

# “Raising the Needy from the Dust”: The Judeo-Christian Imperative

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**ABSTRACT:** Using the Bible, this article demonstrates that giving charity, as crucial as it is, is not a sufficient response to the impoverished because it deprives the receiver of dignity. Christians and other followers of the Bible have a greater responsibility than simply providing the underprivileged with donations of money or food to survive. The Bible dictates that we must find ways to generate jobs and provide employment for the poor so that they can escape their poverty with dignity. The purpose of many biblical laws such as leaving the gleanings, forgotten produce, and the corners of the field for the poor; forgiving debt; returning land to its original owners during the Jubilee year; lending money to the destitute; and others had the purpose of “raising the needy from the dust” (Psalms 113:7). More than offering a safety net, the Bible obligates believers to provide a ladder for the unfortunates of society to climb out of a cycle of poverty.

**KEYWORDS:** poverty, charity, sabbatical year, Jubilee, Nehemiah, impact investing

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the most popular book of all time; an estimated 5 billion copies have been sold (Mumford, 2015). The Hebrew Bible, particularly the Pentateuch (i.e., the Torah), with its considerable number of precepts, is the basis of the religions of more than half of humanity, the so-called Abrahamic religions. To the believer, the Bible provides a blueprint for how individuals and businesses should behave. Even some non-believers recognize the Bible as an essential work of literature and a valuable tool for teaching timeless lessons. The Bible’s core values can, and should, be used to help countries shape an ideal economic system; more than 100 of its precepts deal with business and economics (Tamari, 1987). We will survey and summarize some of these crucial Judeo-Christian precepts that can help guide businesses and business leaders to create a more compassionate socioeconomic reality.

This paper will cite scholarship from both Jewish and Christian traditions to give insight on these topics. Christian scholarship, and even the Pope, have commented on these issues and will be quoted below. Jewish scholarship, including biblical commentators and the Talmud, will also be shared.

Jewish tradition wanted to ensure that biblical values of compassion were transmitted and interpreted for every generation. Jewish sages recorded these values in the Talmud, the compilation of Jewish oral law, which expounds on the written law contained in the Bible. The Talmud is primarily concerned with *halacha* (Jewish law). It also provides a detailed record of the Jewish people’s beliefs, philosophy, traditions, culture, and folklore, i.e., the *aggadah* (homiletics), and it is replete with legal, ethical, and moral precepts. Tamari (1987) observes:

All of man’s actions, including those involved in the accumulation of material goods, are to be subjected to the ethical, moral, and religious demands of the Torah, so that the individual and society can attain a state of sanctity even while carrying out the most mundane acts. (p. 32)

This body of Rabbinic work will be quoted to provide insight into significant Jewish developments and aspects of many of these precepts and values as modeled in that tradition.

This article will demonstrate that a socioeconomic system based on biblical values must consider the core values of compassion for the unfortunates of society and the maintenance of human dignity that provides the

indigent a chance to get back on their feet with jobs and opportunities. Providing the impoverished with charity is only the beginning of what humankind is obligated to do for those in dire straits in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Setting up a fair system in which all can prosper and have opportunity prevents the formation of a permanent underclass. The authors will argue that it is the duty of Christian business people to advocate for and inaugurate such a system.

## THE PROBLEM OF DISPARITY

Income inequality can be indicative of an unfair system. Many young people are disillusioned with capitalism due to income disparity and feel that socialism is the answer to many problems (Stokols, 2017). Crony capitalism that favors an elite at the expense of the ordinary person is indeed becoming a severe problem in the United States (Ballhaus, 2015). Such a system does not provide equal opportunity for all to succeed and is contrary to biblical values. Beed and Beed (2014) remark that “the Mosaic Law and Jesus advocated reduction in extreme material inequality between families” (p. 12).

