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We
– the United States –
have arguably become
the most dangerous nation
on earth...

a danger to Africa, surely,
and a threat to ourselves as well.

*A personal manifesto
for justice in Africa and the United States
by the Executive Director of the Washington Office on Africa*

A PERSONAL MANIFESTO FOR JUSTICE IN AFRICA AND THE UNITED STATES

We are frequently told that nothing will ever be the same after September 11th, 2001. It's convenient as a rationale for any action our government may wish to make, but it's not true. We still claim to be committed to the rule of law. We view our nation as a democracy. We embrace the rhetoric of freedom and liberty. We speak of peace. In theory, at least, these remain, present before and after.

We are also told that everything changed after September 11th – a point that is not the same as that nothing will ever be the same. If we as a people are not vigilant, if we choose not to confront the danger that our government, acting in our name, poses to us and the rest of the world, then everything may well change. It may well be that we will have *allowed* all to change... the undermining of democracy and the rule of law, the violation of human rights, the transformation of our Department of *Defense* into an instrument for wars of aggression.

Of course our history as a nation has been a patchwork of goodness, compassion, and a sense of justice, intimately sewn together with vicious wrongs to our own citizens and those of other countries, a tragic indifference to human suffering, and a masking of injustice in the name of such values as individual liberty. But the realities of today, the abuse of September 11th to serve narrow ends, and the disregard of those values that have sometimes made us as a nation worthy to be called good... well, this is a dangerous moment in our history. And given our power in the world, it is a dangerous moment for our world.

Not long ago I wrote an article in *Episcopal Life* about our government's broken promises to confront the global AIDS pandemic. Shortly I received a hand-written note from a reader in Kansas. "Let me guess," she wrote. "You're a liberal Democrat!" No, I replied. "I am a Christian."

I'd like to think that it is possible to speak of what our nation does and does not do – fundamental to Christian social ethics – without a simple reduction into political labels, without a sweeping dismissal of the possibility that

our voices (diverse as they may be) may represent a genuine effort toward a faith-based witness for justice. I'd like to think, too, that Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," might have rendered that tired and foolish argument about the Church and politics indefensible... but that's a naïve underestimating on my part of the tenacity of the view among many *within* the faith community that some realms of human life are to be separated both from God's sovereignty and from faithful critique by the Body of Christ.

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I readily confess that I no longer have the patience for such discourse, so I'm not going to take us through all that, nor am I going to seek to reflect about Christian social ethics at a level academic ethicists might consider demonstrative of "depth." The latter is a worthy enterprise (when done in community), but what I seek to do is to *begin* with the presumption that people of faith are called to reflect and act for justice, peace, human dignity, the common good. *And* – and this is a critical "and" – I start with the premise that it is appropriate and right that people of faith seek policies of their government that uphold their vision... our vision... of right and just relationship.

I need to add that "and," for the "separation of church and state" issue is indeed a problem if we were, in our understanding of a calling, to mean what President George W. Bush

apparently means, that God *called* him and our nation to lead the world towards "freedom" – as he did at a news conference in April 2004. Earlier, on the first anniversary of September 11th, President Bush claimed parallels between the United States and Christ as the Word of God. "This ideal of America," he declared, "is the hope of all mankind. That hope lights our way. And the light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it." The Rt. Revd Peter Price responds that these last two sentences, from John 1:5, "are not about America. There is little doubt," he rightly observes, "that much of what lies behind American foreign policy is bad theology."¹

To present an aggressive US foreign policy as messianic Christianity may be bad theology; at worst, it is blasphemy. What I am suggesting, instead, is that Christian voices that examine what our government *does* in the world as well as in the nation in the light of our faith values are not preoccupied with US dominance and the imposition of US-American "values" (of which our leaders frequently speak but as often ignore). Rather we seek to speak of peace rather than war, of a living wage for all rather than profit for the few, of affordable medicines for those dying of AIDS rather than protection of patents by pharmaceutical corporations. In those terms, this is not a church-state issue.

The focus of the debate about our nation's place in the world and about the critiques offered by the faith

community should be on the substance of the critique, not whether the critique should ever have been made, or whether the critics have a right to make it.

Solidarity – which in faith terms is often expressed as *partnership* – between Africa and the United States has a tortuous history. From paternalism to struggles for authentic partnership, the general presumption in the United States has been that the subject of the discussion is Africa. Even now, as progressive Africa advocates in the US discuss partnership with Africa, they – we – talk about how we are to listen to African partners in identifying and advancing an

agenda addressing particular *African* issues. There is little talk among us about issues faced by those marginalized, those living in poverty, those facing injustice, *in the United States*. Partnership has thus been defined as how US-Americans and Africans should work

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together on *African* issues.

This "manifesto" suggests that what Africans face in Africa we too face in the US, and that authentic partnership would demand acts in solidarity to confront injustice in both Africa and the US. The labor movement, at its better moments, did this. The Church – one of the first true expressions of globalization centuries ago – has been slow to do so, for all sorts of reasons: Power, cultural and racial bias, and theological arrogance, to name a few.

It is time – well past time – to stand together as one community. "That we all may be one" may have been Jesus' prayer for us as Christians, but if his parable of the Good Samaritan is to be fully accepted, this oneness transcends religion and race and nation and culture. The common good is just that, a *universal* common good, and it is under attack in our name by our government. It doesn't matter much to me whether you approach it as a secular or faith expression, but I know I cannot be silent, as a Christian, in the face of the danger that the US now poses to our world.² I seek to be in solidarity, and call us to solidarity, US-American and African alike.

¹ I recognize that the Washington Office on Africa has among its activists, readers and supporters those who do not perceive their central identity as being part of a faith community, or who are in other faith communities. I ask that they accept that I need, on this occasion, to write from my own faith perspectives, and that they look beyond the faith expressions to the substance of my analysis and call for action.

¹ Bishop Price is the Bishop of Bath and Wells in England. In *Church Times*, December 19/26, 2003.

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Our government speaks of peace. It speaks of good governance, economic reform, and human development. (These latter three, in fact, are the criteria for country eligibility to receive funds through the new development assistance initiative known as the Millennium Challenge Account.) African governments accept these four as well.

What is meant by them, and how our and African governments seek to address them, are open to wide debate.

Our faith tradition speaks of peace, just governance, economic justice, and human dignity as well. We and our African partners tend to accept these four as reflecting Christian social ethics values.

How we and our African partners understand them, and seek to address them, are open to debate too. But the parallels – where we and our African partners, and our government and their governments, are *seemingly* talking about shared vision and shared concerns – validate these four rubrics as the focus of my analysis and call in this manifesto.

Where else better to begin than with...

Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Matthew 5:9

The willingness of post-colonial Africa to engage in war to resolve a myriad of issues (not least who possesses political power) is well-known. From Sudan to Sierra Leone, from the Congo to Liberia, from Angola to Mozambique, the option has been for violence. For every conflict there have been blaming rituals: the colonial legacy, geopolitical forces, the sins of existing rulers, ethnicity, real and perceived abuses. Whatever the reasons, the image of suffering has been searing and has brought forth both generous humanitarian support and the advancement of the “hopeless” image of Africa (a view still widespread in the US and the international community).

The willingness of the US to engage in war to resolve a myriad of issues is strikingly less well-known among US-Americans... at least we are less prepared to acknowledge the substantial list of invasions – especially in the Caribbean and Latin America – undertaken for narrow and often embarrassing reasons. We tend to restrict our memories to those struggles that seem heroic – the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the two world wars, and perhaps Korea and the first Iraqi war. (We certainly remember Vietnam, but our memories are too painful to know where to place it on the list.)

Even though we have frequently been the aggressors, we don't like to think of ourselves that way. We name our military apparatus the Department of *Defense*. We are a

peace-loving nation, we tell ourselves. And for all of our mixed history over issues of war and peace, and for all of the mixed theological approaches people of faith have toward engagement in war, maybe we *are* a peace-loving people, though at best no more or no less than Africa and the rest of the world.

