

# In brief

VOLUME 6

NUMBER 2

## CHARITY

Biblical  
and Political

BY

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THE FOUNDATION FOR  
ECONOMIC EDUCATION, INC.

IRVINGTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

Many sincere persons now advance the argument that Jesus Christ Himself endorsed the principle of using the force of democratic government to "take from those who have, and to give to those who have not." They claim that the Bible fully supports the concept that aid to the unfortunate — charity — is a proper function of government. Since, in addition to religion, this concept concerns both economics and political science, it falls within the scope of the Foundation's field of research. Russell J. Clinchy, pastor of the First Church of Christ (Congregational) in Hartford, Connecticut, was asked to study the various issues involved in this question. Here is his report.

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# CHARITY



CHARITY is defined as an “act of loving all men as brothers because they are sons of God.” This is a purely personal matter; an act voluntarily performed by one person for another; an act of faith in God and His commandments for governing our relationships with our fellow men. When we keep this concept in mind, it becomes a simple matter to distinguish between true charity and the spurious schemes that now masquerade under its name.

## CHARITY DEBASED

THE ORIGINAL concept of charity as an expression of love, now appears to have been largely replaced by a concept of government-guaranteed security. One possible explanation for the development of this concept of charity may be that so many people felt that personal responsibility in the dispensing of charity was too slow and inadequate. Thus they chose to move into the speedier method of the use of public funds.

Admittedly, the motives of these people were probably good and charitable. But the method chosen was uncharitable because love was replaced by force. The spirit of charity was de-

based to "public welfare," and the shift from personal responsibility to grants by the state was on. The flow of state funds for relief and rehabilitation has become greater and greater, and the part that personal responsibility can play has necessarily become less and less.

The element which gives meaning to charity is personal consideration and responsibility, but that element is lost when the edicts of the state are substituted for the voluntary decisions of persons. The means have destroyed the ends.

#### DOUBLE RESPONSIBILITY

**T**HERE ARE TWO areas in which this sense of personal responsibility comes home to us. One is the person's responsibility for himself, and the other is in the person's responsibility to his fellow men. Both of these lie in the area of religion, and of them the Judeo-Christian religion has something definite to say. It states, unequivocally, that man himself is responsible both for his personal life and for his social relations.

This is one of the first lessons taught in the Bible. In the drama with which the Bible opens, there is the picture of God as One who is walking in the cool of the evening in the Garden of Eden, and He calls out to Adam: "Where art thou?" And Adam replies: "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was

afraid." It was the picture of man being afraid of what God would ask of him. But then God puts responsibility upon the man and the woman, and sends them forth out of the ease and the luxury of Eden into the reality of the world God had formed, in which man was to find himself through the acceptance of his personal responsibility.

### THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

THIS WAS ALSO the theme of the Hebrew prophets. And in the teachings of Jesus Christ we find this concept of personal responsibility emphasized over and over again. Jesus faced all kinds and conditions of men and women, but He never allowed anyone to escape the sense of responsibility for his own life, and for the needs of others. The parable of the talents is set in the midst of the teachings of Jesus, and each person, no matter whether he is endowed with ten or five talents — or even one — is responsible for the preservation of them, and also for the development of them.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

SO IT IS concerning the need of others. The one story which best exemplifies all the teachings of Jesus regarding our relationship to the need of others is the story of the Good Samaritan. There was a man who was beaten by

robbers and left to die. A priest, and then a Levite, came along. As it should be, the choice of helping the man was left with each of them. Both chose not to help. Then a Samaritan came by. He personally and voluntarily accepted a responsibility for the man who was in need. He knelt down and bound up the man's wounds, took him to the nearest inn, and paid for having him cared for until he could return and pay the full bill. In accepting his personal responsibility for the need of his neighbor, he acted in accord with God's commandments.

But in this immortal story, we should remember that Christ did not say that part of the duty of the charitable man was to levy a tax upon the priest and the Levite so that they would be forced to pay two-thirds of the cost of helping the wounded man, even against their will, while he would pay the other third, which would be his share under such an arrangement. The Bible confronts each with his responsibility. But in addition to being purely personal, it is also completely voluntary. And the excuse of "good motives" in voting to confiscate another's money will hardly be adequate. For how can charity — the love of a person for his fellow men — ever be connected with force and compulsion in any form? Are not these two concepts — the voluntary law of love of person for person, and the compulsory law of force of person against person — irreconcilable in all respects?

## CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

OVER AND OVER again Jesus emphasized this teaching. Always He spoke of what one does with his personal life, with the responsibilities which are the cost of his being a person. With love and understanding and example, He explained that there can be no escape from personal responsibility by taking refuge in customs and in laws and in a subserviency to the state. In fact, in His condemnation of the tradition or law of "corban," Christ specifically stated that no person could use the law to relieve himself of the responsibility of caring for the aged and dependent members of his family. He said that this denial of responsibility was a rejection of God's commandments, even though the excuse for denying such responsibility was "corban" — a dedicating of one's resources to God. And since Jesus would not accept even this high purpose as sufficient excuse for rejecting personal responsibility for the maintenance and welfare of one's kindred, how do you suppose He would react to our present-day mania for turning this responsibility over to the secular state? What does the future hold for a nation wherein parents have come to believe that the purpose of government is to relieve them of the responsibility for their children, and wherein the children in turn demand that government relieve them of the responsibility for their parents?

