

### SESSION 3

## *What Role Should Government Play?*

- “‘Nothing Shall Make Them Afraid,’” by Jim Wallis
- “Do We Care Enough?” by Ronald J. Sider
- “Time to End Poverty,” by Sen. John Edwards
- “Priorities for the Poor,” by Elizabeth Green

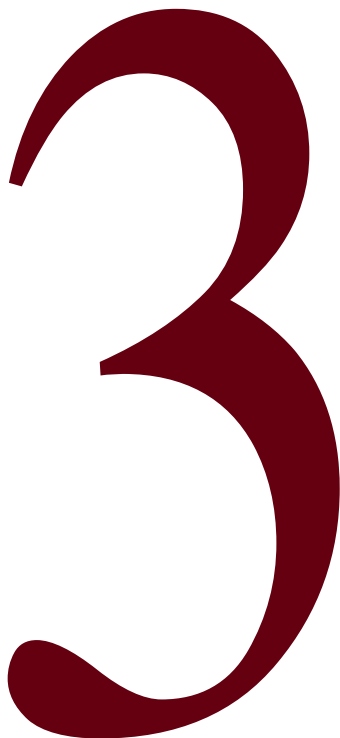
**J**im Wallis asserts that the biblical prophets—such as Amos and Isaiah—have a lot to say about the role of government and national spending priorities. Evangelicals for Social Action founder Ronald J. Sider discusses why “sin makes government intervention in the economy necessary,” and former Sen. John Edwards examines the state of the American Dream by looking at the country’s treatment of millions of people who live at the margins and below. Elizabeth Green brings to light the details of everyday poverty in the United States.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does lack of access to adequate food, clean water, housing, health care, and the basic necessities of life contribute to conflict and violence? How might this be corrected?
2. Identify five facts about poverty that you think are central to the problem of economic disparity. Do the same with five facts about wealth.
3. How would you rewrite Micah 6 to address today’s economic situation? If you were to make Micah’s address to Congress, what points would you make? What would you emphasize?
4. In what contexts do you have conversations with people of different socioeconomic classes? Explore the definitions and indicators of class and the ways in which income and wealth are distributed. Talk about these issues in light of the accounts in Acts 2:38-47, Acts 4:31-37, and Acts 5:1-11.

### RESOURCES

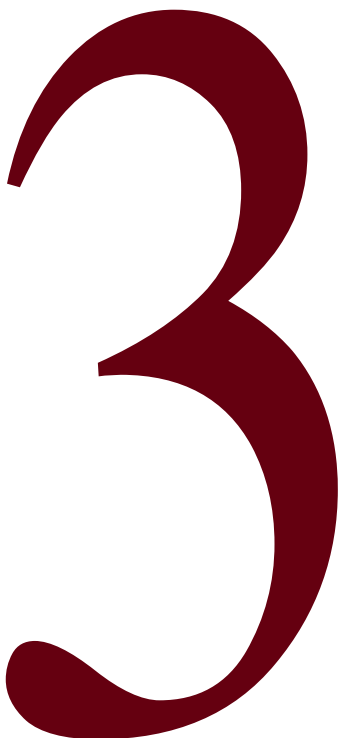
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities provides current information on the federal budget, as well as a breakdown of how federal priorities affect state level funding. ([www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org))
- In his article “A Sign of Spiritual Distress,” Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben and Jerry’s Homemade, Inc., explains how a democracy is revealed in its spending priorities. (*Sojourners* magazine, May-June 1999; [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net))
- The Local Initiatives Support Coalition assists resident-led, community-based development organizations to transform distressed communities and neighborhoods into healthy ones by mobilizing businesses, government, and philanthropic support. ([www.lisc.org](http://www.lisc.org))
- Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities works to reduce military spending to better fund social services and education to the end of reducing poverty. ([www.sensiblepriorities.org](http://www.sensiblepriorities.org))
- In “40 Acres and a Mortgage,” Franklin D. Raines, former Fannie Mae CEO, argues that centuries of denying African Americans opportunities to gain assets and build



## *Christians and Poverty*

wealth have created cycles of poverty that African-American families have only recently started to break. (*Sojourners*, September-October 2002; [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net))

- In *Under the Overpass: A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America*, Michael Yankoski describes his time living as a homeless person in six American cities over a five-month period and the effect this had on his Christian faith. (Multnomah Publishers, 2005; [www.undertheoverpass.com](http://www.undertheoverpass.com))



### **‘NOTHING SHALL MAKE THEM AFRAID’**

*by Jim Wallis*

**B**eing a new father has changed a lot of things in my life, including my schedule of travel—I try not to be gone now for more than a night or two at a time. My son Luke is now 4 (and a half!). He has a new brother who is now 3 months old, so Luke is a big brother. When I’m traveling, Luke and I talk on the phone—often two or three times each day.