President Bush, however, is willing, even anxious, to waive any such pretensions. In the midst of all of the ongoing debate as to whether Iraq had weapons or whether Saddam Hussein supported terrorism, we have allowed to pass by with minimal comment the Bush administration's “National Security Strategy” – a clear and open endorsement of *preemption*, military actions by the US to confront “attacks” before they ever happen.³ Given the very real threats that exist in our world, it sounds common-sense to prevent them, doesn't it? *But how do we know?* Even if a threat *seems* real, theologically we may still consider a war immoral, but as a nation, the burden to *know*, truly to know if a threat is real, is indisputable.

What we know now is that the Iraqi war was justified with lies, deception and deceit. The White House said Iraq had a massive stockpile of biological weapons. None have been found. They said they were certain that Iraq had “vast” stockpiles of chemical weapons. None have been found, and it appears that none have even been produced since 1991. They said Iraq had restarted its nuclear programs. There is no evidence of any active program. David Kay, the chief US weapons inspector, has told us that “we were almost all wrong,” which says something about the non-existent grounds for war, though it is clear that *everyone* was not wrong, that skepticism was clearly expressed before war.⁴

Meanwhile, members of the Bush administration relied heavily upon Ahmed Chalabi, the Iraqi exile and fugitive from Jordan (where he had been convicted of bank fraud), despite the fact that the CIA had found his reports untrustworthy. Now, in a British interview, Mr. Chalabi admits that he “knowingly provided false information about Iraq's weapons and its ties to terrorists” to the Pentagon and to the US press. “We are,” he said, “heroes in error. As far as we are concerned, we've been entirely successful. That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in Baghdad. What was said before is not important.”⁵

President Bush now speaks of “weapons-of-mass-destruction-related program activities.”⁶ Do all these qualifying adjectives provide sufficient grounds for war?

³ “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” September 17, 2002, p. 11.

⁴ *Washington Post*, January 19, 28 and 29, and February 15, 2004.

⁵ David MacMichael, of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, “Untruth and Consequences.” The Chalabi interview appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* (London) on February 19, 2004.

⁶ Quoted in the *Washington Post's* lead editorial, January 29, 2004.

The Bush administration, and President Bush himself, have constantly “hinted” at a link between Iraq and September 11th – “we’ve removed an ally of al Qaeda,” the President himself declared – though he felt the need to state – once – that “we’ve had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with the September 11 attacks.” There is, indeed, no evidence of any such link, nor of any general Iraqi support of terrorism.⁷

What, then, did we *preempt*? The word *preemption* means that another – an adversary or an ally – is going to do something, and we act to prevent it before it happens. We lacked evidence that Iraq was capable of doing anything, and they were not threatening to do anything. What then did we *preempt*? Saddam Hussein didn’t like us, but not liking us is not a “grave” threat and is certainly not a good basis for war; given the poll data from around the world, we’d be “preemptively” attacking most everybody.⁸

Our leaders and the national press sadly failed the nation by adopting so readily the Bush administration’s phrase, *preemptive war*. What we’ve just witnessed was not preemption, as dubious a foundation for military action as it may be anyway. What we’ve just witnessed was a war of aggression. *Blessed are the peacemakers*. That’s not us.

The foundation of Christianity, as the *Church Times* observes, is “pre-emptive grace.”⁹

The Bush administration has also declared – and the press has adopted the phrase – a *war against terrorism*. Like preemptive war, we haven’t questioned that phrase very much either. *Terrorism* – and the undoubted human tragedy terrorist acts represent – is not an enemy; it is a method, a tactic, that some people have chosen to use to secure their goals. Never mind that what is a terrorist in the eyes of

some may be a freedom-fighter in the eyes of others... and the US has certainly looked away when acts of terror were done by our allies.¹⁰ There seems little question that al Qaeda was guilty of the attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. If “war” was to be declared upon anyone – and some of our faith communions question even that – it would be persuasive to suggest that our Congress

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would grant to the President the right to wage war against al Qaeda. But no.

In the aftermath of September 11th we have given our government the right to wage an open-ended war against an undefined enemy anywhere. It is sufficient for our President to declare “them” (whomever they may be) to be a threat and to be engaged, in his judgment, in acts of terrorism. This is more than dangerous... to us, and to other governments in the world who might be forgiven for thinking that they may do the same.

Our President shows disdain for international structures which, for all of their failings, provide a forum for peaceful discourse. He shows a general lack of curiosity about the richly-nuanced variations in human experience that lead others to have priorities that differ from ours, and a disinterest in understanding and respecting them; he divides the world into “civilized” and, by definition, uncivilized (a word that will surely bring back African memories of European imperialism); and he defines security with little sensitivity for the vulnerability of people around the world. With these guiding insights, the Bush administration has set an agenda of narrow self interest, demanding essentially that the world commit itself to protect... *us*. Or else.

“The only path to peace and security,” President Bush writes in his strategy document, “is the path of action.”¹¹ *Action?* Fine. But his agenda is not for *peace-making* action. It does not talk about the relationship between justice and peace, nor about the interests of others that differ from ours. Rather it prescribes confrontation and aggression...

⁷ But compare with this, which is but a sample of many such “hints”: “The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11th, 2001,” President Bush declared on May 1, 2003. Vice-President Cheney has been especially aggressive on this spurious theme. Last September he told “Meet the Press” that the Iraqi war was a “major blow [at] the geographic base of the terrorists who had us under assault now for many years, but most especially on 9/11.” The US-American public may be excused from perceiving such a politically-convenient but non-existent link. *Washington Post*, September 6, 2003, and E.J. Dionne Jr. in the *Post*, October 7, 2003.

⁸ William Raspberry writes that saying the world is better without Saddam Hussein is “no answer at all. I can think,” he continues, “of many world leaders (and even a few members of the Bush administration) whose absence from power would leave the world better off. But that does not justify turning thought into violent action.” In the *Washington Post*, February 2, 2004.

⁹ Leader, September 13, 2002.

¹⁰ Or by ourselves; destroying native American communities with smallpox was surely bioterrorism, but we don’t talk about it very much.

¹¹ “National Security Strategy,” p.1.

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toward our allies and friends as well as toward those who genuinely are or whom we perceive to be our enemies.

At the very moment when the world's compassion for the United States knew no bounds (those days immediately after September 11th), our government's message was that if you were not for us you were against us. This heavy-handedness, this lack of sensitivity and care for the rest of the world, has borne fruit. The Pew Research Center reports that "discontent with the United States has grown around the world... among longtime NATO allies, in developing countries, in Eastern Europe and, most dramatically, in Muslim societies." Seventy-two percent of Nigerians, in another Pew poll, worried that the US could become a threat to their country.¹² "The American public," Pew adds, "is strikingly at odds with publics around the world in its views about the U.S. role in the world and the global impact of American actions."¹³

The Bush administration claims that the world is now safer after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. We don't know. It may prove to be; it may not. At the time of this writing, the short-term looks ominous as the rebellion against the US occupation of Iraq grows increasingly violent. The long-term looks bleak as well. Both the State Department and the CIA say that since the US invasion of Iraq, Osama bin Laden's anti-Americanism is spreading.¹⁴ As a recent US Institute of Peace report suggests: "The United States is losing its campaign for the hearts and minds of the Arab world. Poll after poll suggests that opinions of the United States in the Middle East range from suspicion to loathing. Al Qaeda itself is under siege, but its ideas are flourishing."¹⁵

A world made uneasy by the reckless unpredictability of the US is not an indication of greater safety. And the fundamental silliness of "they hate us because of our freedom" is not an indication that US foreign policy and intelligent analysis of our world are related to one another.

There is one thing in our government's approach to war and peace that does reflect clarity of thinking: the US economic agenda. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations have shown a deep commitment to a free market economy. While this may seem to have more to do with the economic justice theme,¹⁶ sadly this has a direct relationship to peace-making, and to Africa, as well.

¹² For Russia and Turkey, the figure was 71%. Cited by Harold Meyerson, *Washington Post*, June 11, 2003.

¹³ Pew Research Center, "What the World Thinks in 2002," December 4, 2002.

