

POVERTY AND AID TO THE POOR: SCRIPTURE, KUYPER'S SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY AND ENTITLEMENT SPENDING

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INTRODUCTION

Two difficult issues that the Christian community deals with are the existence of poverty in our communities and the appropriate balance of private and government solutions to the problem. These two issues often conflict with one another in the economic and political spheres in the form of government policies like entitlement programs. For these programs, type of program, recipients, size, funding and evaluation are issues that many believers struggle with. On the private side, should aid come from individuals or organizations like charities, churches or businesses? Poverty is a problem that has existed throughout human history, and it seems the debate as to how to address it has been around about as long.

Christians struggle with poverty aid because it has many facets from a Christian perspective. Issues of individual responsibility, church care for the needy, individual stewardship of resources, state-sponsored aid and income redistribution are all issues that have been long debated in Christian circles. Two papers in a series of influential volumes of work (Chewning 1989 and 1991) address many of the public and private dimensions of poverty and poverty aid. Moore (1989) and Mason (1991) examine the debate from both a private sector as well as a public welfare perspective. A number of themes are reiterated in both places. Moore identifies the two predominant poverty causes in Scripture as "oppression" and "sluggardliness" (p. 216) and notes that Scriptural solutions to oppression based poverty acknowledge that the poor have a responsibility to work to remove themselves from poverty, aid was typically dispensed by private landowners, and that aid should only go to those non-disabled individuals who accepted responsibility for their plight and would actively work to get out of poverty. Direct family aid, gleaning, low interest loans and Jubilee forgiveness were all Biblical solutions. Sluggards were to be admonished and if they did not respond they were not to be given aid.

The consensus view is that the problem is complex and multi-layered so that it requires a number of entities to come together and supply expertise, resources and compassion if any progress is to be made. A number of key principles have emerged. First, the nuclear family unit is a huge part of the Scriptural solution to poverty. Family breakdown and loss of social skills are big drivers of poverty and so other aid can be directed to those areas (Mason, 1991). Second, education and training must be part of the outreach to the poor (Moore, 1989). Government aid and aid from private charity must not be at odds with one another; they should be addressing the same problems in a complementary manner. Government policies must recognize the dignity and value of work, not suppress it and fiscal policies must incent stable families and skill development.

The work of Mason and Moore, cited above, was published 25 years ago. While the solutions that were discussed are still relevant today, the landscape, as they say, has changed dramatically. Both in sheer numbers and in public attitudes, the nature of aid and the application of it have changed since the early 90's. We could reasonably say that these changes have not been for the better, so new ideas and solutions are necessary to meet the challenges of poverty and aid going forward. Private entities like churches and businesses can offer solutions that can move things back toward a more Biblically based model.

We view this transition from the lens of the theology of relationships from Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper known as "sphere sovereignty." Kuyper's structural pronouncements seem to mirror what has taken place with entitlement programs and attitudes toward poverty relief, providing a predictive lens that was ahead of its time in describing the visible encroachment of the state in this area. Kuyper's lens also serves as a reminder that other spheres like the family or businesses have a role to play in the existence and maintenance of an orderly society, including the care of those most in need, and these now play a lesser role than in the

past. This belief is leading many in the church and in the Christian business community to both develop programs and direct resources to those in need, bypassing the government as a result in an attempt to re-balance the spheres of influence. In this case Kuyper was prescient in his analysis and his recommendations are increasingly being followed. We will look at how other “spheres,” particularly Christian businesses, can help in poverty alleviation.

A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF POVERTY AND CARE IN THE SCRIPTURES

To understand the existence of and cures for poverty as Christians, we need to begin our discussion with what poverty means in a Biblical context and understand what our relationship is to God himself and to the created order. We also need to understand the social institutions created by God for our benefit and why these institutions have failed certain people. The creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 describes our basic relationship to God and the created order. We can summarize as follows:

1. **We are all created in the image of God.** This means that our ultimate value is tied to the character of God Himself.
2. **We were created to have a specific purpose.** We were (and are) given the task of subduing creation, and having dominion over all other living things.
3. **We were promised blessings if we obeyed and curses if we didn't.** This is known theologically as the Covenant of Works.

