



TRANSCRIPT OF THE VOICE AND VISION DVD

Segment of Faith Leaders Speaking about Health care Reform

Speakers:

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director and Counsel, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Ronald J. Sider, President, Evangelicals for Social Action

The Reverend Dr. Marvin McMickle, Senior Pastor, Antioch Baptist Church, Cleveland, OH

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, Lobbyist, NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

The Reverend Joan Brown Campbell, Director of the Department of Religion, Chautauqua Institution

Jackson H. Day, M.Div., MPH, Pastor, Grace United Methodist Church, Upperco, Maryland

Barbara Baylor, Minister for Healthcare Justice, Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ

Dr. Ahmed Moen, Professor in Health Management Sciences, Howard University.

What Does Health care Reform have to do with my Faith Community?

Rabbi David Saperstein:

You know the famous story of the two guys standing by the river. They see the baby floating down the river and take the baby safely out.

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH RAISING VISION AND VOICE

Another baby comes and they take it out. More babies come and they drag them out. One of them runs off and the other asks where they are going. "I'm going to find out why the babies are in the water to stop it from happening." That is kind of the challenge that we face. The more we help individuals, the more the broad range and the extent of this crisis becomes self evident. It is a call to us to deal with the structural systemic causes of the failure to meet the health care needs of the American people.

Ronald J. Sider:

Well, I think that biblical faith compels us to say that it is fundamentally immoral to have, in the richest nation of human history, a situation where some 47 million Americans have no health insurance.

Reverend Marvin McMickle:

The whole biblical concept of stewardship and the whole biblical concept of loving one another is loving one another not only in terms of word, but in deed. The Book of James says that if I say that I love you, but I do not provide for any of your physical needs, what have I really done? And, so it really seems to me that what the Christian faith tradition tries to say to people is that all of us are the beneficiaries of what God has provided and that some of us have stewardship responsibilities to make sure that everybody is included, everybody gets something to eat, someplace to live, has some meaningful quality of life. And those who have voice, and those who have influence need to speak up on behalf of those who do not.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton:

I think government has an obligation to see that that common good is carried forward. And who is government? Somehow in the United States we think that government is out there and I am in here. We are "government". The more you work on Capitol Hill, the more you realize that. That the voices that come up there are the people who have a right to be up there to tell those representatives who are representing them that that is the way things should be.

Dr. Reverend Joan Brown Campbell:

It was Abraham Heschel, great Rabbi that he was, who said, “There comes a time when silence is betrayal, and that time is now.” I think we have to come in the world of health care to say silence is betrayal. We have to have our faith leaders speak out and they have to speak out in a way that we see this as important a call as the civil rights call was when Martin Luther King issued it in his day. I think it is that important.

Jackson H. Day:

I think this is one of the challenges that faces people of faith in the United States today because we have traditionally had a very individualistic emphasis where we think of people as individuals. We think of groups and communities simply as collections of individuals. The sense of corporate responsibility, even though our scriptures are laced with it, is something that people haven't thought that much about because it doesn't fit our very individualistic, secular culture.

Rabbi David Saperstein:

There are three issues that are involved here. The first is the belief in the fundamental dignity of every person entitles them to health care. That was clear in the Jewish tradition and I think it should be clear for us today.

Ronald J. Sider:

Well, I think that the starting point for any discussion about issues in society must be the dignity and the value of the person. The biblical case says that every person is created in the image of God, that God wills wholeness and health for every individual. That means that we must be concerned with those things that provide wholeness or those things that create brokenness for other persons made in the image of God. It is only when we start there that we see that every single person, no matter how broken, no matter how sick still matters. They matter to God, and God says He wants them to matter to you and me. So, that is the starting point. Now, in order to do that, in order to

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH RAISING VISION AND VOICE

genuinely care for our neighbors, we have got to have smart economics. We have to have good institutions. So the economics matters, but the reason we are talking about the economics is because persons matter.

Jackson H. Day:

You can modify something, you package it, you break it into pieces, but most importantly, you put a price on it, it becomes part of this domain of contrived scarcity so that you can increase its value. But health care itself, especially from a faith perspective, has traditionally been considered a ministry that people engage in, and so the commoditization of health care is something that from a faith community's perspective, really is in many respects an attack on the core of faith values. Health care needs to be a ministry.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton:

The Catholic hospital system grows out of the whole concept of we must be responsible for the dignity of the human individual. We must be responsible for human needs.

Dr. Ahmed Moen:

Health, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) definition, is a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and is a fundamental human right.

Barbara Baylor, Minister:

Jesus worked with people who were oppressed and devalued and a lot of our people today are oppressed and devalued. It is the church's responsibility to lift that up, to make connections, to restore and nurture people.

Rabbi David Saperstein:

Judaism sees certain values from our tradition as being universal in nature. Amongst those, the fundamental dignity and value in every

human being derived from the belief that we are created in the image of God.

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

Well, I think that the most basic thing of people of faith is that we know and believe that we are created in the image of God. And I am not sure that we always grasp the very deep and profound meaning of that. I always remember Desmond Tutu when he was speaking to a very large audience. He looked out at this audience and he said, "God loves you," and then he stopped. Then he said, "I bet you wonder why you flew me from South Africa just to say those simple words." Then he said, "God loves everybody." That is a different understanding. Well, if God loves everybody and if we are made in God's image, then it our responsibility to make sure that everyone can live up to that God given potential, that God image in all of us.