¹⁴ *Washington Post*, April 4, 2004.

¹⁵ "Global Terrorism after the Iraq War," US Institute of Peace Special Report 111, October 2003.

¹⁶ See below, p. 12.

When a rebel movement in Sierra Leone was chopping off the hands and feet of children, the Bush administration was more concerned that the removal of "conflict diamonds" as the key source of funding for the rebels meet World Trade Organization (WTO) rules than that an effective control – what became known as the Kimberley Process – be put in place.¹⁷

When Sudan began to produce oil, and there was a direct correlation between increased oil revenues to the Sudanese government and increased military expenditures in a civil war that has raged for decades and has cost well over two million lives, the Bush administration opposed capital market sanctions that would have prevented foreign oil companies from securing money from within the US, on the grounds that the government should not interfere in such economic activity.¹⁸

When *any* African conflict erupts, weaponry is not sophisticated expensive stuff. What dominates African conflicts are small arms. Where do they get them? Nearly half of the world's conventional arms are sold by the US. In 2002 our sales to developing countries totaled \$8.6 billion. We're number one. At the UN, we have taken the lead in obstructing international agreements to restrict the global trade. Maryknoll reports that "at the last major UN Conference on Illicit Use of Small Arms and Light Weapons, representatives from the NRA [National Rifle Association] were part of the US delegation."¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Bush administration shows little interest in extending the domestic ban on assault weapons and refuses to place domestic "gun shows" under regulation even for background checks.²⁰ I wonder why.

The answer has been that our economic system and the trade rules that serve it are declared to exist in their own untouchable domain, rather than that economic rules should serve a broader social agenda, where a just community restricts, for example, products that fund rebel movements that cut off the hands and feet of children. Talk of economic policy serving a just peace agenda does not, our

¹⁷ Yes, the US did enter into the Kimberley Process system, but we have not pressed for independent monitoring of conflict diamond compliance, and recent reports suggest conflict diamonds continue to enter the market. See Global Witness's March 2004 report, *Broken Vows*, and the Washington Office on Africa's website, www.woafrica.org, for detailed analyses.

¹⁸ See the Washington Office on Africa's website, www.woafrica.org, for detailed analyses.

¹⁹ Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, *NewsNotes*, March/April 2004.

²⁰ President Bush is also proposing nearly \$5 billion in credits for foreign militaries to buy US weapons. Jim Lobe, in Interhemispheric Resource Center, *The Progressive Response*, February 20, 2004.

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government's economic policymakers insist, belong at the table. *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

Our government is seeking to increase its military presence in Africa. US military leaders have recently been visiting Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, and South Africa. There are recent training agreements with Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. The principal motivation is to be better positioned to confront terrorist threats, and secondarily, to protect oil sources, notably Nigeria and Angola. In 2003 Burundi, the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda agreed to be part of a US-backed task force to respond to terrorism. The US has provided armed forces training in Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda.²¹

This may well serve the US anti-terrorism agenda. (It may not; indeed, a visible US presence often exacerbates local tensions.) Whether a US military presence serves Africa's agenda is another matter. And to the extent that military force has become what Mel Goodman calls "the main instrument and organizing principle of US foreign policy,"²² whether it ultimately makes for peace is a dubious proposition at best.

All of this should, I believe, be a matter of grave concern to us as US-Americans. It should be even more so for people of faith. A tragedy – September 11th – happens, and our national response is a rampant militarization of our foreign policy; a bolstering of an economic agenda that places peace second to profit; and... an optional war against a country not responsible for that tragedy, justified on fictitious grounds.

Such an agenda costs massive amounts of money. A nation's priorities are demonstrated most profoundly by its budget, by what our government – we – choose to spend our money on.

US military spending is roughly *one-half* of the military expenditures *in the entire world*.²³

Since our invasion of Iraq in March 2003, we have been spending around \$4 billion a *month* on that military operation alone. Congress approved \$79 billion for Iraq in April 2003. Last September the Bush administration sought, and got, an additional \$87 billion for Iraq's military and

reconstruction needs. An additional request for \$25 billion is now being made; another, for \$50 billion, is expected later this year. Adjusted for inflation, we are already getting close to the total cost for World War I.²⁴

Andrew Natsios, head of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), suggested in April 2003 that the US share of costs to rebuild Iraq would be \$1.7 billion. "We have no plans for any further funding for this." The figure for 2004 alone is at least \$75 billion.²⁵

Nelson Mandela observed that "there is no doubt that the United States now feels that they are the only superpower in the world and they can do what they like."²⁶ He's right. And though they don't say so as bluntly, the Bush administration holds this view passionately. Doing what we like extends well beyond the war in Iraq to our disinterest in arms agreements, the elimination of landmines, international efforts to address environmental protection, even international cooperation to confront the global AIDS pandemic... the "unilateralism list" is a long one. The US message to the world is that "we have no need of you."²⁷

That is a dangerous message, as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan indicated in his speech to the General Assembly last September. "The right to act unilaterally... represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfectly, world peace and stability have rested for the last 58 years. My concern is that, if it were to be adopted, it could set precedents that resulted in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification."²⁸

The danger, however, seems lost on our government. Facing criticism over a US plan for international action against people the US suspects to be terrorists without disclosing the evidence as to why persons were on the list, a US official simply replied: "At some point, people are just going to have to trust the United States to do the right thing."²⁹ Why should they? Why should we?

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²⁴ *Washington Post*, May 6, 2004.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, July 13, September 8 and 9, 2003, and March 19, 2004; and Lobe.

²⁶ *Newsweek*, September 10, 2002.

²⁷ Of course we "have need" of the rest of the world when we find ourselves in trouble – such as our needing to find a way out of Iraq – or when we want the rest of the world to pay for the failure of our agenda. But those are not gestures at multilateralism, of being in solidarity with the rest of the world. They're just efforts to sustain our unilateralist policies.

²⁸ Quoted in the *Washington Post*, September 24, 2003.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, February 2, 2002.

²¹ Associated Press reports by Anthony Mitchell, July 30, 2003, by Alexandra Zavis, February 27, and by Robert Burns, March 16, 2004; and Amnesty International, *The Terror Trade Times*, June 2002.

²² Interhemispheric Resource Center, *The Progressive Response*, February 20, 2004.

²³ Jim Lobe, *ibid.*

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Critical for us, in all of this, is that the United States has the capacity for good as well as for wrong, and we do both. But when we claim primacy in the world, and a right to use our power alone as we see fit, and seek to mask that “right” as God-given, then we become free to wage war, however ill-conceived it may be, however deceitful our justification,

however disingenuous our post-war explanations, however costly – human and financial – our acts. We have freed ourselves to use our power and our resources with military solutions in mind, as if military dominance defines us as an intrinsically-good people committed to freedom. It is as wrong as it is obscene. *Blessed are the peacemakers.*

“There is no doubt that the United States now feels that they are the only superpower in the world and they can do what they like.”  Nelson Mandela

“I do not need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being president. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don’t feel like I owe anybody an explanation.”

 George W. Bush

Just governance

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

I do not quote those words of President Bush above³⁰ to be mean-spirited. My focus is upon the policies and practices of our government and its leaders. That quote is important in terms of my *focus* because it represents an approach to “just governance” that puts the adjective seriously in doubt.

We as a people proclaim our nation to be a democracy, and we preach democracy around the world. The opportunity for informed public discourse is critical to the fundamental concept of a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” I suggest that our democratic tradition is under serious threat, and I suggest further that the difference between our democratic expression and that of African governments known for their corruption and suppression of opposition is one that is nuanced, not sharp. Never mind that, as Ian Taylor writes, “power in African politics must be understood as the utilization of patronage and not as the performance of legitimacy drawn from the

sovereign will of the people.”³¹ We have our own ways to reach that same end.

The US Presidency and the US Congress have been bought. The battle against “special interests” is over, and the US-American public has lost. (Whether the “war” will ultimately be won, and by whom, remains open to debate.) By the end of March the Bush campaign had raised \$185,650,000; Senator John Kerry, \$85,500,000.³² The pharmaceutical industry has given President Bush \$585,000 thus far; they’ve given Sen. Kerry \$58,000. The telecommunications industry followed a similar pattern, \$578,000 to \$58,000.³³ Forget the McCain-Feingold campaign finance law. The fix is in, whoever wins.