I was on the road a few months ago, and I had already talked with Luke twice, but he left a voicemail in my hotel room. After all, two hours had passed, and many things had happened! It was a nice surprise when I got back to the room and eagerly listened to his little voice. He told me all the things he had been doing since we last talked. Then he did his familiar sign-off, one that warms his mother’s heart and mine: “Daddy, I love you, I like you, and you’re incredible.” It’s the kind of affirmation we all need, maybe what God would want to say to us. But it is often hard to receive, and far easier from a 4-year-old.

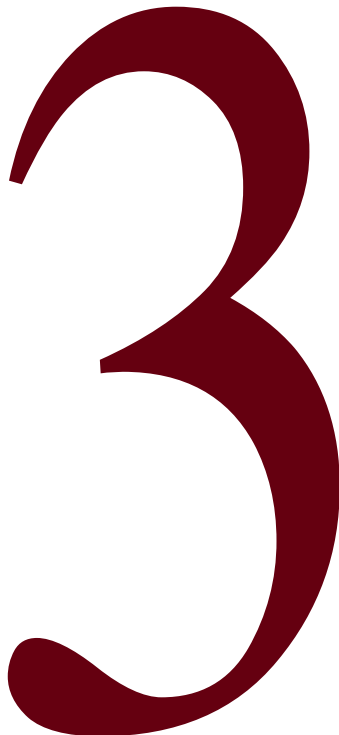
But then, Luke said something he’d never said before. Out of the blue, my 4-year-old son said, “Daddy, don’t be afraid.” Don’t be afraid.

I heard his mother take in her breath in the background. Where does a little child find those words? Don’t be afraid. These, of course, were Jesus’ most frequent words to his disciples—his most common instruction. “Be not afraid,” he told us over and over again.

We’ve just been through a war. The war with Iraq was argued and justified mainly on the basis of fear. Trappist monk Thomas Merton said it well years ago: “The root of war is fear.” Since Sept. 11, our nation has been terrified. Even now, in victory. Code Orange has become a way of life. We are afraid, and with some good reason. But there is a huge difference between prudent action, against real dangers, and living in fear. Fear can cause us to give up important things, to accept other things that violate our own best values, to spend virtually all of our resources to make us feel more secure—even at the expense of everything else—in ways that may, in fact, make us more insecure. But, as I travel around post-war America, I believe we are also a nation hungry for peace. What are, as Jesus asks, “The things that make for peace”?

My favorite prophet these days is Micah, who took up the questions we face of war and security, poverty and peace. Those running the nation believe that only unquestioned military superiority, and nothing else, can bring us security. But the 8th-century Micah offers us another view. He offers another vision. “He shall judge between many nations and shall arbitrate between strong peoples far away. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But, they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.”

Several millennia later, Pope Paul VI paraphrased Micah when he said, “If you want peace, work for justice.” The assertion is that the possibilities for peace, for avoiding war, depend upon everyone having enough, having a little vine and fig tree. The insight from Micah is both, I would suggest, prophetic and practical for us in these days. If the tremendous imbalances of this planet could be leveled out just a little, nobody would have to be afraid. Micah knew it was the great imbalances and fears that lead to war.



### **'Nothing Shall Make Them Afraid' (cont.)**

Micah knew that we will not beat our swords into plowshares, we will not overcome war, we will not prevent further wars, until everyone has their own vine and fig tree—their own little piece of the global economy, their own small stake in the world, their own share of security for themselves and their families. Because when you have a little patch on which to build a life, nobody can make you afraid—or at least it's much harder. What 8th-century-B.C. Micah understood is that there is no security for ourselves until there is security for others. Prophetic, but practical. A spiritual reality that is more true today than perhaps ever before. Micah suggests that our weapons cannot finally protect us—only a world in which most people feel secure will be safe for ourselves and our children.