According to the OECD, the United States has the highest level of income inequality among the G7 nations (Schaeffer, 2020). The following indicates how badly the U.S. is performing when it comes to wealth inequality:

Wealth—the value of a household’s property and financial assets, minus the value of its debts — is much more highly concentrated than income. The best survey data show that the share of wealth held by the top 1 percent rose from 30 percent in 1989 to 39 percent in 2016, while the share held by the bottom 90 percent fell from 33 percent to 23 percent. (Stone et al., 2020, para. 8)

The effects of income inequality on society are devastating and should not be ignored. Significant differences in such problems as mental illness, homicides, outsized prison populations, obesity, poor physical health, high dropout rates in high school, and high teenage pregnancy rates are common in countries where income inequality is high, even among states within the United States (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). There is even evidence of higher divorce rates in areas where there is greater income inequality (Frank, 2010). These symptoms reflect a society in which true equality of opportunity is diminished.

James Madison famously warned against “an oligarchy founded on corruption” (National Archives, n.d.).

The Founding Fathers always believed in preserving fair competition for markets to function efficiently. They feared large concentrations of wealth that prevented upward social mobility and political rights (Kurland, 1987). Income inequality is potential evidence of crony, or corrupt, capitalism in which equity of opportunity and fair competition do not exist. The neediest can become mired in a cycle of poverty that becomes increasingly difficult to escape.

Several noteworthy economists believe that inequality weakens the economy and hurts economic growth (Stiglitz, 2014). Boushey, an economic advisor to Joseph Biden, contends that countries such as the United States that have higher economic inequality are considerably more vulnerable to financial crises than those with more equality (as cited in Lederer, 2020). Besides, increased income inequality weakens citizens’ faith in a democratic government and a fair and efficient system. Income inequality may explain why the newest Social Progress Index shows that the United States has dropped from 19th place in 2011 to 28th place in 2020. A total of 163 countries are assessed in the Social Progress Index, and the United States is only one of three countries (the others being Brazil and Hungary) where the quality of life had dropped from 2011 when the index was first published (Kristof, 2020). The bottom line is that everyone wins and a country becomes more politically stable when there is greater wealth and income equality.

It is apparent that giving charity, as vital as it is, is only the beginning of addressing many of the above concerns. Christians have a greater responsibility than merely providing the underprivileged with money or food to survive (Francis XVII, 2015, para. 128). The Bible provides a systemic blueprint of ethical responsibility, compassion, and opportunity for all. In their collective role of ambassadors for Christ, Christians must advocate for, and exemplify, this blueprint (2 Corinthians 5:20).

## COMPASSION—CARING FOR THE POWERLESS AND DEFENSELESS MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

Caring for the helpless members of society—the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and the poor—is a biblical value. One may also include debtors in this group, as members of the community who are in an unfortunate situation. Workers, including slaves, must be protected because employers typically have greater situational power. An economic system that does not take care of the

needs of these members of society would be inconsistent with biblical values.

Even slaves, who had very limited rights in ancient (and early American) society, have rights in the biblical system. The biblical “slave” is more comparable to an indentured servant who can earn freedom and has rights. For example, a slave owner may not physically harm a slave in any way (Exodus 21:26). If a slave runs away, one is not allowed to return him (Deuteronomy 23:16). This demonstrates how even the lowest strata of society have certain rights of which the community must be mindful.

In biblical times, agricultural landowners were the equivalent of big business, and several biblical laws describe what farmers must do to help the poor. For example, Leviticus 19 commands:

When you harvest the harvest of your land, you shall not complete your reaping to the corner of your field, and the gleanings of your harvest you are not to gather. You shall not glean your vineyard; and the fallen fruit of your vineyard you are not to gather; for the poor and the stranger you are to leave them. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

It is notable that in this system, the gleaners’ self-respect is preserved by requiring them to harvest the produce themselves. For instance, the corners of the field are not to be harvested by the owner but left for the poor to gather. Individual stalks falling from the sickle during the harvest are for the destitute. Similarly, the farmer is not permitted to pick all the fruits off the vine or tree and leave it bare but must leave the gleanings of the vine and the olive tree for the poor. This is in contradistinction to some modern welfare systems in which the recipient is deprived of the dignity of labor and becomes a victim on whom alms are benevolently bestowed. Historical evidence indicates that workfare systems in which welfare recipients had to qualify by taking menial jobs were successful (Struthers, 1996). Other statements in the Bible are more general but express an overarching value of helping the destitute and being generous with the needy, such as Deuteronomy 15:7 and Psalms 82:3.