Members of Congress who comment that the Congress has not been bought treat US citizens as fools.³⁴ Over three dozen of President Bush’s major fundraisers are associated with companies destined to benefit from the energy and Medicare bills. The energy bill grants \$23.5 billion in tax breaks to industry. Five Bush Pioneers (those who brought

³⁰ Stated in the context of planning for military action against al Qaeda. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York, 2002), p. 146.

³¹ Interhemispheric Resource Center, *The Progressive Response*, February 20, 2004.

³² From reports filed with the Federal Election Commission in late April.

³³ *Washington Post* editorial, February 14, 2004.

³⁴ This does not mean that there are not persons of decency and integrity in Congress. Rather it means that the system has become so corrupted that the likelihood of the common good’s being served is miniscule at best.

in at least \$100,000 in donations to the Bush campaign) are executives and lobbyists for Southern Company, which stands to benefit from the Bush energy bill.³⁵ Odd, that.

Odd, too, that several Senators urged US Health and Services Secretary Tommy Thompson to suppress the World Health Organization's report on healthy diets that encouraged people to limit their sugar additive intake to less than 10% of their daily calories. The sugar industry contributed over \$3 million toward federal election campaigns in the non-presidential-year elections in 2002. And, is it mere coincidence that the Medicare bill prevents Medicare from negotiating with the pharmaceutical industry to bring down drug prices while the industry gives over half-a-million dollars to the Bush campaign? That – “just coincidence” – is what Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) says about an elaborate arrangement by which he and his family benefited from his arranging contracts for developers.³⁶

Meanwhile, should we be surprised that Vice President Dick Cheney's old company has secured \$1.7 billion in contracts for Iraqi reconstruction?³⁷

Recently, what was to be a simple adjustment in corporate tax policy turned into a 930-page piece of legislation, with tax breaks for everyone from bow-and-arrow makers to Oldsmobile dealers. The bill, one lobbyist said, “has risen to a new level of sleaze.”³⁸ As Jonathan Yardley cited in his review of Kevin Phillips' *American Dynasty*, “crony capitalism has turned the funding of American elections into both a joke and a menace, and has made the public's business a matter of private interest.”³⁹

But it's more than just industry and lobbyists. The wealthy are the ones who have substantial funds to support candidates, and it is the wealthy who benefit from recent tax cuts. Only four-tenths of one percent of taxpayers – those with income over \$500,000 – secured some 20% of the 2003 tax cuts.⁴⁰ This is what President Bush means when he carefully talks about tax cuts for “all” as an act of simple fairness.

Yes, there are staggering examples of African government's looting their countries' resources, notably among oil-producing states; Angola immediately comes to mind. Certainly corruption hides behind a lack of transparency. But the major distinction between US and African corruption is that we in the US have chosen to “legalize” ours.

If the corruption intrinsic in payments by industry and the wealthy to our elected leaders serves to define who is able to engage in public discourse – who is at the table – efforts by those with power to mute criticism further prevent alternative voices from being heard.

The war in Iraq provides a striking example. Intimidation abounds. The viciousness of the administration's attacks upon Hans Blix,⁴¹ Paul O'Neill,⁴² and Richard Clarke⁴³ are paralleled by smears upon any in Congress who might dare to question, say, the military budget. “Support our troops” has stupidly become a rallying cry for a policy that places them unnecessarily in danger, and keeps them there.

Look around sometime for who among our political leaders dares to question our military and security policies. They well remember the appalling attacks on then Senator Max Cleland (D-GA) as being soft on homeland defense,

The major distinction between US and African corruption is that we in the US have chosen to “legalize” ours.

with ads featuring Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Sen. Cleland lost an arm and both legs in Vietnam. He's no longer a Senator.⁴⁴ September 11th demands an ever-expanding budget, we are told; never mind that the attacks were accomplished with items we can find in a hardware store. Leaders pay a price for challenging such “wisdom.”

US civil society faces similar intimidation. Mr. Natsios, the USAID head, has attacked US non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for not making it clear, in their

³⁵ *Washington Post*, November 22, 2003.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, April 23, 2003. For details about the “Alaskan Outrage,” see the *Post's* editorial of December 29, 2003.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, August 28, 2003.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, April 19, 2004.

³⁹ “Book World,” *ibid.*, January 11, 2004.

⁴⁰ E.J. Dionne Jr., in *ibid.*, December 2, 2003.

⁴¹ Head of the UN weapons inspection efforts in Iraq from 2000 until the US invasion. Book review of his *Disarming Iraq* (New York, 2004) in the *Washington Post*, March 14, 2004.

⁴² President Bush's Secretary of the Treasury. He wrote that President Bush was planning to get rid of Saddam Hussein from the very outset of his administration. See Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty* (New York, 2004).

⁴³ President Bush's top counterterrorism official. Sen. Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) launched a personal attack upon Clark on the Senate floor that led Richard Cohen to suggest that “maybe not since Joe McCarthy sneered insinuations about communism has any senator waxed so ugly and, in the process, made such a fool of himself.” Frist accused Clark of profiting from September 11th, then acknowledged that he did not know Clark's motive, then returned to his theme, maintaining that Clark's book was “an appalling act of profiteering.” No mention of the substance of the critique. *Washington Post*, April 1, 2004.

⁴⁴ *Gainesville (GA) Times*, October 16, 2002.

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USAID-funded humanitarian work in Iraq, that they were serving as “an arm of the US government.” InterAction, the network of US relief and development NGOs, reported that Mr. Natsios “threatened to personally tear up their contracts and find new partners” if they failed to do so. Meanwhile, the American Enterprise Institute, which has provided numerous right-wing minds for service in the Bush administration, has suggested that “the extraordinary growth of advocacy NGOs in liberal democracies has the potential to undermine the sovereignty of constitutional democracies.”⁴⁵ A remarkable assertion. In and out of the faith communities, we are told that we need to be careful about what we say. Civil society criticism of our government, it seems, is a threat to democracy.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to walk humbly?

Perhaps we simply should not criticize that which we do not know. The Bush White House is notoriously secretive. Jonathan Yardley again: “The Bush culture is one in which public action is decided in private and conducted with as much secrecy as possible, with no real consultation with the public and as little as possible with its representatives on Capitol Hill.”⁴⁶ The public is not to know who from industry consulted with Vice-President Cheney in the development of the pro-industry energy bill. (That White House claim to secrecy has now made it to the Supreme Court.) Nor are we to know how much we spend on intelligence. Recently the Bush White House even declared that it will not answer any questions directly from Congressional Democrats.⁴⁷ For the past year my own office has sought information about the trade negotiations between the US and the Southern Africa Customs Union countries. We are not the “stakeholders,” we are told. Industry, no doubt, is.

But it’s not just access to information and a place at the table that are critical issues about public discourse these days. The level of discourse gives priority to superficiality and diversion. When asked, for example, about the absence of weapons in Iraq, President Bush answered: “So what’s the difference? The possibility that [Saddam Hussein] could acquire weapons. If he were to acquire weapons, he would be the danger.”⁴⁸

I take this to mean that it is irrelevant that our government justified war on the grounds of a grave – and yes, *imminent*, no matter how the administration disputes the

word – threat from “weapons of mass destruction,” and the grounds weren’t there. President Bush’s corollary is that a tyrant has been overthrown, and that’s to the good. Well, maybe it is, but in a democracy it would have been appropriate to have debated that justification. If our government wants us to risk human life and spend hundreds of billions of dollars to overthrow Saddam Hussein, then integrity would have demanded that such a proposal for action come to us for debate. It never happened, and now we are told to get over it. We’re attacked if we don’t.