Micah urges us to go deeper, to the resentments and the angers and the insecurities and the injustices embedded in the very structures of today's world. Micah knew the cruel connection between poverty and war. The connections between global poverty, injustice, resentment, and terrorism are painfully clear. But even here, at home, we don't understand the message of Micah. What makes for true security? What is real national security?

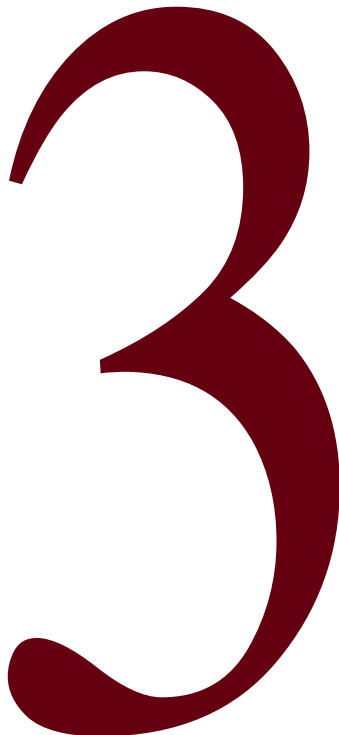
PART OF MY JOB is to read federal budget and tax resolutions. It has not been pleasant reading in these last few weeks. Because the cost that will pay for war in Iraq will be measured now in the loss of health care for millions of poor American children, in our inability to provide the education that frees inner-city youth from the prison of poverty, in the shame of women and children living in shelters, and in the alarming percentage of people in this richest nation in the world still going hungry.

The most telling criticism of President Bush's faith-based initiative was that it could easily silence the prophetic voice of the faith community. Many of us who supported expanding partnerships between religious organizations and federally financed social services also said we would continue to evaluate all of the administration's policies by how they affect the poor. We promised to challenge excessive tax cuts and budget priorities that primarily benefit the wealthy and deprive us of resources to fight poverty.

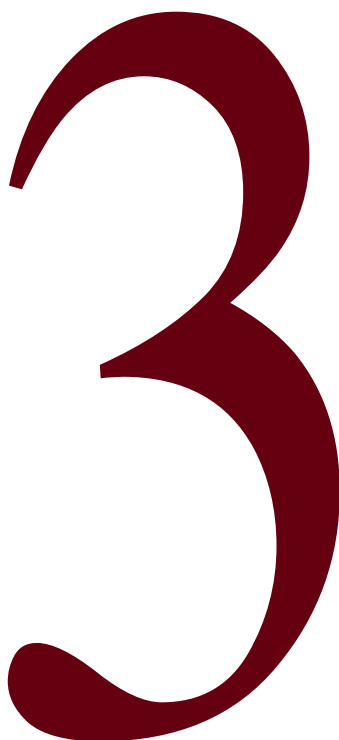
The time for that challenge has clearly come. Congress recently approved nearly \$80 billion requested by the administration as the first payment for the war with Iraq. Then they agreed to a budget resolution containing increased spending for the military while resources for important domestic programs are falling below the amount needed even to maintain current social services in a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. And then, they approved a \$350 billion-dollar tax cut which will give households with incomes over \$1 million a year an average of \$93,500 while providing little or no relief to low-income working families. A single mother with two children making \$18,000 gets absolutely nothing. Perhaps most outrageous is the revelation that the child tax credit for most low-income families was dropped in order to free more funding to cut the dividend tax.

This will effectively prevent almost 12 million children, one in every six in America, from receiving any benefit. Middle- and upper-middle-income families will see an increase in their child tax credits from \$600 to \$1000, but low-income families and their children will be systematically excluded. The inclusion of these families in child tax credit benefits was in the Senate package but was stripped out in the conference committee, reportedly to make room for more dividend and capital gains tax cuts.

Government spending programs sometimes provoke legitimate concerns about effectiveness. This was not a government spending program. It was a child tax credit that would have put money directly into the hands of our poorest mothers and fathers, trying desperately to raise their children. "These are the people who need it the most



### **‘Nothing Shall Make Them Afraid’ (cont.)**



and who will spend it the most,” said Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), whose provision to include low-income families was dropped from the final bill. Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) voted against the bill, calling the omission “ill-founded” and “unfair.” So what does such a clear and revealing decision tell us?