The implications of these points are that we were and are created to be productive and work, as we mirror the image of the creative and productive God we serve. So we were created to have some responsibility for our own provisions. We were also created to be in a relationship with God as well as a relationship with the created order, and later with other people as humanity expanded. The mandate here is pretty clear—we quite naturally should view work, creativity, and productivity as our mandate from God, and we should do it as an act of obedience and as a way we model Christ's activ-

ity. This is also carried out collectively in the context of God-given institutional relationships in the family and community. God ordained the family, later the broader community and ultimately the church as institutions that would enable us to flourish.

In the Old Testament, it was these family and community relationships that permeated how the Israelites were instructed to care for the less fortunate among them. There are three groups of needy people frequently mentioned in the Scriptures: the poor, widows and orphans. These represented people who had no inherent means of taking care of themselves. There were multiple causes, such as infirmities, personal calamities or misfortunes, or a lack of family to care for their needs. Care for the needy was assumed to be a responsibility of the faith community through one way or another, so this relational, community focus was an essential part of the culture, recognizing that all people had a fundamental God-created dignity that was to be recognized and preserved.

Gleaning Laws

There are a few passages in the Old Testament that clearly identify means by which those in society who were economically suffering would be cared for by others, Mason's “oppression poverty.” One way was through gleaning laws. In Leviticus (Holy Bible, *New International Version* by International Bible Society, 1984) the Israelites are instructed “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the edges of your fields or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:9-10). A comparable passage occurs in Deuteronomy 24:19-22. The motivating factor here was that the Israelites had once been enslaved themselves and were helpless to do anything about it, and so God instructed them that based on His redemption of them from Pharaoh they should also work to help those around them in need.

There are a number of things that we can see from these passages. First, there was an assumption that there would be poor and needy people in the OT faith community. Care for the less fortunate was a responsibility of that community, assuming an inherent belief in the dignity of the poor and widow, and so help was given in a manner that would preserve this. Second, there was a

command directed toward those of means to be proactive in their care for the less fortunate. And third, there was an assumption that the less fortunate *would also be proactive in helping themselves if they were able* (Beed and Beed (2011) refer to these as the “able-bodied poor”). The gleaning laws laid out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy required that the person in need actually work to gain food. The property owner simply left food there but it was not provided directly to those in need. Laziness and lack of effort was clearly condemned (Mason’s “sluggardliness poverty”). Passages like Proverbs 6:9-12 condemn “sluggards” and encourage them to work. La France (1997) remarks that “the importance of work is a consistent theme throughout the Bible. It is obvious that God expects people to work to the best of their ability” (p. 72). As we will explore later, this is an assumption that has largely been lost in modern thought about poverty and assistance. La France, again: “Any transfer program that allows able-bodied recipients to eat without working is in violation of God’s law” (p. 72).

In the Old Testament economy, there were two elements that played a role in the social view of poverty and the possible care options for the needy: land and family. The family structure was both tribal and paternalistic, so that the extended family was both the enterprise unit as well as the care unit. The primary economic driver was land (see Wright, 1990). It helped to determine not only wealth but the ability to farm or graze, which were also economic measures of prosperity. This link to the land was not only a definer of prosperity but a possible cause of poverty as well. Dispossession of land or the ability to work the land often meant economic hardship, and widows, orphans, and aliens were typically dispossessed people. If we look at the gleaning laws, the Sabbath year, and the Jubilee Year, these were all things put into place to remedy the economic damage from this dispossession. Based on this, we can argue that businesses, or what we would likely today call family enterprises, were the key drivers in poverty relief, not the state, and that the wealthy were often the aid-givers to the poor.

New Testament Examples of Poverty Assistance

In the New Testament, there are several passages that give differing views on helping the needy. In Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9, Jesus is at the home of

Simon the Leper when a woman pours a jar of very expensive perfume over his head. Some of the people there were enraged (even though their anger was mis-directed) because they felt that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus responds that “The poor you will always have with you and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.” (Mark 14:7) The emphasis acknowledges that poverty is an eternal problem that should be addressed by the faith community, but their more pressing need was to be near to Christ in His earthly ministry.