For the Bible, the care of and compassion for the powerless are of the utmost importance. God threatens those who harshly oppress the downtrodden:

If you afflict them in any way and they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my anger will burn and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives will be widows and your children will be fatherless. (Exodus 22:22-23; NET Bible)

The vulnerable often have no protector or recourse. Therefore, God says he will protect those that have no protection and provide them with divine justice. While the Bible recognizes that there will always be people in society who suffer misfortune, there is a standing obligation in Deuteronomy 15:12 to show compassion and actively help others: “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’”

## THE WIDOW AND ORPHAN

Widows and orphans tend to be among the more helpless members of society even in our time. The Bible singles out this vulnerable group for special consideration to prevent a vicious cycle of abuse and multi-generational poverty. For example, Exodus 22:22: “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.” Other notable biblical imperatives about the widow and the orphan include Deuteronomy 16:11, Isaiah 10, and Job 29. In a physical labor-intensive economy in which men bore the primary responsibility of providing for a family, those households without an adult male were in an economically precarious position. Therefore, the widow and orphan are singled out as having special protection from the Almighty, and there is a strong obligation to help these socially disadvantaged groups.

Hezekiah ben Manuah (n.d.), French Bible commentator, explains why the Torah (Exodus 22:21) uses the plural pronoun for this precept about causing pain to orphans and widows, which is not the case for the other laws in this chapter. He opines that the purpose is to emphasize that everyone who witnesses the mistreatment of widows and orphans (and other helpless members of society) and remains silent without protesting is included in the condemnation. This also explains why the punishment for the crime is also in plural form: “My wrath shall be kindled, and I will kill you by the sword, and your wives will be widows and your children orphans” (verse 23).

## THE STRANGER

General xenophobia was common in ancient societies. Ancient Sparta, for example, practiced *Xenelasia*, the expulsion of any foreigners. Strangers were seen as a threatening group who did not share the society’s com-

mon values and could undermine its fabric. Foreigners were also perceived as a potential military threat (see, for example, Exodus 1). The Bible, however, provides a warning against discrimination against foreigners, reminding the ancient Israelites, “You shall not maltreat or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:20).

In Jewish tradition, the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Metzia 59b) notes that the Pentateuch mentions the principle of not maltreating, taunting, or oppressing the stranger 36 different times. The stranger is often equated with the widow and orphan and is afforded similar protections: “You shall not pervert the justice due to the stranger or the orphan; nor take the widow’s garment as a pledge” (Deuteronomy 24:17).

This sentiment is also repeated in the later Prophets and Writings. For example, Zechariah 7:10, Jeremiah 22:3, and Psalms 146:9 all include foreigners as a class of vulnerable individuals, alongside widows and orphans. The ancient Israelites were required to take the protection of foreigners very seriously. Not only were ancient Israelites obligated to protect them, they had the more advanced responsibility of *loving* the resident alien, as expressed in Leviticus:

When a stranger dwells among you in your land, you are not to mistreat him. The stranger who dwells with you shall be treated as your native-born; you shall love him like yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33–34)

## THE WORKER

Laborers also tend to be vulnerable in many societies. There are many laws to protect this group in the Bible as well. In a very general sense, the employer must always deal fairly with a laborer, especially when it comes to wages and compensation: “You shall not cheat your fellow and you shall not rob; the wages of a worker shall not remain with you overnight until morning” (Leviticus 19:13). The importance of paying a laborer’s wages on time is repeated in Deuteronomy 24:15. Scripture emphasizes that the cheating of a laborer is not only a sin against the worker but against God as well.