Apparently, what is good for middle- and upper-income families and children is *too* good for the poor. Apparently, stimulating the economy with middle-class mall shopping is a good thing, but helping the grocery budget for low-income single moms is not. Apparently, reducing taxes on stock dividends and capital gains for our wealthiest citizens was the highest priority for the congressional leaders, and there was simply no room left, under the tax cut ceiling, to do anything for poor families. Apparently, the Republican preference of putting money back into people’s hands, rather than spending it on government programs, doesn’t apply to the poor. We do have our priorities after all.

IF BIBLICAL PROPHETS like Amos and Isaiah had read this week’s news about what happened to child tax credits for low-income families, they would surely be out screaming on the White House lawn about the justice of God—and be quickly led away by the Secret Service.

Let’s tell it like the prophets might have: The decision to drop child tax credits for America’s poorest families and children in favor of further tax cuts for the rich is morally offensive. It is blatant disregard of the poor and an outrageous bias toward the rich. In religious terms, the exclusion of any benefits for poor children in the new tax bill should be named as a political sin. And those politicians who utter the words of religion and faith, yet supported this exclusion of the poor, deserve to be called hypocrites. The White House, which approves all these choices, engages in moral doubletalk when it espouses faith-based initiatives and then allows the abandonment of poor families. The Republican House and Senate leaders who, with the support of the administration, made these choices against the poor should be ashamed of themselves.

But there is more at stake than a child tax credit.

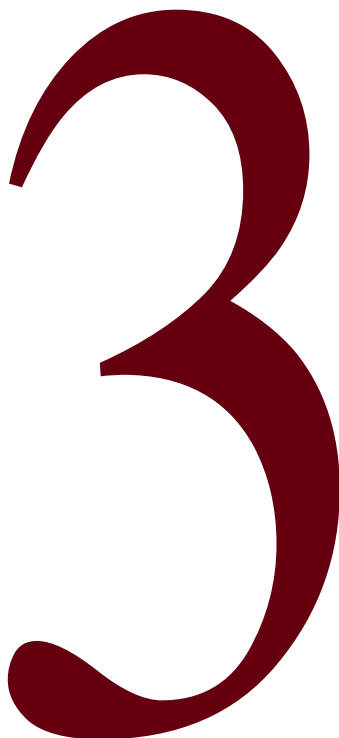
Even the president’s faith-based initiative is being sacrificed at the altar of tax cuts. The Senate finally passed the CARE Act by an overwhelming bipartisan vote, including restoring over \$1 billion dollars to the Social Services Block Grant—funds that assist state and local social service providers. Incredibly, the same day the White House announced it would oppose that funding. Once again, the budget priorities of the administration do not match its rhetorical promise of a faith-based initiative to reduce poverty. The faith-based initiative is in danger of becoming a hollow program that merely provides equal access for religious groups to the crumbs falling from the federal table. Faith-based organizations know that crumbs and prayers are insufficient to seriously reduce poverty.

In a letter we delivered to the White House in 2003, we said that “the lack of a consistent, coherent, and integrated domestic policy that benefits low-income people makes our continued support for your faith-based initiative increasingly untenable.” And we reminded them that, when the president announced the faith-based initiative, he pledged that: “I want to ensure that faith-based and community groups will always have a place at the table in our deliberations.”

And, we said, “Mr. President, it’s time to bring faith-based organizations to the table where policy decisions are being made. We are concerned that the needs of poor people in America seem to have little influence in the critical policy decisions your administration is making.”

VIRTUALLY EVERY STATE in America is suffering terrible budget deficits. But the federal budget offers little relief and no solutions except suggested further cuts to crit-

### **‘Nothing Shall Make Them Afraid’ (cont.)**



ically needed domestic poverty programs, child health care, and education. Only a holdout by moderate Republican senators over the administration’s objections secured \$20 billion over 2 years in the tax cut bill. The drastic state budget cuts will be acutely felt by faith-based service providers, which will bear the brunt of increased poverty in their communities.

Two years ago, the president said, “Government has an important role. It will never be replaced by charities. Yet government must also do more to take the side of charities and community healers and to support their work. Government must be active enough to fund services for the poor—and humble enough to let good people in local communities provide those services.” Some of the “good people” running these programs are now angry and feel betrayed, having to cut their budgets and lay off staff in the face of growing needs and diminishing resources.