A tension portrayed in the New Testament seems to reflect the accumulation of earthly possessions and how we approach that. In 1 John 3:17-18 and in James 1:27 we read admonishments to use material possessions to aid others and help free ourselves from their grip. Beed and Beed (2011) cover a number of New Testament parables that deal with these issues of wealth and its management, in particular ways that Christians can use it to promote equality by aiding the poor. In our materialistic culture, this is even more necessary, particularly since the accumulation of and misuse of possessions has also infiltrated the church, in many cases at the pastoral level. While these passages do not specifically indicate businesses using their resources to help the poor, the mandate appears to imply that those who possess wealth (presumably through land ownership, herds or commerce) be unattached to those possessions and be willing to use their social standing and resources to aid the poor, providing for “the least of these.”

Laziness, lack of discipline and idleness are also condemned in the NT as being sources of poverty that can befall someone (Mason’s “sluggardliness”). In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Paul addressed a group within the church that we might see as suspect: the part of the faith community who refused to work and were living off the charity of the wealthy. Paul instructs the church that if these people do not return to work, they should be disassociated with—excommunicated—from the community.

These passages consistently teach that there will always be those members of society within and around the faith community that are in need, as well as those who have significant wealth. The mandate in both the OT and NT is pretty clear to provide assistance in one form or another. There is an implied mandate that

those of means within the faith community provide assistance to those in the community who have needs. The question, then, to be answered is how should this assistance be administered and by whom?

Poverty, Responsibility and Charity

The Scriptural messages that we can see are clear: there are both poor and those of means in society, both within and outside of the community of faith. Property owners should be willing to use part of it to take care of those in need. The able-bodied were assumed to work and take responsibility for themselves and their families. There was a responsibility to care for the community of faith first and then move outside to helping others, with the ultimate goal of restoration of the individual while preserving their dignity. Charity was a communal response to community needs, or as La France puts it, “meeting the basic physical needs of the poor; ensuring that every member (or every deserving member) of the community has been provided (or has been provided the means to acquire) the basic sustenance of life” (p. 58).

In the early history of the United States, care for the needs of the poor was the sole responsibility of the community, which at least philosophically followed a Scriptural mandate. This began in the church, and then became a state issue during the Roosevelt administration, when the federal government began to take leadership and fiscal responsibility in this area. This moved the care for the poor further away from the community. As we will discuss later, there is the belief that this also reduced the amount of compassion present in the relief.

MODERN ATTITUDES ABOUT POVERTY AND CHARITY

Poverty in the Scriptures was a situation where peoples’ lives were literally at stake. They were in a position to starve to death without some form of aid. Today the concepts of charity and poverty differ from those in Scripture. Sykes (2011) reveals some sobering statistics on today’s poor (p. 14):

- By mid-2010, one in six Americans were receiving aid from anti-poverty programs
- More than 50 million on food stamps

- More than 10 million on unemployment
- 4.4 million on welfare
- Jobless benefits have increased from \$43 billion to \$160 billion
- Cost of food stamps up 80% to \$70 billion
- Welfare up 24% to \$22 billion

This is in spite of incredible gains in standard of living. Schoenfeld (2012) reports the following:

- In the US since 1790, real per capita GDP has increased 4000%
- In 2012, a person in the bottom fifth of the income distribution has a higher quality of life and life expectancy than the average member of the top 1% in 1790
- In 1992, 20% of families living below the poverty line had a dishwasher, 50% had air conditioning, and 60% owned a microwave. In 2005, the Census Bureau reported the same figures as 37%, 79%, and 91%

Arthur Brooks, in his recent book *The Road to Freedom* (2012), reports on a recent study of poverty in the US. He finds that “One recent study of the American poor found that the average American household in poverty (as defined by the government) had air conditioning, cable television, multiple TV’s, and, if they had male children, an Xbox or PlayStation video game console” (p. 79). The current definition of “poverty threshold” from the U.S. Census Bureau for a family of four is \$24,230. This makes one think hard about what the word “poverty” or the term “poor” really mean in a modern society.