## EQUALITY

THIS CHRISTIAN philosophy of freedom of choice and personal responsibility for one's own actions was offered to men who were steeped in totalitarianism. It is not surprising that it was difficult for them to understand this concept. And even today, many persons are still trying to reconcile communistic methods — public ownership and control of land and resources, equalization of property by force for “the good of all” — with the teachings of Christ. But the parable of the talents teaches that equalitarianism is not a Christian concept. In truth, God has designed each person to be an individual; except in value before God and before the law, no person is identical or equal to any other person. And as for the references in the New Testament that allegedly advocate some equalization or common ownership of resources, they are *always* on a voluntary basis among persons who wish to participate. They are *never* advanced in the form of a commandment or a law. Compulsory collectivism, on the contrary, takes both responsibility and resources from the individual and places them in the secular state. This is a denial of the rights of the individual, as well as a denial of his duty, for then the individual ceases to be a person who must make account for his stewardship of the gifts granted by God. As a collectivized member of the state,

man is held accountable to the state for his every thought or action, and so the collectivization has deprived him of his birthright as a personality accountable only to God.

#### DISASTERS

**N**OW MANY PERSONS will agree that aid to the unfortunate should theoretically be voluntary and a purely personal matter, and that the state should not enter into the process. But then they will recall various natural and man-made disasters — such as floods, droughts, depressions, explosions, and earthquakes — and claim that the economic problems then involved are too great for strictly private solution. This, of course, is a legitimate question. Let us examine it.

First, where is the proof that the children of God will refuse to voluntarily help their brothers who are victims of *any* disaster, however great? An examination of the evidence reveals that — as any Christian would expect — the necessary voluntary aid through private organizations soon makes its appearance wherever disaster strikes. Persons do not starve — or even for long remain ill fed, ill housed, or ill clothed — in a free, Christian nation. Starvation is found only in countries where God is denied and where persons are fed and controlled by their governments. If this voluntary aid is now less than what could ordinarily be

expected, is it not due solely to the fact that the force of government has entrenched itself in this area of love which, by its very nature, can apply only to individuals acting alone or through their voluntary organizations?

#### ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

**A**ND AS FOR the governmental controls that have been perpetuated upon us on a "temporary" basis during an alleged national emergency, we must remember that the Christian philosophy deals with eternal or timeless principles. Is a thing right or wrong? If it is wrong, then reject it; if it is right, then accept it — regardless of the temporary opposition and the shallow arguments of political expediency that will surely appear. For example, must we continue the evil of governmental "charity" merely because so many people — those who receive it and those who have the political jobs of dispensing it — now have a vested interest in its continuance? If governmental control over peoples' lives is evil, let us abolish it now before this evil consumes us.

#### JESUS DID NOT COMPROMISE

**T**HE PROPONENTS of social control by the state collide as directly with the teachings of Christ as would two trains running toward each other upon the same track. Jesus was so uncompro-

mising in his insistence that responsibility be placed upon the individual for both his personal life and for his attitude toward others that Jesus never suggested an institution of any kind that could take the place of such individual responsibility. Nor did He ever mention an institution or a power to which an individual could transfer such responsibility, either by acquiescence, force, or plunder.

Nevertheless, this fatal temptation—the temptation to believe that functions which are spiritual can be transferred to the secular state because it possesses the necessary force and power to “get things done”—continues to confront both religious and social effort. This temptation shows itself in our modern mood of believing that it is the function of religion to force a change in the spirit of people by law, by the naked power of the state. In socialist democracies this is done by the due process of law; in more realistic totalitarian states the naked power is used. But both take away the resources of those who do not contribute willingly to whatever the government may currently designate as “social need.” The Soviet system, which is the ultimate development of socialism, did this by killing many millions of farmers who resisted the collectivization of all the farms of Russia. The state then owned all the land and the resources, so it could do what it wanted with them, and personal decisions were no longer permitted.

## GOOD INTENTIONS NOT ENOUGH

SUCH ACTION rudely shocks the well-intentioned people who believe in what they call the welfare provisions of the socialist state, but who deplore police-state methods. But though the words describing the welfare state methods are more honey-covered, the results are the same. That is, the laws of the welfare state are imposed to plunder the resources — and control the actions — of the farmer or the business man to the same extent as does the dictate of the totalitarian state. In either case, the objector is either fined or jailed or liquidated, if he refuses to conform.

## NOT A CHRISTIAN IDEA

THERE IS NO Christianity in the concept that pressure groups, desiring material benefits, have the right to use the power of the state to take property from some individuals for the material gain of those who have the political power. That is plunder, and it is still plunder even if Robin Hood declares that he is robbing the rich to help the poor.

