaith Council, vice-president of the Phoenix Art Therapy Institute, member of the Religious Advisory Board of Planned Parenthood, United Jewish Campaign, and passed member of Board of Directors of the Sudden Death Syndrome Association and Board of Directors for Tempe Leadership. Rabbi Lee has developed and presented weekend programs for study and discussion throughout the country.*

I am pleased to be a part of this seminar, and would like to express my thanks to the Roatch family for providing this opportunity for learning and conversation. My thanks, too, to Dr. Mullet for his very thoughtful presentation.

The Hebrew Bible, in Deuteronomy, expresses a sad truth: *Ki lo yehdal evyon*, for the poor shall never cease out of the land. As long as we have human society, as long as there is economic activity, there will be a problem of poverty to wrestle with.

The Torah, however, makes it clear that the poor have a right to share in the fruits of the economy. Parts of the field could not be harvested; gleaning the harvest was prohibited; loans were to be made without interest. The Bible makes it clear that these belonged to the needy as a matter of right.

The Hebrew Prophets held that care for the poor, the homeless, the widow and orphan were religious requirements. Without these, the piety was vain, pointless. The Ancient Rabbis held that *tzedekah*, charity was an obligation, not a matter of individual generosity or whim. Indeed, where Jews had measures of autonomy, the authorities could compel people

to make charitable contributions.

Throughout Jewish history there were two signal approaches to alleviating poverty. The first was personal commitment to voluntary, collective action. *Havurot*, clubs or groups were formed to assure that basic needs of the community were met: caring for the wayfarer, lodging for the homeless, visiting the sick, collecting food, hosting strangers for meals, distributing charity and burying the dead. The second approach to alleviating poverty was community taxation: taxes were levied on all to provide a *tamhui*, a community kitchen for the needy.

When Jews came to America in a group, 23 refugees arriving in New Amsterdam in 1654, they were allowed to remain in the colony on condition that they "not become a public charge." This came to be seen as a basic charter of Jewish acceptance in America, and from the earliest days here the community developed many self-help communal organizations, among them the Jewish Free Loan societies, which helped my own grandfather start up a small grocery business in Texas. As Eastern European Jewish immigrants flooded into the country from 1881-1924, many organizations mobilized,

“What is required in our society is a combination of good works and governmental commitment to the rights of the poor.”

Respondent Rabbi Barton G. Lee (continued)

especially women, to volunteer to help teach, train, employ, educate and socialize these immigrant Jews. Many of these volunteer women, as Professor William Toll, demonstrates, became professionals who helped develop the social work profession.

The Depression overwhelmed the resources of the Jewish community, as so many other communities. No longer was self-help a possible remedy for the tremendous poverty that was created. With the New Deal era, it became clear that in America there was a need and a critical role for the government to perform a major portion of the task of alleviating poverty.

As the Bible put it, poverty cannot be eradicated. The truth is that the problems of poverty are too large in scope, too complex in our modern urban environment, for private and religious philanthropy to do the major work in helping the poor.

What is required in our society is a combination of good works and governmental commitment to the rights of the poor. That, alas, does not seem to be the mood in Arizona today. But I believe that government has responsibility to assure that the poor get med-

ical care, food and shelter. The power of taxation should be used to assure that children get a fair shot at a good education and that they not have to learn while their stomachs growl from hunger or have to go to bed on an empty stomach.

There should be social policy predicated on the Biblical notion of society: that the poor have a right to a share in the fruits of the economy. I am dubious about attempts to delegate the role of ameliorating poverty to religious groups. First, I fear there is always a temptation to mix food with theology and ideology. Secondly, I fear that the idea of delegating the amelioration of poverty is an excuse to avoid the responsibilities of government toward the poor, to hide from the real, complex and pressing human problems that poverty perpetuates.

I believe that we have a religious obligation to influence public policy so that the government not abdicate its role in caring for those in need. And we must also be committed to personal and communal action in our churches, synagogue, mosques and other meeting halls to working for justice and compassion to those of our fellow human beings who are in poverty.

Respondent Monsignor Edward Ryle



Monsignor Edward Ryle has served since September 1984 as executive director of the Arizona Catholic Conference. He was also the vicar of the Catholic Charities programs of the Diocese of Phoenix. In his work with the Catholic Conference he represents the Catholic bishops of the state to the Legislature, state offices and agencies and Arizona's Congressional Delegation.

Ordained a priest in 1956, he was a parish priest for five years, obtained his MSW in 1963, and served as assistant director then director of Catholic Charities in Arizona from 1963 to 1971. He taught at Catholic University's School of Social Work and was dean of Marywood University's Graduate School of Social Work. He was also a visiting professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. He is the author of several articles on welfare issues.

He is a member of the board of the Labor's Community Service Agency, the Maricopa County Emergency Food and Shelter Program Board, the Southwest Catholic Health Network (The Mercy Care Plan), Catholic Social Service and the Foundation for Senior Living. He is also a member of the Bioethics Committee of St. Joseph's Hospital and the Arizona Bar Foundation and has served on the Advisory Committee on Child Support of the Arizona Supreme Court, the Commission on Salaries for Elective State Officers and the Industrial Commission of Arizona.

Care of the widow, the orphan and the poor is a major biblical theme. Similar teaching, however, can be found in the literature of the ancient Near Eastern neighbors of the Jewish people. These parallels suggest that the power of God's grace was and is at work far beyond the borders of the Jewish and Christian traditions and/or that there is a basic sense of decency and compassion for the poor and dependent that extends far beyond these traditions. Revealed religion is an important source of ethical teaching about care of the poor, but not the only source.