When did definitions of “poverty” change to this degree? First, we must acknowledge that there are a number of complex sociological factors at work in terms of poverty. We cannot cover them all but can look at recent changes in attitudes that have driven policy. There have been interesting questions raised over the years. In 1986 Ronald Nash published a book entitled *Poverty and Wealth: The Christian Debate over Capitalism*. Nash devotes a large portion of the chapter on “Poverty in America” to non-economic forces that determine poverty. One that he identifies is a “defective time preference” (p. 173). People from lower socioeconomic classes tend to be more present-oriented. This leads to behavior that is

impulsive, so that immediate needs or action take precedence over any sort of planning. There is no routine or interest in work, if work is done at all. Other societal factors play a role as well, such as public morals, religious beliefs, literacy, education and the health of people. Nash also identifies political stability (or lack of) as a major contributor to national poverty. Interestingly enough, Nash notes that when the Food Stamp program began in 1965, it served 424,000 people. At the end of President Johnson's presidency, the number was 2.2 million, and by 1980 the number was 21 million. Compare that to the 50 million today, and clearly the amount of aid has exploded. By the factors that Nash noted, however, poverty should be *declining* in the US. We have a high literacy rate, free public education, access to state of the art health care and a stable political environment. We also provide huge sums of money to poverty relief, both privately and publicly. So, as the old saying goes, what gives?

According to Sykes, part of the problem lies in re-defining the causes of poverty apart from any personal responsibility. "The welfare explosion was accompanied by a transformation of attitudes as welfarists attacked root and branch the stigma associated with dependency. At the heart of this change of values was the belief that the poor were victims and therefore were not responsible either for their condition or their behaviors" (p. 44). This has produced, Sykes and others argue, a culture of dependency where the poor are incited to remain dependent on government programs. This seems to validate Nash's point that the poor focus only on their present circumstances. The argument that Sykes makes is that the system is structured to incite people to this end, rather than trying to fix it.

This is shown dramatically in James Pethokoukis's blogs on the current state of welfare programs, part of his American Enterprise Institute blogs. On July 12, 2012 he published a graph illustrating what is known as the "welfare cliff". This is the point where work becomes counterproductive because it would reduce or eliminate available welfare benefits. In the example, the hypothetical woman "Julia" would be better off with a \$29,000 per year job with all of her available welfare benefits provided rather than assume a job paying \$69,000 per year where she had to pay for the services funded by welfare herself. The argument presented here, as well as in Mackey (2012), is that the policies are

counterproductive because they discourage someone from climbing the economic ladder while increasing dependency.

Other social science research points out the long term effects of this type of thinking. Brooks discusses a phenomenon called "learned helplessness" (p. 30). This is a condition where people become paralyzed by circumstances to the point that they eventually become incapacitated. In a series of experiments, both people and animals were subjected to random events or insolvable problems. After a period of time, they were taught that they were powerless to change their circumstances, and so they gave up. This was even true for good things that people did not earn. Brooks then argues that this has impacts on poverty and aid- this helplessness produces a belief that life is not possible without external assistance, and so the cycle of dependency deepens and goes on. If we acknowledge that this is the case, then how do we "unwind" or modify these programs in a compassionate manner?

Hall and Burton (2012, p. 146) summarize what they consider to be 5 tenets of the modern view of poverty:

- Poverty can be eliminated.
- Man has a right to sustenance.
- Man is not responsible for his economic plight.
- Compassion does not require accountability and change.
- Government is the institution best suited to lead poverty-relief efforts.

One of the last vestiges of biblical principles in welfare policy came in the "workfare" reforms in the 1996 welfare reform bill in the United States, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. This bill had a provision in it where families getting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a family welfare benefit, had to participate in a certain number of hours of "work activity" to continue receiving benefits. This bi-partisan reform of then-existing policy under the Clinton Administration was designed such that it more closely followed the Biblical model we have discussed in terms of restoration of the individual. Unfortunately, the work provisions in the act regarding TANF have been modified to effectively reduce them (Ponnuru, 2012). This led Brad

Wassink, in an AEI blog post (July 20, 2012) to comment on work and the safety net: “Work is vital to both American identity and the goal of helping vulnerable individuals climb out of that net.”

The gist of these examples is that modern theories about the causes and solutions to poverty are the antithesis of the biblical discussions of poverty and its assistance. The biblical model is based on individual responsibility, industriousness, responsibility and loving personal care through the ministries of the church and its members. Responsibility is dual in that persons of means are to contribute to the welfare of the poor through the church or their own private means and the responsibility of the able-bodied poor is to view aid as temporary and to be willing to work to get it. It is fundamentally relational and restorative in nature. The modern secular approach is based on the belief that the poor are not responsible in any way for their circumstances and that aid is a right that is best administered by state-run agencies. Personal contact is neither required nor necessarily encouraged. Poverty, in this view, can be eliminated, which is also contrary to Scripture, by providing enough entitlements for the poor. LaFrance (1997) summarizes this disparity in a statement made by Ronald Nash: “Nash contends that justice requires a coercive state, acting impersonally, according to law. He further believes that love is voluntary, personal and goes beyond the law. Thus, unlike Beversluis, Nash concludes that the state cannot love. Hence, charity, as an act of love, can only be undertaken by individuals, not the state” (p. 72).