We see this phenomenon in issue after issue, from both sides of the congressional aisle. We see it in the gimmicks used in recent tax cut legislation that disguise the true costs to us, and mask who benefits. (William Raspberry calls it “blatant flimflam.”)⁴⁹ We see it, too, in superficial media treatment of our public life. There is much to debate between thoughtful progressive and conservative views about how the common good is to be served. It’s hard to find that debate anywhere in the United States at present. Worse, our political leaders seem determined that it not happen.

What does the Lord require of you but to walk humbly?

A crucial companion to a functioning democracy is the rule of law. Ours is a nation of laws, we say. Yours should be too. And we work that prescription into foreign policy legislation of all sorts.⁵⁰

The rule of law can be a noble aspiration, and the US probably does fare better than most if not all African countries in the fair application of the law. Not always, of course. Federal bribery law defines the offering of “anything of value” to a public official “with intent to influence any official act” a crime. When GOP leadership saw they didn’t have the votes to pass the Medicare bill in the House late last year, they held the vote open for hours. During that time Rep. Nick Smith (R-MI) reported that he was offered \$100,000 for his son’s political campaign, and he was told that if he didn’t vote their way, “some of us are going to work to make sure your son doesn’t get into Congress.” House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) said his staff looked into the matter, “and there was nothing of substance there.”⁵¹

Justice concerns have to do with the substance of the law as well as its application. Look again at the USA Patriot Act, adopted after September 11th. As the Friends Committee on National Legislation summarizes, the Act reduces judicial review, limits congressional oversight, and decreases publicly-available information of administration

⁴⁵ Naomi Klein, in the *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 20, 2003.

⁴⁶ Yardley called this argument by Kevin Phillips “powerful.” “Book World,” *Washington Post*, January 11, 2004.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, November 7, 2003 and February 17, 2004.

⁴⁸ In an interview with ABC’s Diane Sawyer, quoted in a *Washington Post* editorial, December 19, 2003.

⁴⁹ In *ibid.*, May 5, 2003. See also editorials, including “Yo-Yo Economics,” in the *Post*, May 5 and 15, 2003.

⁵⁰ The African Growth and Opportunity Act, the US-Africa trade legislation, is but one example.

⁵¹ *Washington Post* editorial, December 30, 2003.

actions; increases surveillance over citizens' private information without suspicion of crime; and permits fewer protections over the rights of immigrants. Our Quaker friends also note that the Bush administration "has issued numerous other orders enhancing its powers to wage the 'war on terrorism' [without regard] for legislative or judicial oversight."⁵² Persons who are "targets" under the Act cannot disclose that they have been so named, and when the ACLU filed a lawsuit challenging the Patriot Act, they were prevented from even saying they had done so.⁵³ "The Patriot Act," Mark Medish writes, "is the civil equivalent of the administration's military doctrine of preemption. The US government can act first and investigate later."⁵⁴ I'd imagine *not* investigating is an option too.

The Justice Department takes some satisfaction that critics cannot cite specific abuses under the Patriot Act. The explanation, though, is that information about its application remains secret. When the House and Senate judiciary committees sought even summary statistics, they were told the information was classified.⁵⁵ Even so, we do know that the Justice Department jailed 762 "illegal immigrants" after September 11th. "None of them – that's precisely zero – was ever linked to terrorist activities. Yet," Richard Cohen writes, "some of them were held incommunicado for months..." refused lawyers, verbally harassed, held in solitary confinement. "To all of this, [Attorney General John] Ashcroft responded with a shrug. 'We make no apologies,' he said."⁵⁶ Videotapes discovered last December show some guards "slamming prisoners against walls."⁵⁷ For these hundreds of detainees, efforts to know even their names were thwarted.

At Guantanamo Bay, some 660 detainees from Afghanistan have been denied rights under the Geneva Convention. The Bush administration has refused to say who's being held. None has a lawyer, and the proposed military tribunals seem spurious at best. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), who visited Guantanamo last December, commented that they, the detainees, "are human beings. There is such a thing as human rights."

Is there, from our government's standpoint? Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that an "administrative panel" will review their cases each year. And there have been a few releases, based essentially on what country they come from. Britain topped the list.⁵⁸ Ah, the rule of law. *What does the Lord require of you but to do justice?*

⁵² Friends Committee on National Legislation, "Taking Freedom for Granted?" February 2003.

⁵³ *Washington Post*, May 13, 2004.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, October 19, 2003.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, September 8, 2003.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, June 10, 2003.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, December 19, 2003.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, December 13, 2003 and January 10, 2004.

Benamar Benatta, an Algerian citizen jailed on the night of September 11th, was held in federal prison, often in solitary, for 26 months, even though in November 2001 the FBI had already concluded that he had no connection with terrorism. In the case of Zacarias Moussaoui, the French citizen charged in the US for involvement in the September 11th attacks, the Bush administration has argued that they alone – not the courts – have discretion regarding how and what evidence may or may not be presented. In the case of Jose Padilla, the US citizen arrested in the US in May 2002, President Bush declared him a month later to be an "enemy combatant," and he has languished in a military prison ever since, with no criminal charges laid, and with no access to a lawyer. Finally, in December 2003, a US Court of Appeals ordered the government to charge him, declare him a material witness, or free him. We shall see.

Hady Hassan Omar, an immigrant detained on September 12th, was held for 73 days in Louisiana and is now suing the US for detention "to the level of torture." In the case of Yaser Esam Hamdi, a US citizen who surrendered with a Taliban unit in November 2001, President Bush declared him an "enemy combatant" and the government argued that he was not entitled to an attorney. When they finally relented two years later, the White House indicated that their position "remains, that enemy combatants are not legally entitled to access to counsel."

In the case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen detained in transit in New York and deported to Syria, where he was held for ten months and reportedly beaten, the Prime Minister of Canada protested that it was "completely unacceptable and deplorable" for the US not to have sent him to Canada instead. The practice is called "extraordinary rendition," where the US turns over suspected terrorists to other countries known for a "more flexible" view of torture. Mr. Arar has now sued Attorney General Ashcroft.⁵⁹

Many of these people may well be guilty of something, but if we truly embrace the rule of law, our nation should permit their opportunity to prove their innocence, or more properly, our judicial system's proving their guilt. As the Friends argue, "the trade-off between civil liberties and security is a false choice. The exercise of civil liberties does not increase the likelihood of terrorist acts."⁶⁰

If we think it can only happen to "them," we deceive ourselves.

What does the Lord require of you but to love kindness?

Look at the way our Congress adopts legislation these days as an expression of our commitment to the rule of

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, May 1, June 18, July 30, November 6, 11 and 29,

December 4, 13, and 19, 2003, and January 23, February 14 and 20, March 9, 2004; and *New York Times Magazine*, October 27, 2002.

⁶⁰ Friends Committee on National Legislation, "Taking Freedom for Granted?" February 2003.

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law. Members of both parties may not even see legislation until time to vote. Ordinary House members of the majority party have a hard time offering amendments to bills; members from the minority don't even get a chance. Conference committees – which are established to reconcile differences between bills passed in the House and Senate – sometimes remove provisions that actually appeared in both House and Senate versions, or add things no one has ever seen or debated. Democrats are frequently excluded from conference committees entirely.⁶¹

Late last year, Rep. Ralph Regula (R-OH) threatened to remove funding for every education or health project from appropriations for the Labor and the Education, Health and Human Services departments sought by the 198 Democrats who voted against the bill.⁶² It's reminiscent of the abuses of the regime of Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi, who declared in the 1990s that regions that did not vote for him could expect no development projects.

Look too at the International Criminal Court as an expression of our commitment to the rule of law. The Court was established in 2002 to try cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The Bush administration has been vehement in its opposition to the Court and put immense pressure on countries around the world to exempt the US – the exemption essentially giving US soldiers blanket immunity from prosecution. Our government says it's protecting US soldiers from "arbitrary or political prosecution." We have since suspended military aid to some 35 countries because they wouldn't go along.⁶³

The key message we have given the world is that the law does not apply to us. As horrific as the recent evidence of torture by some US soldiers in a Baghdad prison,⁶⁴ to question our nation's policies regarding the International Criminal Court is not an attack upon the integrity of our soldiers. Rather for us as people of faith, it is a recognition of the capacity of all persons for both good and evil. For us as citizens, it is a recognition that US participation in and support of international structures that hold people accountable for grave human rights abuses especially in time of war both serve our national interest and affirm human dignity. Rather than seek safeguards to protect against "arbitrary prosecution" – and arguably safeguards are unneeded, for they are already there – we have chosen to proclaim to the world that the rule of law is for "them," not us. Remember My Lai.