Unless the current domestic priorities are turned around, the truth is that hungry people will go without food stamps, poor children will go without health care, elderly will go without medicine, and school children will go without textbooks—so that the taxes of the wealthiest Americans can be further reduced. That is morally intolerable to us, and the religious community will not accept it.

The consequences of these actions are becoming a silent war, felt most severely in the poorest parts of the United States, where low-income families are desperately clutching onto the bottom rungs of the failing economy. Indeed, America’s poor are no longer even a part of the administration’s rhetoric. In his inaugural speech, President Bush said, “America, at its best, is compassionate. In the quiet of American conscience, we know that deep, persistent poverty is unworthy of our nation’s promise.” But “compassionate conservatism” seems to have lost its moral compass, and is in danger of becoming compassionless conservatism.

Paying for war by cutting needed spending for the poor while giving unneeded tax cuts to the rich is morally unconscionable. The federal budget’s priorities are a disaster for the poor, a windfall for the wealthiest, and thus directly conflict with biblical priorities. Budgets are moral documents. They reveal the priorities of a family, church, city, or nation. Let me say this in my clearest evangelical language: This federal budget is unbiblical.

A MODERN PROPHET a lot like Micah once said, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is a nation approaching spiritual death.” So said the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

War and security, our being afraid, are indeed pushing poor people off the agenda. Call to Renewal hosts a regular dialogue in the Senate—Republican, Democrat, top staff people who care about these issues—and they agree: There is little space, there is no room, to talk about what’s happening to America’s poor.

Just ask all the heads of those faith-based organizations in every community. Ask how they are faring. Ask faith-based organizations across this country, which are all struggling for survival. You know! The consequences of these actions, these budget resolutions, have become a silent war against those who live in the poorest parts of this nation.

I am convinced that the critical task of poverty reduction will not be accomplished without a spiritual engine. History is always changed by social movements with a spiritual foundation. Such an enormous task requires qualities that are specifically religious, I would suggest, especially the energy of hope. The real battle today is not between belief and secularism, as some say. The real battle is between hope and cynicism. The prophets begin with critique and judgment, but they always end in hope.

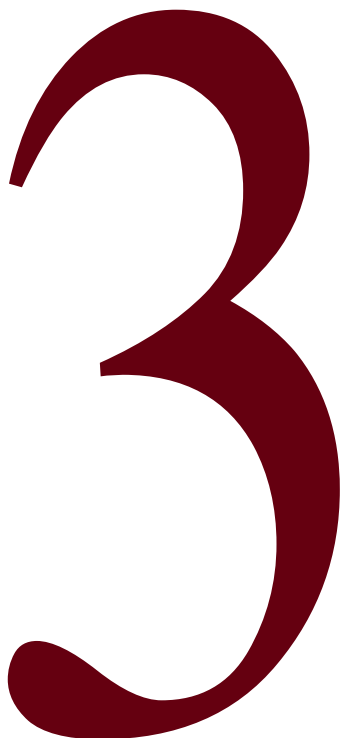
## *Christians and Poverty*

### **'Nothing Shall Make Them Afraid' (cont.)**

Listen to Micah—the promise of God’s purposes being fulfilled in history. Hope is not a feeling; hope is a decision. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, says the book of Hebrews, the evidence of things not seen. Or, my best paraphrase, hope is believing in spite of the evidence and watching the evidence change.

Hear the voice of a child—“Don’t be afraid.” Hear the voice of a prophet named Micah, saying don’t be tempted by your military might and power, but rather do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. Hear Jesus—Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. ■

*Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners. This is adapted from a speech Wallis gave for Call to Renewal’s Pentecost 2003 event at National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C.*



### DO WE CARE ENOUGH?

by Ronald J. Sider

**T**he great evangelist Paul spent much of his time over several years collecting an international offering for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9). For his work, he found a norm (2 Corinthians 8:13-15)—equality of basic necessities—articulated in the Exodus story of the manna in which every person ended up with “as much as each of them needed” (Exodus 16:17-18).

Throughout scripture we see the same standard. When people cannot care for themselves, their community must provide a liberal sufficiency so that their needs are met.