It is strange that even many of our churchmen should trust neither themselves nor others to do the right and the good thing about the need of the world. But we can see that they lack faith when churchmen themselves advocate these civil laws to take money away from

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people by force to give it to those who demand material benefits. This procedure may be a way to distribute money, but it is as far from being a spiritual experience as anything in this world could be.

### WHO WILL REFUSE?

WE NEED new recognition of the power which lies within us. We need to know that the life of God is within us in far greater measure than we now believe. We turn despairingly to the state, which is the vainest of hopes, because we do not believe enough in either God or man. Let us lift up our hearts. For which one of us is it that will refuse his help in a case of real human need? You? I? Or is the finger to be pointed again at that nebulous scapegoat "someone else"?

I write as a minister, and I want to attest that through an experience of thirty years I have never seen a church member fail to respond to an authentic case of human need. And from those who could and did help when I have described such a case, I have invariably received expressions of gratitude that the opportunity was presented.

It is that faith which we need restored today. If we will only believe that such is the spirit of man we will not only be believing more in God, but we shall receive a response from the people of God that no one has yet dreamed

of. We act as though the opposite were true — that men are not really like God and are unable and reluctant to be moved by Him.

If we need laws to make people treat men of other faiths and races as friends; if we need the police power of the secular state to take money from men for human need; if it is believed that the only hope of a city of God is to seek the alternative of a collectivized mass leveled to the lowest common denominator of mentality and ability — if all this be the limit of our hope for mankind, then even such activity is sheer futility, for even if such an effort could be achieved it would have no meaning at all for mankind. This rejection of personal responsibility would prove only that it is possible to make men live like whipped dogs, and the proving of it would be hell.

#### TWO VITAL QUESTIONS

**T**H**ERE** ARE TWO questions in the beginning of Genesis that illustrate the God-given personal responsibility of man. The first is the question of God to Adam: "Where art thou?" The second is the question of God to Cain: "Where is Abel thy brother?" In both questions the Bible goes to the heart of man's being and meaning. He is to make a response to the personal search of God, and he is to bear a personal responsibility for his brother. Man could not evade his personal response to God by say-

ing that the woman tempted him, and he could not evade his personal responsibility for his brother by saying that such responsibility was not his and could be turned over to any other power. When God raises such questions as those — and He raises them to every man and woman in every generation as He did in the Garden of Eden — God is not speaking to a community. He is alone with a man. And in that moment man cannot excuse himself by saying that his community is immoral and has corrupted him, any more than Adam could transfer his responsibility to a temptress, or any more than Cain could transfer his responsibility to the community.

#### THE STATE IS NOT MORAL

THE CONCEPT that the community is a moral object which can accept such responsibility is utterly absurd. Only persons are moral or immoral; responsible or irresponsible. Society and community are secular in form and substance; they are terms describing social units which are without moral significance at all. There is no more of a moral sense, good or bad, about a state or a community than there is about a crowd at a game. One would not dream of saying that he could give over his responsibility for himself, or for his brother, to the crowd in the bleachers. And no more can a Christian believe that he can do so with the state.

## CHARITY IS SECRET

FINALLY, we must remember one other biblical principle when we are considering the plight of the poor and unfortunate: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly."

## FALSE CHARITY

HOW CAN *any* attempt at governmental almsgiving be in harmony with this Christian principle? Do the advocates of social security legislation, relief laws, United Nations rehabilitation programs, Point Four, and other compulsory governmental schemes to aid poor and unfortunate people "do their alms in secret"? Or do they "sound their trumpets before them" in order "that they may have glory of men"? Is it their own money, or is the money taken from others without their consent? Is their theory and practice of "police-grants from the

state" in harmony with the teachings of Christ? If so, then are our voluntary social and missionary societies really in accord with the mind of Christ?

### CHRIST REJECTED

**I**N DEFENSE of their acts, some of these legislators point out that they — like Christ — have distributed food to those who were hungry, and clothed those who were naked, and housed those who were cold. This is a true statement. But, nevertheless, they have rejected Christ in the process. They have introduced the evil principle of force into an arrangement that should be voluntary. They have made a Roman holiday out of a responsibility that is essentially spiritual, both for the giver and the receiver. These rulers of men have rejected the spiritual, and have made this stated or implied compact with their supporters: Elect me to a position of power and I will then reward you — or others designated by you — with special privileges and the money that I will legally take from others.

Robbery is thus legalized. Equality before the law is thus denied. Personal responsibility is thus rejected. Freedom is thus destroyed.

This political approach to charity may or may not be effective strategy for winning elections, but let us never inject the name of Christ or the principles of Christianity into this sordid

bargain. Rather let us hang our heads in shame at the evil we have done or tolerated in the name of charity — especially to the very ones we have claimed to be helping. Let us search for the lesson to be found in this statement by the Apostle Paul: “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . . and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

Let us render unto the state that which belongs to the state, and unto God that which belongs to God. It is God’s commandment that there must be a personal concern, as well as a personal sharing, with those in need. The use of the force of government in this area of compassion and charity precludes any personal expression of Christianity. It becomes a mechanistic and secular thing, devoid of feeling. So let us return to the teachings of the Gospels, and render unto God our willing response to those of His children who need our help and ourselves.

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