⁶¹ *Washington Post* editorial, November 26, 2003.

⁶² *Ibid.*, November 7, 2003.

⁶³ AFP news service, July 2, 2003, and *Business Day* (Johannesburg), July 31, 2003.

⁶⁴ There had already been reports of abuses in Afghanistan and Iraq before the graphic photos emerged in early May. *Washington Post*, March 9 and 21, 2004.

Economic justice

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Matthew 25:37-40

The abysmal economic performance of most African countries has led, appropriately, to fundamental questions about necessary “reforms.” Fair enough. The problem is – or at least begins with – the ideological mantra our nation advances, of *free trade* and the *free market*. The free market and free trade have become our domestic and international prescription. When the President (whether Bush or Clinton) spoke of “economic reform” in Africa, this is what he meant. A global free market is the foundation of relevant US legislation, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and marks the economic agenda of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The catch is, this version of economic *reform* has very little to do with economic *justice*.⁶⁵

The idea of “free” sounds appealing. Someone produces something. Someone wants something. Prices adjust to how great the supply is and how strong the demand is. The “freedom” of the market encourages competition (keeping prices down), and creativity (leading to new products and new opportunities). Left alone, without government interference, the market will find some level of equilibrium, whereby supply and demand will find balance, prices will be reasonable, and people's needs will be met. This, essentially, is the free market economy. It will serve the common good because the public will know of, and reject, companies with poor and unsafe products, unfair pricing, environmental irresponsibility and labor abuses. That's the idea.

⁶⁵ This section on economic justice draws heavily upon “Why Talk about Trade?” a part of the Washington Office on Africa's Trade Educational Packet for our Millennial Campaign for Africa in 2003.

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The free market economy historically has been seen as a system related to sovereign states, meaning that the US would uphold this system by minimizing government regulation and freeing the US-American people and US companies to produce and sell and buy and use products as the market itself defined. More recently, the term *economic globalization* has affirmed the interrelatedness of the world's economies, and the defining agenda of globalization – defined, we should point out, by the wealthiest nations in the world – has been the free market.

Free trade becomes a necessary expression of the free market agenda. In order for goods to be exchanged freely, barriers discouraging the exchange of goods across national borders need to be removed. And so free trade becomes part of the mantra. Governments should not place obstacles in the way of a truly global economy that gains its strength from the free exchange of goods.

Does the “free” market serve the common good? No. The evidence is overwhelming that an unfettered free market economy fails miserably to do so, and we don't need to look to Africa to see.

We need to have an historical memory, of the progressive movement in the United States at the beginning of the last century, of labor-organizing in the 1920s and 1930s, of civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, of environmental protection in the 1970s. Our very history demonstrates that, left alone, business will seek to maximize profits (to be fair, will sometimes simply be seeking to survive in a competitive market-place) at the expense of public safety, health, non-discrimination, fair wages, and the environment.

The Bush administration today speaks of “voluntary compliance” by businesses to these issues. But do we want our prescriptions to be safe, our food unspoiled, our jobs secure from racial and gender and disabilities discrimination? Do we want the air safe to breathe, our streams and rivers free of toxic waste? These protections come from legislation and the much-maligned *regulations*. But more than that, they come from a view that a *regulated* market economy allows individuals and companies to produce and compete, *yet allows a broader vision of the community and the social good* to offset the abuses of an unfettered free market economy.⁶⁶

Proponents of the free market say that the common good is *eventually* served as opportunities emerge for people to get themselves out of poverty. That's a dubious proposition at best, but even if it were true, it doesn't mean much for the woman seeking a living wage *now*, or the child who cannot find treatment during an illness *now*, or the

mentally-ill man living on the street who cannot secure the care and encouragement he needs *now*.

In the United States, one out of every five children lives in poverty. The number of people without health insurance in the US increased by 1.4 million in 2001 and another 2.4 million in 2002; now the estimate is well over 40 million people, according to the Census Bureau. Uninsured children number 8.5 million.⁶⁷ While accurate figures on the homeless among us are difficult to come by, the respected Urban Institute states that about 3.5 million people, 1.35 million of them children, are likely to experience homelessness in a given year. This is the free market economy at work.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

For a nation with a gross domestic product of \$9.8 trillion, by far the largest economy in the world, we may rightly ask, *Where do we see a substantive acknowledgement of the dignity of every person? Where is the common good?*

These are the fundamental questions for people concerned about economic *justice*, not economic *reform*. And when we see such poverty and human need here at home, it becomes an even more serious question when we witness our government's efforts to impose our economic system upon Africa.

But that is what we are actively seeking to do. This means that the US wants African countries to have a minimum of economic regulation. Just as recent administrations in the US have sought to roll back environmental regulations, labor rights, worker safety rules... the list is a long one... at home, we have done the same in our relations with Africa. Through the structural adjustment program of the IMF and World Bank (where we have dominant influence), through our activism at the WTO, and through our negotiated trade agreements and legislation, we have essentially told Africa that governments should not operate free health clinics, should treat water as a commodity sold by private companies for profit, should not protect its own fledgling industries... in short, in the midst of stunning poverty, should not try to serve the common good if it interferes with the free market economy.

We add to all this an insistence that African countries treat multinational corporations and local African companies “equally.” ExxonMobil has a greater economic value than at least 27 *countries*. Of the top 100 economic entities in the world, 29 are multinational corporations. The notion that small African industries can compete in such a global economy is nonsense. To treat unequal partners “equally” is unjust. This alone should lead us to look warily at this dominant economic mantra today.

⁶⁶ One can argue, of course, that even then the system does not serve the interests of those marginalized and living in poverty – the “least of these” – especially given the governance realities described above.

⁶⁷ *Washington Post* editorial, January 25, 2004.

Despite our nation's willingness to lecture Africa and the world about the free market economy, we can make no legitimate claim that, in the US, we practice what we preach. We heavily subsidize domestic agriculture, a barrier to free trade. Add to that the fact that the US "dumps" food into global markets, and African farmers are simply out of business. But it's not just US agriculture that undermines our right to lecture Africa about free trade. The Bush administration was quite willing to protect the domestic steel industry against foreign competition; that's but one example that shows that for the US to pretend that it even engages in free trade is nonsense.

To treat unequal partners "equally" is unjust.

For us to suggest that the free market agenda – our prescription for the world – works *fairly* and *justly* is absurd. In a world where almost half of the population live on less than two dollars a day, and where the assets of the world's three richest families total more than the combined wealth of the 48 most impoverished countries, such life-shattering inequities are not indications of a healthy economic system.

Of course we can rightly find a variety of explanations for these stunning and growing inequities, but it is difficult to imagine that one can simultaneously defend an economic system that is unquestionably a part, and a large part, of the explanation *and* speak of compassion. The tragedy is that our government is unprepared to explore the relationship between its economic "reform" agenda and these inequities. Indeed, it argues for more of the same. The solution, the Bush administration lectures Africa, is "free" trade. It doesn't talk at all about a vision of the common good.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

With the free market comes the corollary, that public initiatives to provide safe water or health care, education or shelter are to yield to private initiatives. They are more efficient, we are told. They are also for profit. The commodification of life itself – the notion, for example, that water, essential for life, is an economic commodity to be owned and sold to those who can afford it – is the result. The Bush administration is pushing that, by the way, pressing African governments to privatize the provision of water. They call it economic "liberalization."

The privatization agenda of this administration – even private *armies* are in Iraq today – emerges from the conservative view that government should be "small" and should not interfere in the social and economic justice issues of the day. I agree that the appropriate role of government in addressing societal concerns is worthy of debate. It was never very convincing to me that African beer production, for example, needed to be a parastatal, and I am sure we can

find US examples where private initiative is to be preferred over public control.