The history of English Poor Law reflects a change from the Statute of Laborers in 1348 to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1597-1601. The change was one from state support for ecclesiastical care of the poor to assumption by the state of responsibility for meeting the basic needs of the poor. (This did not mean the end of voluntary philanthropy, both religious and secular in England.) This history can be read as recognition of the right of the poor to public assistance as a matter of justice, not charity.

Faith based organizations have a role to play in care of the poor, but I believe this should

basically be in the "soft" services, e.g., counseling and child care and in emergency assistance. (Churches and synagogues should also advocate for better public welfare programs and reversal of the punitive elements of the 1996 welfare reform act.) Basic welfare programs such as cash public assistance and food stamps should be administered and overseen by the public sector.

Respondent Reverend Kimberly Sterner



Reverend Kimberly Sterner received a bachelor of science from Arizona State University and a masters of divinity from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. She was ordained a minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on October 5, 1986. She has served with her husband at:

*Bethel Lutheran Church, Los Angeles, CA;
Mount Caramel Lutheran Church in San Luis Obispo, CA;
and is presently serving as associate pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church in Phoenix, Arizona.*

She is married to the Reverend John G. Lemnitzer and is the mother of Jonathan Lemnitzer, age 10, and Allison Lemnitzer, age 6.

Throughout Dr. Mullett's lecture the reoccurring theme of the expected, even required compassion of Christians belies the reality in the parishes: Just because we should doesn't mean we will. We are called to compassion absolutely, no dispute there. But Christians are not always answering that call.

The job of parish pastors as I understand it and feel it, is to preach the good news of Christ, read and tell stories of Jesus and make them relevant to their hearers. The question is, however, are the hearers inspired to respond to the call of Christ? Are the hearers inspired enough to work toward the alleviation of poverty?

At our church we preach the great compassion, the text of Matthew 25 as highlighted in Dr. Mullett's lecture. I believe we preach it vigorously. We have a hunger program to collect and distribute food and to cook and serve at homeless shelters during the winter months. A few years ago the woman who had been volunteering to coordinate this cooking and serving ministry needed to step down. No one took her place.

As much as everyone in the congregation supported the ministry, there was a gap in their words. There was no one coming forth to take over the job. The question to be asked was how important could the job have been to the members of the congregation?

The homeless got fed that winter but without our church's help. It didn't sit right with me or the other pastor or for that matter with a lot of the members of the church. Yet, no one had been willing, or inspired to do what was needed. After one winter of not having a feeding the homeless program, another woman stepped up. She was scared to be in charge, to be responsible for anything, but she was more afraid of not doing the work of God! Her faith made her strong enough to take on this challenge.

The question for the churches is how to inspire Christians to respond to poverty and the needs of others if the words of Christ alone don't do it. As a pastor, I hope and pray that each congregation, each family of faith keeps trying until something clicks.

Different needs, different ways to help attract different people. Some of our church members really get involved in the feeding of the homeless program; others become involved with two orphanages our church has adopted in Haiti. Some people can be inspired to help close to home; others prefer more distant places.

People of faith want to help. I firmly believe that. But they tend to want to help in their own way and in their own time. Churches, faith communities need to offer variety in the way they seek to alleviate poverty and do the work Jesus needs us to be doing.

Respondent Reverend Willard Stevens



Reverend Willard "Buzz" Stevens has served as the senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Phoenix since 1990. Currently he is also on the Committee on Episcopacy of the Methodist Conference and serves on the Arizona Ecumenical Council. Over the past 34 years, he has also served as senior pastor at Desert Southwest Conference; South District Superintendent at the Tucson First United Methodist Church and Wesley Foundation, AZ; pastor at the Point Loma United Methodist Church, CA; campus minister at the Wesley Foundation, Tempe, AZ; and pastor at the Asbury United Methodist Church, CA. He served on the Methodist Conference Commission on Religion and Race and on the Commission on the Status of Women. He has been on the board of United Methodist Outreach Ministries in Phoenix.

He received a bachelor of science from California State Polytechnic College, San Luis Obispo in 1961 and a Rel. D. from the School of Theology at Claremont in 1967. He is married to Liv Stevens and is the father of Christine and Sonja.

If we are relatively secure in our profession or station in life we may assume we carry the primary, if not all the necessary, resources needed by the seemingly broken-hearted souls we encounter through our work. But just about the time we think we are the one bringing a welcome cup of water to a darkened place, to a person in need, we may receive a bucketful from one whom we thought was simply an empty vessel. We have to constantly struggle to keep that urge to be the giver in perspective.

C.S. Lewis spoke to that tendency when he claimed, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit."

We, in professions related to human services, often become numbed by an overload of cases and eventually settle into a mode of relating that does not allow for any emotional surprises when it comes to being on the receiving end of good-

ness. We rely mostly upon the intimacy we find within our family or faith-based communities for all the personal affirmation we need. When we are able to risk opening ourselves to the energy and strength of those we meet and they detect that vulnerability it is possible to get to a tender meeting ground.

I have discovered in ministry that I can become jaded with the overwhelming demands of hospital, nursing home and prison calls related to the congregation, but when I become intentional before the calls and focus on what I may receive in the encounter I often walk away having been fed.

*“Let us once
realize the sacredness of
every human being,
however poor, however
ignorant, however
degraded, and tyranny
becomes impossible,
lust becomes impossible,
war becomes impossible.”*

– Dr. Mullett quoting Hugh Price Jones