In one of the best-known sections of the Bible, the Ten Commandments place a strong emphasis on workers’ rights in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Workers are required to have a weekly day off just as the employer

on the Sabbath.

Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord, your God, has commanded you. Six days shall you labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your God, on it you shalt not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates; that your manservant and your maidservant may rest like you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord, your God, took you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore, the Lord, your God, commanded you to make the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:9–14)

A day off is a hallmark of modern workers’ rights and an essential feature of current labor laws. All are entitled and required to take this day off, employer and employed alike.

Agricultural workers were given several protections, including the right to eat the produce on which they were working:

When you come [as a worker] into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as is your desire, to your fill, but you may not put any into a receptacle. When you come into your neighbor’s standing corn, you may pluck ears with your hand, but you should not lift a sickle on your neighbor’s standing corn. (Deuteronomy 23:25–26)

In the biblical system, workers are even entitled to a severance package upon completion of a term of labor: “Do not send him [the servant] away empty-handed. You shall give him a severance gift from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar...” (Deuteronomy 15:13–14).

These biblical imperatives were precedents of modern labor laws. In a revolutionary fashion, these laws recognize that employers must act compassionately toward their workers. In contemporary terminology, the Bible requires fair wages, time off, and even employer-funded meals in season.

## COMPASSION TOWARD THE POOR

While there will always be unfortunate people in challenging situations, the biblical system is concerned with eliminating a permanent underclass. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. described the “spiritual danger

a nation faces when it does not use its ample resources for human flourishing” (as cited in Jaffe, 2020, paras. 2–3). As noted above, the biblical system allowed for the gleaner’s dignity and produced a work ethic to empower the poor out of poverty. The Bible sought to set up a society that enabled the impoverished to break the cycle of misfortune and have the opportunity to work their way out of poverty.

This section and subsequent sections examine numerous biblical passages to establish that society must find ways to help the disadvantaged escape poverty; charity is not enough. Philanthropy and altruism are wonderful traits, but the Bible demands that God’s people take steps to ensure that poverty is addressed by acting with compassion. The following verse (Leviticus 25:35) indicates that there is a requirement to “strengthen” the indigent so that they can escape poverty: “If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters beside you, you shall strengthen him, whether he is a stranger or a native so that he can live with you.” Ezekiel also makes this point: “Behold, this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters had pride, plenty of bread, and peaceful tranquility; yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy” (Ezekiel 16:49). The Psalmist declares, “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heaps” (Psalm 113:7).

According to Moses ben Maimon (n.d.) (1138–1204), medieval philosopher and codifier of Jewish law, the premier form of charity is providing a poor person with the ability to earn a living. He derives this from the above-cited verse in Leviticus (25:35) that talks about “strengthening” the impoverished individual. Maimonides argues that this may be realized by providing a gift or loan and thus enabling one to start a business, taking the poor person in as a partner, or helping the individual find employment. Rae (2004) states: “God, in His providence, works through our occupations to accomplish His work in the world.” He notes that God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15) “to work it and protect it” even before he and Eve sinned. Regarding the need for widespread employment as an escape from poverty, Beed and Beed (2014) remark:

It is arguable that the normative biblical ethic that should characterize all economies is that the poor are to be helped to a lifestyle not vastly inferior to some norm prevailing in the society in question. Rectification of the lot of the poor is the sought normative biblical principle. Economic independence was to be earned through self-directed work, or

what we would describe nowadays as remunerated employment. (p. 16)

Work was always part of the biblical plan for humankind and viewed as an essential aspect of humanity.

In Jewish tradition, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040–1105), the French medieval biblical commentator, citing the halachic Midrash, *Torat Kohanim* 5:1, explains the term “strengthening” from Leviticus as follows:

And you shall cause him to be strengthened — do not allow him to descend and to fall, for then it will be difficult to raise him up. Rather, strengthen him from the moment his hand begins to falter. To what can this be compared? To a burden on a mule. While it is still on the mule, one person can hold on to it and allow the mule to stand, but once the mule has fallen, even five people will not be able to raise it up (Ben Isaac, 2016).