ABRAHAM KUYPER, “SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY” AND THE WELFARE STATE

Abraham Kuyper was a Dutch neo-Calvinist who provided some context that is useful in this discussion in terms of what he called “sphere sovereignty.” Kuyper, in his 1880 lecture, argued that basic life systems revolved around three fundamental relationships: 1) our relation to God, 2) our relation to men, and 3) our relation to the world. This reflects the post-fall world described in Scripture. The world can be defined by “spheres” or areas of influence, which he defined as State, Society, and Church. God is the creator of all things and so is the ultimate Sovereign over the activities of all spheres. They exist because the fundamental

relationship between God and man was fractured in the fall, making other human social structures necessary to preserve order: “on earth one actually does not meet God Himself in things visible, but that sovereign authority is always exercised through an office held by men. And in that assigning of God’s Sovereignty to an office held by man the extremely important question arises: how does that delegation of authority work? Is that all-embracing Sovereignty of God delegated undivided to a single man; or does an earthly Sovereign possess the power to compel obedience in a limited circle; a circle bordered by other circles in which another is Sovereign?” (Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty*, p. 4).

Under the sphere of Society were a number of diverse parts including family, business, the arts and other social institutions. These are inherently defined by some degree of interpersonal relationships. The State, on the other hand, is a device set over people because of the fall. The State, Kuyper believed, was a mechanical device to maintain internal justice in its administration **over** the other spheres. “Now in all of these spheres or circles the cogwheels engage one another, and it is precisely because of the mutual interaction of these spheres that there is an emergence of that rich, many-sided, multi-formed human life, but in that life there is also the danger that one sphere may encroach upon the neighboring sphere; thus causing a wheel to jerk and to break cog on cog, and interfering with the progress of the whole. Hence the reason for the existence of a special sphere of authority in the Authority of the State, which must provide for these various spheres, insofar as they emerge into the visible realm, a felicitous interaction, and to keep them within the pale of justice; and which also, since one’s personal life can be depressed by the group in whose midst one lives, must shield the individual from the domination of his sphere” (Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty*, p. 6). This administration of state authority occasionally caused friction, because Kuyper acknowledged that sin promoted a struggle between “Sphere Sovereignty” and “State Sovereignty,” leading to greater power being exercised by the state. “But after it appeared that State Sovereignty suspected Sphere Sovereignty of being its *permanent adversary* [emphasis added], and within those spheres the power to resist was dissipated by a violation of their own rule life, i.e., by sin. Thus ancient history presents to our view among all peoples the shameful spectacle

that, after persevering, and sometimes heroic struggle, freedom in one's own sphere perishes, and the power of the State, turning into Caesarism, gains the upper hand" (Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty*, p. 8).

The reality of the current welfare state is that Kuyper appears to be right. Government has "invaded" Kuyper's Social Sphere to the detriment of virtually all of the relationships in it by "mechanically re-arranging" it. The family and the traditional roles of the family in care for the poor have been re-defined in ways that have increased poverty and dependence. The church is being increasingly marginalized. Part of the reason for this might be the fact that the church has gradually ceded control over social welfare programs to the state. The church used to be at the forefront of providing education, health care, and aid and care of the poor. Some faith-based organizations like the Catholic Church, the Adventist organizations and the Latter Day Saints churches (see Riley, 2012) for example, are still actively involved in a systematic way in these areas. And most churches have small scale programs to deal with local issues. Businesses have been taxed and regulated in ways that make it harder for them to operate. By re-arranging the order of these relationships, Kuyper's "rich, many-sided, multi-formed human life" has been distorted, particularly where care for the poor is concerned.

