

To Tithe, or Not To Tithe: That is the Question.

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We have heard that “Nothing [is] certain except death and taxes”. Inexorable growth of government bureaucracy and its tax burden also seems sure. Stimulus packages are in reality just “porkulus” ploys. The big ticket item in government’s deficit spending is welfare. The “subprime loan” fiasco that still poisons our economy can be seen as a politicized extension of government welfare. In fact, it has been noted that an early funding request for the Iraq War was merely two percent of the federal debt.¹ Looming hyperinflation, which threatens to destroy the U.S. Dollar, is clearly powered by debt demands of bankrupt Social Security, Medicare, etc.

So, how do we get out of this fiscal quagmire? Is there a socio-economic manual we can check? Happily, there is. It’s called the Holy Bible! The Puritans learned the Protestant Ethic from the Bible. Their Biblical vision energized the Puritans to become leaders in the Industrial Revolution, beginning circa A.D. 1760.

Population Explosion

The current cratering of our economy can be traced in part to social problems associated with early progress of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and America. Advances in the standard of living and longevity prompted repeated doubling of Great Britain’s population.² This, of course, increased the domestic market. Population explosion also resulted in hordes of orphans, the common object of pathos in the novels of Charles Dickens. The deceased parents of these waifs had been over stressed by demands for support of their doubled offspring as infant mortality abruptly fell in response to plunging prices of food and fiber.

Puritan Dilemma

Puritans addressed these growing pains by endowing various charities, in effect transforming these ministries into impersonal businesses with baleful, Scrooge-like results. Puritans in Colonial America further began to inject politics into the ministry of education. In 1647, they passed the “old deluder, Satan” law that required Massachusetts communities to establish public schools to assure learning and religious study by the young.³ Outside of New England, notably in the South, education was left up to parents, headmasters of private academies, varied religious groups and charitable donors.

Later, under Horace Mann, Massachusetts common schools became a near monopoly in education. Curricula were purged of Bible study, in keeping with his Unitarian, nonsectarian agenda. Mann’s utopian vision for his common schools, however, failed to pass muster. Zachary Montgomery’s devastating comparison of 1860 U.S. census data for New England and the Old South found that “where the political State controlled the education and training of children, the ratio of suicides ranged from 250 percent to 800 percent higher than [in Southern Seaboard States with education under] . . . parental control”⁴ Not a good report card!

We are now saddled with impersonal, politicized “widget factories” whose secular educational programs produce massive “inventories” of “dumbed-down” graduates unable to make change if their computerized register crashes. Even more tragic, suicide is a leading killer of teens.

Keeping the teacher-student nexus personal is vital in education. The rubber meets the road in the classroom. But, this essential relationship between students and teacher is easily broken by an economizing mind set that limits kilowatts and counts paper clips.

Further, harried teachers are mandated to “teach to the test,” to assure supposedly “no child is left behind.” So, they must also cope with ever-present, destructive boredom. It’s ironic that, in a fully routinized class, that which is in the instructor’s notes is often slavishly copied into the student’s notes without passing through the mind of either. Our tax dollars at work!

Legal Eagles

Like education, the ministry of justice also suffers from the Puritan amalgam of business and politics. In our litigious society, it is sadly true one can get as much justice as one can afford. Politically protected trial lawyers pursue the gold of “jackpot justice.” Meaningful tort reform to “level the playing field” remains as elusive as the Holy Grail. Stratospheric court judgments help drive up costs across the entire market place, including much-debated health care costs of “Big Pharma,” “Mega Medicine” and “Frankenstein Insurance.”⁵

The Biblical Tithe

So, what is the underlying reason these essential ministries now languish in confusion? It is simple, we have stopped tithing. Christians have turned a blind eye to the needy in America. So, management of welfare for the ever-present poor (Matthew 26:11) has been usurped by politicians with twisted agendas. We also tax our neighbors to educate our own children in secular schools that are cursed with faith-destroying curricula.

Why don’t we *re-appropriate* the Lord’s Tithe to fund local ministries to the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)? How about starting a corps of Christian teachers funded with local tithes, as the Levites were in Israel (Numbers 18:26)? In addition to reading and writing instruction, these community educators, like the Levites, would be tasked with making the Bible accessible to God’s people (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). This was the real role of parsons in New England now sadly extinguished by bureaucratized ministerial education.

Taking a page from Genesis, we know that Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac (implicitly) observed the Tithe (Genesis 14:18-20, 28:22). Tithing enabled the Patriarchs to build an educated work force with solidarity and loyalty seldom seen in any work place or church setting today. Their servant-saints kept the state secret that Sarah was also Abraham’s wife. Their steadfast refusal to gossip about Abraham and Sarah blindsided two heathen kings who otherwise would have mounted a genocidal attack to capture beautiful Sarah.

Let us repent of stinginess and heed the Prophet's searching question. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: [with "toxic assets" and a dying dollar] . . . Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and . . . [I will open] the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:8-10). Sure beats legislated health care in costs and quality!

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1. Robert Samuelson, *War Meets the Welfare State*, Newsweek, April 7, 2003, page 37.
2. "Industrial Revolution" in American Academic Encyclopedia, Vol 17, page - 158.
3. Samuel Blumenfeld, *Is Public Education Necessary?*, 1981, page 17.
4. Zachary Montgomery, *Poison Drops in the Federal Senate*, 1886, page 30.
5. Thomas Sowell, *The "Costs" of Medical Care*, an excellent four-part analysis of the health care debate.

URL is http://townhall.com/columnists/ThomasSowell/2009/11/03/the_costs_of_medical_care