Scripture, as well as Jewish and Christian traditions, emphasize showing compassion and genuinely helping the needy by providing them a pathway out of poverty. This, in effect, could help protect against a permanent underclass. All in all, the Bible is concerned with the opportunity for upward social mobility for the most vulnerable.

#### PREVENTING POVERTY: THE OBLIGATION TO LEND MONEY

Modern economies thrive on healthy credit markets. The ability to borrow and lend money allows for expansion and economic growth and a source of economic stimulus during a downturn. The Bible requires that the wealthy lend to those in need. Scripture states,

If among you, one of your brothers should become destitute, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your poor brother. Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his requirement, whatever is lacking to him.... For there will never cease to be destitute people in the land; therefore I command you, saying, “You shall surely open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.” (Deuteronomy 15:7–8, 11)

The compound verb “You shall surely open” is used to emphasize the importance of aiding the poor repeatedly (see the commentary of Rashi). Linzer (2016) opines that the various verses in the Torah dealing with succoring the impoverished (Exodus 22:24; Leviticus 25:35–38;

Deuteronomy 15:7–11) emphasize lending money to those in need more than giving them charity. Both are ways to assist the needy and are obligations. The better way, however, is via loans. Loans and jobs are ideal for enabling people to break the cycle of poverty without loss of dignity. They also empower an individual to rise above victimhood and become self-sufficient.

### SABBATICAL YEAR (*SHMITTAH*)

Debt is a complicated yet necessary feature of any economy. Individuals and nations often struggle and are hurt by debt. The Bible sought a balance between a healthy credit system and predatory lending, which would lead to insurmountable debt. Liebling (2013) underscores that debt forgiveness is a powerful tool for preventing poverty and a permanent underclass:

The law of *shmittah* was developed in an agricultural society. Farmers frequently needed to borrow money to buy seeds for the spring planting or to buy food in a time of drought. Not surprisingly, the Torah is filled with stories of drought and famine. In fact, every agricultural society is dependent on loans and therefore produces debtors. Debt leads to inequalities in wealth, the concentration of wealth, indentured servitude and prostitution. If a farmer accumulates too much debt he (men were the principal property owners) may need to sell the land to pay off the debt, or give the land to his creditor in lieu of payment. Or he may choose to sell himself or a member of his family to the debtor in payment (Liebling, 2013, paras. 2–3).

Debtors are released from paying their debts at the closing of the *shmittah* (sabbatical) year (Deuteronomy 15:1–2). This law helps borrowers not over-leverage or fall into unmanageable debt while still allowing for healthy credit markets and borrowing.

When the sage Hillel saw that people refused to lend money to the poor because of the sabbatical year, he instituted the *prosbul*, a document which states that the debt is being entrusted to the court (Gitten 36a-37b). This system helped balance fair credit markets and predatory lending. The *prosbul* provided a legal fixture administered by the court as a legal intermediary that restored balance to the credit system by preventing abuses and encouraging healthy lending.

### JUBILEE YEAR (*YOVEL*)

The fiftieth year in the cycle of seven *shmittah* was known as *Yovel* (Jubilee) (Leviticus 25:8–13). The Bible provides validation for this law, stating, “And the land shall not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine; for you are but strangers and sojourners with Me” (Leviticus 25:23). God is the ultimate owner of the land and restores it to the originally allocated landholder as described in Joshua 14–21 and Numbers 26:52–56.

Without land, in some ancient societies, it was impossible to advance economically in an agricultural-based economy. During the *Yovel* year, agricultural land sold in the previous half-century reverts to the original ancestral owner. The purpose of this law was to provide the opportunity to those who sold their lands during difficulty to now reclaim the chance to make a living through agriculture and provide for themselves once more. It should be noted that this land law only applied to agricultural lands and not city dwellings. The sale of this latter category of property was considered final and permanent.