If we put this re-arrangement into the context of the Biblical model of poverty relief, there was no real "government" involvement per se in Scripture, unlike now. We might argue that the Levitical laws were "national" regulations or policies that applied to the OT "nation", but they were confined to the Israelites and not the people around them. Kuyper would argue that this is not the case now. Government is intrusive and has re-defined both problem and solution as far as poverty is concerned, creating policies that are ineffective as well as making it harder for other institutions like churches or businesses to participate in solutions. It has also created institutions that have failed to develop skills in the poor that would move them out of their condition by moving them away from the Biblical model of personal responsibility and toward dependency, undermining their personal dignity in the process.

RECOVERING A BIBLICAL PRACTICE OF AID TO THE POOR

If we look at the trajectory of anti-poverty programs over the last fifty years or so, the focus has been a movement away from programs that move the beneficiary away from dependency to ones that promote it. This track's Kuyper's belief that given free reign, the state would move from simply keeping the "cogs moving" to increasing its influence over the other spheres. As Christians, we need to support and encourage policies that move the pendulum back. In *The Problem of Poverty*, Kuyper makes this point very clear when he states "we as Christians must hold that state and society each has its own sphere, its own sovereignty, and the social question cannot be resolved unless we respect this duality and thus honor state authority as clearing the way for a free society" (p. 58).

Kuyper's prescriptions were very practical and shed light on the proper role of government in aid as well as the Christian response. "Finally, a brief word about state aid. God the Lord unmistakably instituted the basic rule for the duty of government. Government exists to administer his justice on earth, and to uphold that justice. The tasks of family and society therefore lie outside government's jurisdiction. With those it is not to meddle" (*The Problem of Poverty*, p. 64). The role of the state, in Kuyper's mind, was more of a "referee" than an activist when he stated "the material assistance of the state should be confined to an absolute minimum. The continuing welfare of people and nation, including labor, lies only in powerful individual initiative" (p. 65). The increase in government involvement has distorted normal relationships in other of Kuyper's spheres, at great social cost.

In the book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself*, authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert argue that this destruction of relationships is at the root of poverty. They argue that we all suffer from poverty of relationships in one form or another. However, those that we normally think of as "poor" have been reduced to lives of near-total desperation. Corbett and Fikkert list three areas where the poor in the United States suffer from the institutions created to help them: skill development, wealth accumulation/ management and housing/ health care. Because of these root causes, they argue, they have a lack

of assets, poor health and physical weakness and they have feelings of anxiety, helplessness, powerlessness and suffocation. The systems in place, such as public assistance, provide for their material needs but cannot rectify the broken relationships that they face. In fact, they often amplify this brokenness by not encouraging people to participate in their own reconciliation and rehabilitation, leading to a cycle of victimhood, perpetuating the problems into future generations.

Beed and Beed put these ideas into focus. "The Mosaic Law oriented its assistance toward maintaining employment for the able-bodied poor, although Jesus did not comment directly on this form of aid. A reasonable inference, nonetheless, is that given Jesus' support for the essence and truth of the Law, an orientation to helping the poor through jobs with adequate support services still maintains its relevance" (pp. 36-37). The essence of a Biblical model of aid can be through these two areas: job creation as well as increased support services.

WHERE CAN BUSINESSES FIT IN?

Biblically, the model of assistance to the poor was relational and restorative. It was handled by the family and the faith community in a way that was temporary and designed to help people fulfill God's mandate for their lives to be creative, productive and fulfilled. This is the model we need to recapture. Current aid policies do not encourage work or intact families; social science research points out that family deterioration and poverty are closely linked and that work provides not only economic, but social benefits as well. If we take Kuyper's premise as correct that government programs have over-run their normal influence, how can the other spheres like businesses restore some balance?

One might ask whether businesses need to be concerned with assisting the poor at all in any way, particularly from Kuyper's perspective. Quatro (2012) weighs in on this from the standpoint of Business as Missions (BAM). His interpretation of Kuyper seems to suggest that business should not be involved in this at all. "The specific implication is that there are different God-ordained norms for each sphere such that a business must not be run like a church, or an educational institution must not be run like a governmental agency." Later, "Thus, God's people in business contexts must

embrace and live out God's good design for the sphere of business as opposed to His equally good design for the sphere of the church" (p. 84). Business, in this strict sense, should steward and shepherd creation and thus extend God's common grace to everyone in that manner. I think there is general agreement with this, but still a place to steward creation and be restorative at the same time. Earlier, we quoted from Kuyper: "Now in all of these spheres or circles the cogwheels engage one another, and it is precisely because of the *mutual interaction of these spheres* [emphasis added] that there is an emergence of that rich, many-sided, multi-formed human life" (Kuyper, *Sphere Sovereignty*, p. 6). This interaction, properly functioning, can steward creation by developing human capital, the pinnacle of God's creative design.