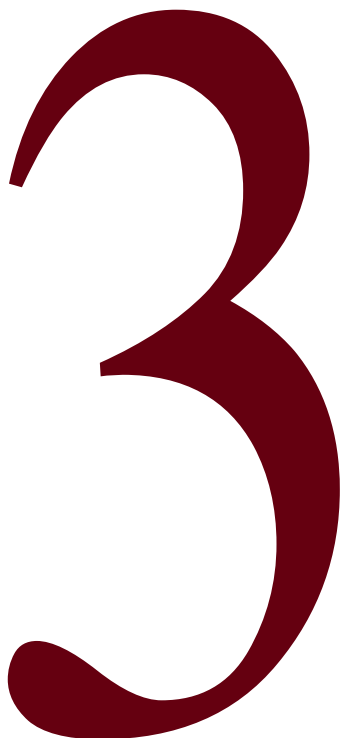
At different points in the biblical text it is clear that the family has the first obligation to help needy members. In the text on the Jubilee in Leviticus 25, the first responsibility to help the poor person forced by poverty to sell land is the next of kin in the extended family (Leviticus 25:25, 35). But the poor person’s help does not end with the family. Even if there are no family members to help, the poor person has the legal right to get his land back at the next Jubilee (Leviticus 25:28). Similarly, 1 Timothy 5:16 insists that a Christian widow’s relatives should be her first means of support. Only when the family cannot support her should the church step in. Any policy or political philosophy that immediately seeks governmental solutions for problems that could be solved just as well or better at the level of the family violates the biblical framework that stresses the central societal role of the family.

But what role should government play? ... Sin makes government intervention in the economy necessary. When selfish, powerful people deprive others of their rightful access to productive resources, the state rightly steps in with intervening power to correct the injustice. When other individuals and institutions in the community do not or cannot provide basic necessities for the needy, government rightly helps.

This teaching on the role of government applies not just to Israel but to government everywhere. The ideal monarch was to be a channel of God’s justice (Psalm 72:1), and God’s justice extends to the whole world (Psalm 9:7-9). All legitimate rulers are instituted by God and are God’s servants for human good (Romans 13:1, 4). In this passage, Paul states a positive reason for government (government acts “for your good”) before he specifies its negative function (“to execute wrath on the wrongdoer”). Romans 13 is structurally similar to Psalm 72:1 in viewing the ruler as a channel of God’s authority. All people everywhere can pray with the Israelites: “Give the king your justice, O God.”

Government is an aspect of community and is inherent in human life as an expression of our created social nature. Governmental action to empower the poor is one way we promote the common good and implement the truth that economic justice is a family affair. However, when indirect approaches are not effective in restraining economic injustice, providing economic opportunity to all, or providing care for those who cannot care for themselves, the state rightly acts to demand patterns of justice and provide vital services.

Does the biblical material offer a norm for distributive justice today? Some would argue that the biblical material applies only to God’s covenant community. But that is to ignore the fact that the biblical writers did not hesitate to apply revealed standards to persons and societies outside Israel. Amos announced divine punishment on the surrounding nations for their evil and injustice (Amos 1-2). Isaiah condemned Assyria



### Do We Care Enough? (cont.)

for its pride and injustice (Isaiah 10:12-19). The Lord of history applies the same standards of social justice to all nations.

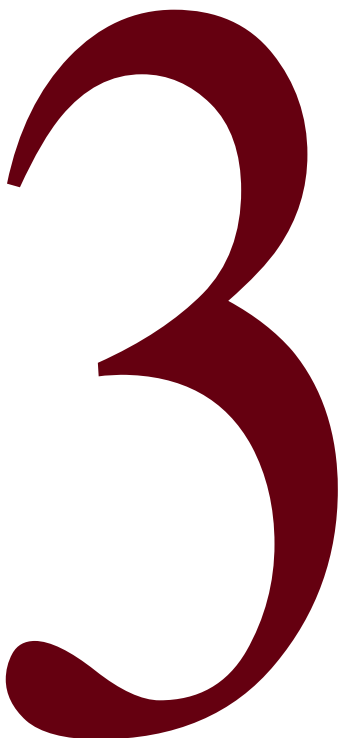
THE TRADITIONAL criterion of distributive justice that comes closest to the biblical paradigm is distribution according to needs. That is not to ignore the important truth that bad choices rightly have negative economic consequences. Nor is it to forget that the able-bodied have an obligation to work to earn their way. But it does mean that a theology of distributive justice grounded in scripture places much more emphasis on structural arrangements that guarantee basic needs for life in community than do other views.