The Jubilee laws ensured that property would return to its original owners and thus provide a safety net protecting against a permanent underclass. This prevents the accumulation of land permanently in the hands of a few wealthy people. According to Heine, “The Torah does not aim at the impossible the abolition of property, but at the moralization of property, striving to bring it into harmony with equity and the true law of Reason by means of the Jubilee year” (as cited in Hertz, 1992, p. 533).

### PROTECTION OF THE SLAVES

As mentioned above, even slaves had rights in the biblical system. Unlike the Colonial South or contemporary slavery in certain parts of the world, the Bible provided slaves with certain protections and rights. The slave in the Bible is more akin to an indentured servant for whom the employer has certain obligations. These protections prevented “owners” from treating other human beings as “chattel” (Sacks, 2012). It should be noted that the Global Slavery Index (2018) indicates that modern slavery is a problem that persists even in the present day. According to the Global Slavery Index, approximately 403,000 people in the United States are living in modern slavery.

On three occasions, the Bible prohibits abusive, crushing work or *parech* of a slave (Sinclair, 2010). Those

who murder a slave are subject to the death penalty (Exodus 21:20).

The Hammurabi Code punishes one who harbors a fugitive slave with the death penalty. This person to whom the fugitive slave sought refuge is a criminal who must be punished (Roth, 2003, Chapter 16). In contradistinction, Deuteronomy requires the exact opposite; one is forbidden to return a fugitive slave:

You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him. (Deuteronomy 23:15–16)

The expectation was that the slave owner treat the servant with compassion as a human being. Abuse of any kind was forbidden. It would be unethical and therefore illegal to repatriate a fugitive slave escaping an abusive situation. According to Jewish tradition, another protection for the slave was that his family was fed by the master (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 22a). This would make it easier for him to become genuinely independent once freed, as his family would not have to go into debt to sustain themselves.

Employers are even required to give their indentured servants a severance gift known as *hanakah*. The Bible states, “Do not send him away empty-handed. You shall give him a severance gift from your flocks, from your threshing floor, and from your wine cellar...” (Deuteronomy 15:13–14). The purpose of this gift was to provide the freed slave with the materials that he or she would need to start a new life as a free person with the capital to have a fresh start. One can contrast this approach with African American employment during Reconstruction, in which slaves would often have to continue working for their former owners for a pittance.

### AN EXAMPLE OF IMPLEMENTATION: NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah serves as a biblical example for God’s people advocating for and inaugurating biblical treatment of the poor. Nehemiah, cupbearer for the king of Persia, was permitted by King Artaxerxes to depart for the Holy Land to help his people. He arrived in the Holy Land 13 years after Ezra in 445 BCE and became the governor of Judah. Scripture states that “he wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed” (Nehemiah 1:4) when he heard how terrible things were going for the remnant of Jews that were in

Jerusalem. The breached wall was one of the many problems that needed a leader (Nehemiah 1:2–5). In ancient times, walls provided security for the city against invaders.

Nehemiah had to deal with another serious situation: the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy in the Jewish community he was desperately trying to rebuild. It is worth observing that the debtors had to bring their children “into bondage” as indentured servants to pay off their debts.

And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brothers the Jews. For there were those that said: “We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore, we must buy grain for them, that we may eat, and live.” And there were those that said: “We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy grain, because of the famine.” And there were those that said: “We have borrowed money for the king’s taxes, and that on our fields and vineyards.” Now, our flesh is as worthy as the flesh of our brothers, our children as worthy as their children: yet, see, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants! Some of our daughters are brought to servitude already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our fields and vineyards. (Nehemiah 5:1–5)

Nehemiah understood that without compassion, the Jews would have no future. He succeeded in convincing the nobility to remit the debts and restore the forfeited fields of the poor. This type of financial and agrarian reform was unheard of in its time and represented one of the earliest examples of progressive land reform. Nehemiah did not place heavy tax burdens on the people as did his predecessors (Nehemiah 5:15) and was known to host many people at his table daily (Nehemiah 5:17).