Corbett and Fikkert give us a beneficial framework to think about how businesses can improve the lives of the poor in our midst in a Biblically-oriented and "sphere sovereign" way. Their prescription for assistance is three-fold: Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (p. 104). Relief is a first step to "stop the bleeding" and begin the restoration process. Rehabilitation seeks to "restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis condition" (p.104). Development is "promoting an empowering process in which all the people involved-both the "helpers" and the "helped"-become more of what God created them to be, moving beyond point 3 to levels of reconciliation that they have not experienced before" (p.105). They go on to characterize this as "ABCD", or asset-based community development (p. 126). Restoration begins when we look for the assets of the poor and their communities and build from there, rather than a needs-based approach which looks for what is lacking. "What is wrong will come out soon enough; but by starting with what is right, we can change the dynamics that have marred the self-image of low-income people and have created a sense of superiority in ourselves" (p.127). Considering their three steps, we would argue that Development is perfectly consistent with business-based approaches to providing both business as well as poverty restoration opportunities, while Relief and Rehabilitation might be more relevant to the church's sphere of influence.

Surdyk (2009) uses this basic premise to examine large corporations ranked in *Business Ethics* magazine's "Top 100 Best Corporate Citizens in 2005-07" and

pull out companies that scored high in the magazine's "Community Relations" category. The companies listed, such as Cisco, Starbucks and Wells Fargo all had programs that improved access to capital or knowledge, used company products and expertise, and supported their communities to address structural issues of poverty. They concentrated on things like financial literacy and access, job skills, and enhanced business opportunities for people in impoverished areas of their communities, secular responses to Corbett and Fikkert's "ABCD".

What about smaller firms or more entrepreneurial ventures, as opposed to large multinationals? Can they make a difference at the local level as well? Peter Cove is an entrepreneur/social activist who has spent much of his life working to alleviate poverty through both non-profit as well as for-profit entities. He offers an interesting blueprint that businesses, particularly Christian businesses, can follow that fits the biblical model as well as recognizes the issues that Kuyper warned of and that Corbett and Fikkert emphasize. Cove created a for-profit model that emphasizes quick training in basic skills and immediate employment for those in poverty. The key is giving them an "entry point" into the workforce and immediate positive feedback in terms of both monetary rewards as well as increased self-esteem. "I learned that if we helped welfare clients get jobs, even entry-level jobs, they would attend to their other needs. By contrast, if the government gave them money and other benefits, they were likely to remain dependent. The reasons should have been obvious all along. Work maximizes a person's capacity to achieve economic self-reliance. Work socializes people and instills a sense of personal responsibility in them. Work connects behavior and consequences. And it permits people, especially men, to obtain the admiration and respect of their spouses and children by supporting them" (p. 3). This type of program is one where a properly placed private sector initiative could work well. Existing public policies emphasize direct payments to the poor, as well as training programs staffed by public sector employees that are often lengthy, unwieldy and expensive. A tax incentive for a business to develop a "quick train/quick employ" strategy like Cove used that puts a person into the working "able-bodied poor" class that the OT recognized would generate the social and familial benefits that work produces. Even without such an in-

centive, this type of program addresses many of the poor's needs: basic work skills and basic socialization into the "middle class values system" that businesses operate under and the poor lack. Christian businesses could adopt strategies like this to get people working quickly and still provide profit potential.