Rev. Marvin McMickle:

So, Martin King, while he often referred to the Declaration of Independence, made Amos five the primary vocabulary: "Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." So, I think we also have to say to people of faith, this is not a political issue, this is not something that stops at the boundaries of a political party, or an ideological persuasion. This is about human life and about God's intentions for creation.

Rabbi David Saperstein:

The second is that we lose our own humanity when we turn our backs on those who are in need, those who could be healed, and we allow them to languish and suffer because they lack adequate access to health care, because they don't have health insurance that works to meet their needs.

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

Health care is basic. If you are not a healthy person, particularly if you

COMMUNITIES OF FAITH RAISING VISION AND VOICE

look at the lives of children, certainly a small, tiny baby can claim no fault of their own whether they are healthy or not healthy. And they certainly deserve the finest resources that we have to offer. In this country we have enormous resources to offer. If we start a baby out, we cradle that baby, and we start a baby out as healthy as they possibly can be, then in the words of faith, we give that child the capability to be everything that God intended them to be. As people of faith, we really need to think of that as not only our responsibility, but perhaps it is even a gift to us because it gives us an understanding of the sacredness of life that is important to all of us.

Dr. Ahmed Moen:

Health care is a priority. It says there are no restrictions on the blind, the physically and mentally challenged. They are dependent on society to support them. So, if you have a deficiency or a challenge in your health, it is a pleasure for a Muslim to serve you. It is a fundamental human right because in the Koran it says that thy shall never achieve piety or the best, unless you spend what you love most for those who need you. Which means we serve the poor as well as people who are in need. So, service is a sacrifice in one way, but service is also an obligation and a duty. It is mostly intertwined with community of common good plus individual responsibility towards others.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton:

When you look back at our Constitution and you look back at our Bill of Rights and all of that and how can we be adequately conscientious citizens to let that be happening when people don't have health care?

Dr. Ahmed Moen:

For Muslims, this is a new experience to vote, to elect and be elected. These people are Americans. They vote and they know their rights. They are the minority, they are in the fringe, marginal. Therefore there is a relationship to change their condition. There is an area of the Koran that says, "There shall never be change unless people change their own condition by themselves." Change never comes from outside.

We have to change personally and individually and perceive change.

Barbara Baylor:

There are a lot of myths out there that the reason poor people don't have insurance is because they are lazy, because they don't want to work, because they haven't worked hard enough in their lives. People who have insurance, even if it is just a little bit, and even if they know that it won't cover everything, they feel like they have earned it because "I have a job and I am taking responsibility for myself." We have to shatter some of those myths.

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

You know, one of the most damaging things about the prosperity gospel is the underlying gospel assumption that God rewards people who are good people and makes them prosperous. And, then by implication those who are poor are somehow not good people. That is such a misunderstanding of gospel truth.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton:

There are many employed people who don't have access to health care. I remember coming out of the White House one day. I grabbed a taxi and this taxi driver said to me, "What were you in there for?" (this was way back). I told him that the president was signing an amendment to raise wages. He said, "Well, that is good." Then he said, "What are you doing about health care?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I work twelve hours a day driving this taxi, but every day when my wife and I get up we kneel next to the bed right away and pray that somehow nobody gets sick because we have four children and have no health care."

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

We have to help people understand that to take care of health care in this country where we have adequate resources to do it is not only a mandate of our faith, it is actually a practical reality.

Rev. David Saperstein:

Third, it wasn't just individual charity or individual responsibility, but communal charity. This was one of Judaism's great contributions to world thought. The notion 2000 years ago that the rabbis created of the community's responsibility to provide for those who are in need and the community's responsibility to intervene when someone (whatever their income level) was running into trouble and needed help. We are all in this together. So, Ammonities, in listing the ten major responsibilities that the communal authorities in every city had to implement and address, listed health care as number one.

Barbara Baylor:

What is the next step, what can you do within your church, family or the wider community to help change the lifestyle?

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

We have a God that says I take the whole world and hold it in my hands.

Jackson H Day:

Our country is like a non-profit organization with a three hundred million member Board of Directors and that is a lot of people whose opinions you need to shape in order to get something done.

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

I remember very well the days in which we were working to build the Welfare Rights Mothers. When they worked together they became a mighty force. A lot of that happened because congregations put their arms around these people.

Sr. Catherine Pinkerton:

I guess I would ask congregations to reflect on: What in this country, when we talk about "all are created equal, all are endowed by their creator with these inalienable rights," what is our fidelity to that?

Rabbi David Saperstein:

There is no term in classical Hebrew for “rights.” Judaism’s legal system and moral system is a system of responsibilities. So, it is not that a person has a right to health care. It is that we have the responsibility to ensure that sick people are healed.

Rev. Joan Brown Campbell:

But, the responsibility in a democracy is that citizens have to act. And for people of faith it is very important that citizens act on the issues that they care deeply about, health care being one of the main ones.

Rev. David Saperstein:

One strand of Jewish theology teaches us that when God created the Universe, God left one part of creation undone, that was the completion of a world of justice and peace, and that God entrusted to us in our sacred text a blueprint of how to do that. But, in calling us to partnership in completing creation, and creating a world of justice and peace, God has ennobled humanity to raise us above mere biological existence and give into our lives destiny and meaning and purpose. So that call to provide that moral witness, to be a different kind of prophet, insuring America meets the health care needs of every one of our citizens, every one who is in this country—that is a fulfillment of God’s call for us to be partners in shaping this better, more hopeful future for all of God’s children.

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