The biblical material provides at least three norms pertaining to distribution of resources to meet basic needs:

1. Normally, all people who can work should have access to the productive resources so that, if they act responsibly, they can produce or purchase an abundant sufficiency of all that is needed to enjoy a dignified, healthy life in community.
2. The difference in wealth between the rich and the poor dare not become so great that inequality of wealth, and therefore power, lead to oppression.
3. Those who cannot care for themselves should receive from their community a liberal sufficiency of the necessities of life provided in ways that preserve dignity, encourage responsibility, and strengthen the family.

Those three norms are modest in comparison with some ideals presented in the name of equality. At the same time they demand fundamental change in our nation. If God's Word is true, then the United States today stands in blatant defiance of God's norms for society. Anyone who seeks to be biblical must demand an end to the scandal of poverty in the richest nation on earth. ■

*Ronald J. Sider was a Sojourners contributing editor, president of Evangelicals for Social Action, and publisher of Prism magazine when the article containing this selection appeared in the September-October 1999 issue of Sojourners. It is an excerpt from Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America (Baker Book House, October 1999).*



### TIME TO END POVERTY

by Sen. John Edwards

**P**overty is one of the great moral issues of our time. It cuts to the heart of America's great promise: that anyone who works hard and plays by the rules will have the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their family. And I believe that the American people are ready to do something about it, if our leaders are willing to ask them.

You can tell a lot about people by how they treat their neighbors in need. And I believe that you can tell a lot about a country's character by how they treat millions of people who live at the margins and below: Do we send them to the shadowy corners, or do we bring them to the center of our lives? We know in our hearts that, in a country of our wealth and our prosperity, to have so many Americans live lives of endless struggle is wrong.

America is a place that believes in ascension, that one person can rise from very little to transform this world. It comes from that eternal belief that we all have the same worth. But the best evidence of America not living up to its ideals is the more than 36 million Americans who live in poverty every day. There are children who have no real hope simply because of where they're growing up. There are people who are working two jobs, and they still can't make rent. And too many families are spending the night in shelters across this country.

OUR LEADERS today want us to believe that each of us is out there on our own. If you make it, that's your success. If you don't, that's your failure.

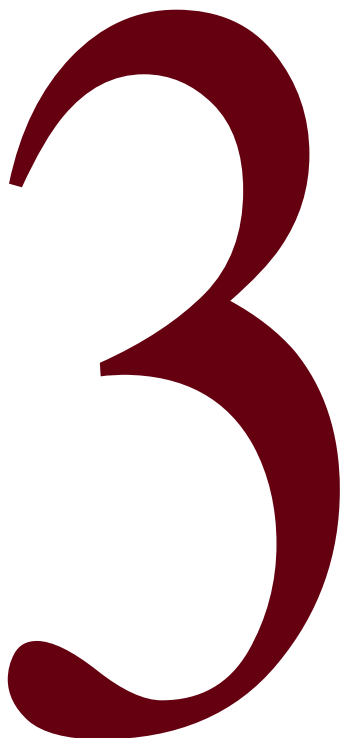
But we know that's not true. The truth is nobody succeeds in America alone. They succeed because America protects private property. They succeed because America has public schools and universities that give everyone the tools to get ahead. And, of course, they succeed because of three very important virtues: hard work, self-discipline, and responsibility. But nobody goes it alone, and everybody has a responsibility to help everyone else get ahead.

The American people believe in the dignity that comes from hard work. And they understand that some people do everything right and the decks are still stacked against them.

It is time for us to go out and encourage more Americans to be a part of a cause that's bigger than themselves. It is time to end poverty in America. It may seem like an impossible goal, but that's what the skeptics said about all of our other great challenges. If we can put a person on the moon, conquer polio, and put libraries of information on a chip, then we can end poverty for those who want to work for a better life.

We know that the Bible tells us the poor will always be with us. Some people hear that as an excuse for inaction. I believe it is a call for us to act and a call for us to serve. My family and my faith didn't teach me to turn my back on a friend or neighbor in need. They taught me to open the door, let them in, and help them get back on their feet. And millions are calling for help right now. They don't want a free ride. They just want a chance: a chance to work, buy a home, take care of their family, and live the American dream. ■

*Sen. John Edwards was director of the Center on Poverty, Work, and Opportunity at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, when this article appeared in the September-October 2005 issue of Sojourners. He was presented with Call to Renewal's 2005 Joseph Award, which honors individuals who faithfully use their position of influence to benefit those in poverty.*



### PRIORITIES FOR THE POOR

by Elizabeth Green

**H**urricane Katrina showed us the depth of poverty in America. Even the mainstream media, not normally a voice for the “least of these,” reported on the vast needs of the poor with increasing alarm. But will we follow through with greater attention to the policy decisions that impact poor families?