What is so dangerous about the Bush administration agenda, however, is that the *point of departure* is that government should not be involved, and *then* the discussion begins as to what should be done about one issue or another.⁶⁸ The effect is that the societal entity with by far the greatest resources – our government – is not to be part of the solution. Our government's getting out of the way is the solution, we are told. Leave economic forces to work it out. Never mind that the richest 225 people have a combined wealth equal to the poorest 2.5 billion people in

the world. It's not the place of government to interfere. Our government shall not interfere, and we're prepared to tell African governments that they shouldn't either.

This approach is reflected most profoundly in our nation's tax policy. President Bush touted his three stunning tax cuts as returning *our* money to *us*. It's an interesting use of pronouns. *Our* implies a community, a recognition that we have something in common. What he was really talking about was *my* money – an individualized approach to our nation. There is no sense of the common good anywhere in such an agenda.⁶⁹

The income tax came into being as a *progressive* tax, meaning that the burden increased the wealthier one was. In the interest of "fairness," the Bush tax cuts have muted the differences. The 2003 tax cut, Michael Kinsley wrote then, is "a shocking and brazen gift to the wealthy." He demonstrated that for a minimum-wage worker there "is nothing in it for her.... The fellow who has a few million or billion... probably has paid no income tax on most of the pile.... the most a person of vast wealth is expected to contribute to the commonweal from his or her last dollar of investment profits is the same 15 cents or so that a minimum-wage worker is expected to pay on his or her first dollar. He concludes that "we have a tax system that... knows who's in charge."⁷⁰

With what are truly tax cuts for the wealthy, our national debt, having risen to \$3.9 trillion in 2003, should stretch on up to \$5.8 trillion by 2009. Each of our share is nearing \$15,000.⁷¹ The Bush budget for 2005 calls for a

⁶⁸ Except, of course, when dealing with some aspects of individual behavior choice with which "social conservatives" disagree.

⁶⁹ And the public seemed, at the outset, to realize that. We had to be persuaded that we "wanted" a tax cut. Polls showed that the majority of us preferred that our government address social security or Medicare or other community needs instead.

⁷⁰ In the *Washington Post*, June 8, 2003.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, April 12, 2004.

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\$521 billion deficit, and that doesn't include further funds for Iraq and Afghanistan. Take out the current Social Security "surplus" and the year's deficit will be \$720 billion.⁷² Given how politically difficult it is to increase taxes – even if the "increase" is only letting recent cuts expire as the legislation provides – deficits will continue indefinitely. The Congressional Budget Office projects that a decade from now we'll still be seeing annual deficits well over \$300 billion.⁷³

These tax cuts and this national debt work, in an obscene way, to promote the individualistic anti-common good agenda of this administration. With increasing costs for our war of choice in Iraq, and without sufficient discretionary funds to address human need at home and abroad, the Bush administration is free to cut needed social programs and to attack those who seek funding for those living in poverty as "tax and spend liberals." It's worked before, and it's a process that has already begun for the next election. The Bush budget for 2005 cuts federal vocational and adult education by 35%, eliminates assistance to workers dislocated by FTAA, cuts housing aid for Native Americans and the elderly. It eliminates 65 federal programs and reduces another 63 significantly.⁷⁴ Having destroyed our capacity to serve the common good through government-based initiatives, we will hear the phrase "fiscal restraint" over and over, a refrain calling us to "be reasonable."

What we are faced with – this "reasonable" approach to economic realities – is in fact a radical agenda. If you are a millionaire who believes you have earned what you have on your own, if you head a corporation that doesn't want to face the cost of your own pollution, if you are convinced that those who are marginalized in our society and our world just need to deal with it themselves – then this is the agenda for you. It is not, I am convinced, a *faithful* agenda.

When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?

That's not on our national agenda today... or our agenda for Africa either.

Human dignity

***I know that the LORD maintains
the cause of the needy, and
executes justice for the poor.***

Psalms 140:12

⁷² Linda Bilmes op-ed in the *Washington Post*, February 10, 2004.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, January 27, 2004.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, February 3, 2004.

A faithful agenda is one that affirms our life in community, that speaks to the basic needs and hopes of humanity, that "does this for the least of them," that seeks the preservation of creation. It calls us to a vision of the world, and of human relationships within the world, that place justice and human dignity ahead of greed and narrow self-interest. And, it demands that we challenge our government and our economic system to serve that vision.

Consider.⁷⁵

Consider poverty.

⇒ In the United States, one out of eight – some 34,000,000 people – live in poverty. There were three million more US-Americans in poverty in 2002 than in 2000. Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

⇒ Child poverty in the United States is double the rate in other wealthy industrialized countries.⁷⁶ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

⇒ Last year people were turned away from food assistance programs in 56% of US cities, and from shelter, in 84%.⁷⁷ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. This too is wrong.

⇒ The income gap between the richest 20% of the world's population and the poorest 20% widened from 30:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

⇒ In sub-Saharan Africa, 315,000,000 people – 49% of the population – live on less than a dollar a day. This is wrong.

⇒ Twenty percent of the world's people consume 86% of the world's goods. This is wrong.

I know that the LORD maintains the cause of the needy, and executes justice for the poor.

⁷⁵ Unless otherwise documented, this data is from "Why Talk about Trade?" a part of the Washington Office on Africa's Trade Educational Packet for our Millennial Campaign for Africa in 2003, or from the UN Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2003* (New York, 2003). I recognize that many other examples, perhaps more appropriate ones, could be cited instead of what follows. The fact that there is so much to choose from simple validates the point.

⁷⁶ From the Luxembourg Income Study, cited in Timothy Smeeding's op-ed in the *Washington Post*, December 21, 2003.

⁷⁷ US Conference of Mayors survey, cited in *ibid.*, December 19, 2003.

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Consider health:

- ⇒ In the United States, the number of people without health insurance continues to soar – now well over 40 million people. Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ Recently, the Industrial Areas Foundation in Baltimore reported that the percentage of children with asthma had more than doubled since 1980. “The explosion of asthma and other respiratory problems has been triggered by the overwhelming presence of roach droppings and rat urine in the projects and tenements that house these children.”⁷⁸ From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, it is well past time to say that our priorities as a nation, as a government, are wrong.
- ⇒ Some 42 million people worldwide have the HIV virus. While the Bush administration has increased US funding to confront the global AIDS pandemic substantially, the figure remains inadequate, both in terms of need and in terms of a US fair share. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ US funding to confront the global AIDS pandemic will not support treatment using generic AIDS medications, even those that have been approved by the World Health Organization and are being used successfully. We’re sticking to US brand-name antiretroviral drugs, thank you very much.⁷⁹ This is wrong.
- ⇒ Three billion people in the world have no access to sanitation. One-and-a-third billion people have no access to clean water. From a faith perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ Over 183,000,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa are malnourished. From a justice perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ Over 12,000 African children under five die every day from preventable and treatable illnesses. This is wrong.

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Consider education:

- ⇒ One out of every five adults in the United States lacks functional literacy skills. In Africa, the overall literacy rate is 62%. Judging by the priorities we permit our government to set, these are realities we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

Consider women:

- ⇒ In the United States, half of all the families living in poverty are headed by single mothers. Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ In the United States, women earn 76.6 percent of what men earn. For African-American women, it’s 65 cents for every dollar received by white men; for Hispanic women, only 53 cents. From a faith perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ In the United States, each year approximately two million women are physically or sexually assaulted or stalked by an intimate partner.⁸⁰ This is wrong.
- ⇒ In sub-Saharan Africa, the risk of death at child-birth is fifty times higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in the United States. The percentage of women who have “skilled health personnel” present at child-birth is well below half. For some countries, like Angola, it is below a fourth; for Chad, 5%. From a faith perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ The literacy rate for African women is only 54%, 77% of the rate for men. Only 56% of girls are in primary school. This is wrong.