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Feiler (2010) maintains that Moses is an American icon who represents the principles of American justice. Moses reminds us of the importance of helping the down-trodden and welcoming the outsider. It is no surprise that many great Americans, including Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr., compared themselves, and have been compared, to Moses.

Findings from disciplines as disparate as psychology and mathematical biology suggest that people are born to cooperate and help others (Nowak & Highfield, 2011;

Tomasello, 2009). It is known that pleasure influences the brain; people who satisfy their desires will stimulate the “pleasure center” of the brain. However, the same part of the brain is also aroused when people engage in deeds of kindness and help others (Keltner, 2009). Haidt describes human beings as “giraffes of altruism,” (as cited in Brooks, 2011), meaning that just as giraffes need long necks to survive, human beings need morality, altruism, reciprocity, and character to thrive.

Rae (2004) notes that the messianic vision in which nations will “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4) is one in which there is world peace and in which humankind works with its tools, plowshares, and pruning hooks. For Christians to inaugurate and conform to this vision, they must work to improve the world and make it a better place for everyone. It is to be a world of full employment where able people who want jobs will find them. Those who are unable to work will be provided with assistance. This will allow the messianic vision of a future with all of humanity living in an idyllic, spiritual world filled with beauty and peace.

Corning (2011) describes the latest research that demonstrates that people have an innate sense of fairness. We are concerned about the needs of others. There are indeed people about 25% to 30% of the population who are “fairness challenged,” self-centered, and do not care much about others. The majority of us, however, are hard-wired with built-in altruism, empathy, and nurturance. As a society and greater community, we care about others.

*Gemiluth chasadim* (performing deeds of loving-kindness) is one of three requirements demanded of humankind, according to the prophet Micah: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). The Talmud interprets “deeds of loving kindness” as *gemiluth chasadim*. According to Simon the Righteous, it is one of the three pillars (i.e., principles) on which the world rests (Ethics of the Fathers 1:2), and society could not survive without it. Charity is seen by the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Bathra 9a) as equal to all the other *mitzvahs* (religious precepts) combined and considers a person who performs charity greater than one who offers all the sacrifices (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 49b). The Talmud views charity as part of *Gemiluth Chasadim*, which includes all acts of kindness and is essentially the opposite of self-interest.

Compassion and well-being to all through dignity is found throughout Christian and Jewish traditions. Pope Francis advocated for biblical principles in confronting

poverty during a 2015 address in Saint Peter’s Square:

Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work. (Francis XVII, 2015, para. 128)

According to Pope Francis, providing dignity to individuals through employment should be the “broader objective” of governments and society.

In Jewish tradition, the Talmud lists four types of characters (Avos 5:10). The person who says, “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours is considered an average type, but there are some who say he is a Sodom-type.” An economic system concerned exclusively with protecting the property of individuals is at best “average.” Tamari (1987) explains why the “mine is mine and yours is yours” attitude is considered Sodom-like (pp. 51–52). Sodom and Gomorrah were wealthy areas that epitomized this philosophy. Living on fertile and prosperous land, the townspeople feared that strangers from surrounding areas would come to their cities to improve their living standards. Hence these cities passed harsh laws against foreigners and were sometimes ready even to rape strangers (see Genesis 19). An economic system concerned only with a small segment of the population is following in Sodom and Gomorrah’s footsteps.

Responsibility is the “greatest overarching theme” of the Hebrew Scriptures (Sacks, 2005, p. 135). The Bible demands that our entire economic system be built on a foundation of social responsibility. A system that allows millions of Americans to be unemployed or underemployed—something that destroys human dignity—and demonstrates indifference to the problem of income and wealth inequality and child poverty fails to satisfy this demand. By advocating for and incorporating the values found in the Bible, Christian business people can create a stronger and more compassionate society for all.

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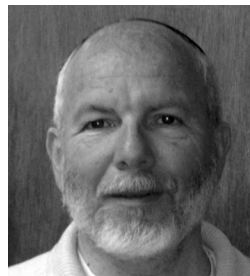
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