For many, poverty is the grinding constant of daily life—it does not merely surface in times of tragedy or emergency. And not only is poverty a continual reality for many, it is growing. Our nation’s spending and policy priorities do not seem to account for this.

The U.S. Census Bureau released its 2005 annual report, and the statistics were grim: Poverty numbers had increased again. In 2004, 1.1 million more people fell into poverty, with 37 million total living in poverty in the United States, according to the Coalition on Human Needs.

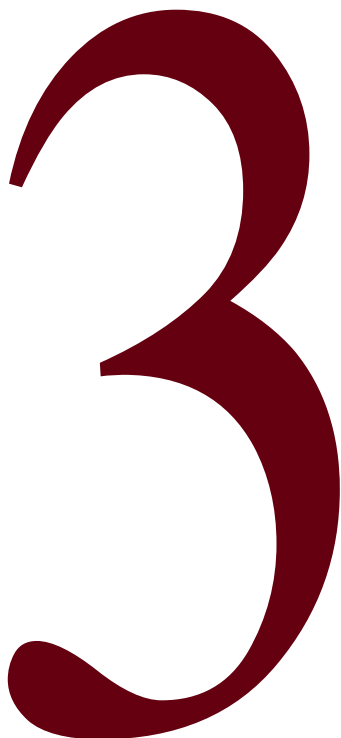
There are also in 2006 more people without health insurance (a rise from 45 million uninsured in 2003 to 45.8 million in 2004), and more children in poverty than ever before—17.8 percent of all of America’s children were poor in 2005, a total of more than 13 million children.

What does it say about our national priorities when poverty rises for four straight years while national leaders pass tax cuts that primarily benefit the wealthiest of our society? During the crisis in the Gulf Coast states, at a time of emergency and tragedy, our nation’s lack of concern for the poor was very clear. But how have we considered the poor in other, more ordinary times?

It is clear that our national budget and spending priorities do not reflect the gospel’s call to include the needs of poor people in our understanding of the common good. Many cuts in the federal budget have come at the expense of low-income families—such as the 2003 tax cut, which removed the low-income child tax credit from the bill at the last minute, excluding almost 12 million children from that benefit. Furthermore, the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts and their subsequent extensions, which primarily benefit the wealthiest Americans, will cause the national deficit to increase tremendously—which affects all of us, but the poor first. At the same time, programs that keep many low-income families out of poverty are in danger—programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid (health insurance for low-income families and kids), and housing vouchers that increase stability.

In addition to social cuts, Congress continues to cut taxes for the wealthy. We are ignoring the realities of these needs and how best to meet them if we do not stand up against both types of cuts. We must also speak out against repeal of the estate tax, which would cost an additional \$1 trillion over 10 years. And efforts to privatize Social Security, if successful, would further increase the national debt by a significant margin. With the deficit averaging roughly \$300 billion a year, we must examine how we invest in—or ignore—the common good.

Low-income families are hurt first and suffer the greatest damage in times of tragedy and disaster. In the aftermath of Katrina, people in poverty have had a much more difficult struggle in rebuilding, since many lack insurance and other supports that wealthier Americans often take for granted. Those with better means often have contingency plans—*freedom to choose*—in time of emergency. Too many low-income people simply have no choice, no alternatives, and no emergency income. They lack a living family income that would meet needs such as transportation, hous-



## *Christians and Poverty*

### **Priorities for the Poor (cont.)**

ing, and health care. They are left with whatever policies and priorities accompany — and also precede and follow — times of devastation.

People of faith must use moments when poverty is in the national spotlight to call for a change in our country's priorities for the common good. Will we accept federal budgets that provide tax benefits to the wealthiest while deeply cutting vital programs for the poor, and all of us? Or will we make use of opportunities to call for morally grounded budget and tax policies that help families escape the growing vise of poverty in times of crisis and "normalcy"? ■

*Elizabeth Green was public policy associate for Call to Renewal when this article appeared in the Sept. 15, 2005, issue of SojoMail.*