Another strategy is a business that hires workers that are from impoverished backgrounds, or the creation of businesses that are in impoverished neighborhoods that can provide goods and services to the residents. This requires effort and commitment, and possibly expense, on the part of businesses. In Inc. Magazine's January 28, 2014 online edition, writer Will Yakowicz identified "3 Leadership Trends for 2014" that give us some guidance. One of the trends was entitled "Giving Second Chances." It profiled Fred Keller, CEO of a Michigan-based company called Cascade Plastics. The CEO said that he drew upon the words of John Wesley to "Do all the good you can." Cascade has a program in place to hire people who have been unemployed for long periods of time. The program forced the company's existing employees to change their opinions of the less well-off and then adopt an attitude of helping the new employees integrate into the business. Keller remarked that this change in culture had benefits for the new as well as the existing employees (benefitting the "helper" and the "helped"). As the program had some time to work, both employee morale and retention improved. The company also launched a program to hire ex-felons. The purpose is to engage these individuals, give them marketable skills, and at the same time encourage them and develop in them the skills that they lack. Keller said "It's up to business leaders who align their businesses to solve some of the world's problems."

Another opportunity lies in viewing impoverished neighborhoods as a market opportunity. Many poor in the United States reside in urban areas that have been abandoned by businesses and other services because of crime or a lack of income of the residents. This often forces them to travel in order to shop or confines them to more costly options nearby. Dick Gygi is a successful businessman in Nashville, Tennessee as well as being a close friend. After a long career with a number of large corporations in product development and marketing, he now does executive coaching and looks for businesses that can create opportunity for those, who in his terms, are in "the lowest levels of the economic pyra-

mid” (D. Gygi; personal communication; May 19, 2014). He developed a business model that puts thrift stores in neighborhoods that are underserved by traditional businesses. They provide not only economic opportunities for residents, but also a source of goods that can help those who are living on low levels of income.

His primary location, called ThriftSmart, has been in business for nine years and has revenues of \$1.5 million annually. They are building another location to spread this model to another area of Nashville. In addition, another Christian business called Sew for Hope trains refugee women to sew clothing. So far, it has trained 60 refugee women to sew. They will open a social enterprise factory with the objective of bringing clothing manufacturing back to the United States. This business not only trains women with valuable skills, it helps to assimilate them into the United States by providing them with a means to earn income but also adapt to a new culture. Dick has also created other businesses called Jobs for Life and Nashville Neighbor Project to serve primarily the poor refugee community in Nashville. His basic model is tested and has helped to improve the lives of residents who live in poor neighborhoods. His long term plan is to create franchises that would offer a viable business to a franchisee and at the same time replicate his vision to offer economic opportunity to those who need it most.

To use business as a means to fulfill a Biblical mandate to help the poor in this economy may require some creative business thinking. It represents business opportunity with a purpose. Small business owners like Cove, Keller and Gygi have a heart to improve the lives of the poor. They tend to think outside of the normal “poverty aid” box to look for solutions that involve giving the poor opportunity, helping them to build meaningful skills, and at the same time recognizing the dignity and worth of them as people. They provide us with examples of how one can fulfill a Biblical mission and make a profit at the same time. Larger companies, as Surdyk showed, have greater resources and so a greater ability to impact their communities directly through skill development or their own goods and services.

CONCLUSION

Assistance to the poor in the Bible was for a class of people who were disenfranchised in some way and faced the real possibility of death from their lack of resources. Aid was provided in Israel through a variety of measures implemented in the community to help the poor survive. It was both restorative and relational, requiring effort on the part of the physically able to provide for themselves. In the New Testament era, believers were motivated to manage their resources well and to provide for the less fortunate among them, generally through the community. In contrast, poverty in many Western countries is generally less severe; it is more relative in comparison. Many poor have access to modern amenities and a wide array of government benefits that lessen the impact of poverty on their lives. Because of this, many poor have difficulty transitioning back to full productivity and fall into dependency instead.

Abraham Kuyper proposed that government should be an entity that created an atmosphere where individuals, businesses and the faith community led the way in terms of aid programs to help the poor move back to employment and their own support. Government should not be the main provider, but should be a “referee” that made sure that others could effectively meet the needs of impoverished people. He argued that if government became too powerful in its own sphere, then it would begin to redefine other spheres such as the family or businesses in such a way that their effectiveness would be compromised. If we look at the modern landscape in anti-poverty measures, it could be argued that he was right, with less than desirable outcomes as a result as statistics show.

Christian businesses can engage assistance to the needy as an opportunity to make a profit as well as fulfill a biblical mandate to help “the least of these.” They can offer employment, training and opportunities to move the poor into self-reliance and away from the problems that government aid may lead to, which still lets, in Quatro’s terms, “business be business.”

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