Consider work:

- ⇒ In the United States, despite some recent gains in employment, the last three years still show a loss of some two million jobs, and the number of workers unemployed for over six months continues to rise.⁸¹ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.
- ⇒ The minimum wage is not a living wage, and hasn’t been for years; the Department of Labor has actually provided businesses with guidelines to avoid their obligations to pay overtime;⁸² and the rights of federal workers have been undermined in the name of security.⁸³ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable.
- ⇒ The world’s biggest retailer and our country’s biggest private employer, Wal-Mart, has \$245 billion in sales based upon its exploitation of non-union labor and minimal benefits, and upon its negotiations with suppliers around the world, who can only provide products at low prices by

⁷⁸ E.J. Dionne, Jr., in the *Washington Post*, January 16, 2004.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, March 27, 2004.

⁸⁰ From National Organization for Women news releases and briefing papers. Consult their issues section at www.now.org.

⁸¹ *Washington Post*, April 3, 2004.

⁸² *Ibid.*, January 7, 2003.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, November 8, 2003.

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exploiting their own workers.⁸⁴ Judging by *our own* choices, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

⇒ Meanwhile, the average CEO is paid 282 times the wage of the average worker, with the median for CEOs of the 100 largest companies now at \$13.2 million – over \$25 for every minute of every day.⁸⁵ The current minimum wage, you'll recall, is \$5.15 per hour. This is wrong.

⇒ An estimated 23,000 qualified academic professionals leave Africa every year in search of better conditions, while AIDS is shrinking the work force.⁸⁶ This is wrong.

⇒ In Kenya, textile workers in export processing zones claim they have been threatened with dismissal should they continue associating with human rights groups that are championing better conditions for workers.⁸⁷ This is wrong.

⇒ Repression of the rights of workers to organize in Africa continues.⁸⁸ This is wrong.

I know that the LORD maintains the cause of the needy, and executes justice for the poor.

Consider the environment:

⇒ President Bush rejected the Kyoto Treaty on global warming largely on the grounds that its implementation would hurt business. His administration continues to challenge “the science” to such an extent that last year the White House demanded extensive changes in the Environmental Protection Agency’s report on the state of the environment, with the result that the report “no longer accurately represents scientific consensus on climate change,” according to one EPA staff memo. Early this year researchers said that if current rates of global warming are sustained, some 15-37% of living species will be threatened by extinction by the middle of this century.⁸⁹ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable. From a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

⇒ President Bush opposes mandatory reduction in carbon dioxide, the key villain in global warming, despite his campaign pledge, because – once again – it would “hurt” the economy. From a faith perspective, this is wrong.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, August 27 and November 6, 2003.

⁸⁵ Citing *Fortune* Magazine in an editorial in *ibid.*, September 3, 2003.

⁸⁶ *Harare Herald/AllAfrica.com*, February 19, 2004.

⁸⁷ Inter Press Service, in *This Day (Lagos)/AllAfrica.com*, May 5, 2004.

⁸⁸ *Trade Union World*, June 2002.

⁸⁹ The Associated Press, June 19, 2003; and the *Washington Post*, July 13, 2003, and January 8, 2004.

⇒ The Bush administration seeks to violate the Clean Air Act, which requires that old utilities and refineries install new pollution-control technology when they upgrade their facilities, because such a requirement would be “costly.” The resulting “energy plan” sets the administration’s priority on increased coal, oil and natural gas, with little regard for energy efficiency. They also decided to close investigations of alleged air pollution violations by 70 power plants, and closed another 13 cases against utilities.⁹⁰ This is wrong.

⇒ An EPA study in 2003 indicated that 13% of major US facilities exceeded toxic limits in water by 1,000%, 21% by 500%, and 50% by 100%, yet penalties have dropped dramatically under the Bush administration.⁹¹ This is wrong.

⇒ The Bush administration disbanded an EPA-sponsored working group that sought to reduce mercury pollution from all of the country’s coal and oil-fired power plants, presenting instead a cheaper course of action, in part by downgrading their assessment of how dangerous mercury, which does neurological damage, is.⁹² This is wrong.

⇒ Rat-poison manufacturers have succeeded in preventing EPA regulations that would protect children and wildlife, even though over 15,000 children under six accidentally ingested the poison last year.⁹³ This is wrong.

⇒ The Bush administration is opening one of the most ancient forests worldwide, Alaska’s Tongass National Forest, to the timber industry. It’s auctioning oil and gas leases in Utah, opening up what are considered “environmentally sensitive” land to development by contributors to the President’s reelection campaign.⁹⁴ And President Bush wants to exempt military bases from environmental regulation, including protection of endangered species – this in the name of national security.⁹⁵ This is wrong.

⇒ President Bush manages to advance policies hostile to God’s creation by using such terminology as “common-sense solutions” and “a comprehensive approach.”⁹⁶ Translate these terms as ones that protect corporate interests from accountability. These policies are advanced, too, by “political interference with science,” according to a congressional investigation. Such interference, they conclude, has led to “misleading statements by the President, inaccurate responses to Congress, altered web sites, suppressed agency reports, erroneous international communications, and the gagging of scientists. The subjects involved span a broad range, but they share a common

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, April 22 and November 6, 2003.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, June 6, 2003.

⁹² *Ibid.*, December 30, 2003.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, April 15, 2004.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, December 24, 2003 and March 1, 2004.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, April 23, 2004.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, April 23, 2003.

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attribute: the beneficiaries of the scientific distortions are important supporters of the President, including social conservatives and powerful industry groups.⁹⁷ Judging by the choices we permit our government to make, this is a reality we as a people find acceptable, and it's wrong.

⇒ Africa is not immune from environmental decisions in the US. Assuming "business as usual," by the 2050s much of Africa will face severe deforestation, decreasing crop yields, and greater risk of disease due to climate change. Much of the coastline from Senegal to Angola will suffer from the rise in sea level.⁹⁸ Our complicity in policies that threaten the global environment is wrong.

Meanwhile, President Bush suggests that we establish a human settlement on the moon, and take a manned flight to Mars. As fascinating as such exploration may be, given the poverty and suffering in our country and our world, from a faith perspective, from a justice perspective, this is wrong.

During the recent debate in Zambia over whether it should be defined as a "Christian nation," their Catholic bishops, in a pastoral letter, wrote that "no nation can be Christian by declaration but only by deeds, especially by the deeds of justice and concern for the poor."⁹⁹

The fact of the matter is that we in the US tolerate the poverty among us. It's not that we cannot do anything about it. We just choose not to.

The same is true in our relations to the rest of the world. We could be true partners in embracing the Millennium Development Goals, a global compact for poverty eradication that sets eight goals, with various indicators and time lines.¹⁰⁰ The US has subscribed to them, though this administration objects to references to them in legislation. And yes, the Millennium Challenge Account, the Bush administration's new development assistance initiative, envisions a substantial increase in funding for those countries (perhaps four in Africa) that meet our criteria. HIV/AIDS appropriations are also significant, though

⁹⁷ US House of Representatives, Committee on Government Reform, Minority Staff, Special Investigations Division, *Politics and Science in the Bush Administration*, August 2003, prepared for Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA).

⁹⁸ *Red Cross Red Crescent*, issue 2, 2001.

⁹⁹ Cited in a Christmas letter by Peter Henriot, Director of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Kabangwe.

¹⁰⁰ The Goals include 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. Achieve universal primary education; 3. Promote gender equality and empower women; 4. Reduce child mortality; 5. Improve maternal health; 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7. Ensure environmental sustainability; and 8. Develop a global partnership for development

inadequate. Even so, we remain the most miserly of donor nations in terms of a percentage of our wealth (GNP); we opt to act alone rather than with others; and we set conditions that serve our narrow interest in the funding we do provide. Thus while we could be true partners in embracing global poverty reduction and human development, we just choose not to.

These choices are made using appealing terminology. *Freedom* tops the list. Bill Moyers, seeing parallels with an earlier age in our checkered history, suggested that such words as *progress* and *opportunity* and *individualism* were turned into "tools for making the plunder of America sound like divine right." "No wonder," he said, "that what troubled our progressive forebears was not only the miasma of poverty in their nostrils, but the sour stink of a political system for sale."¹⁰¹

Ultimately we as a nation have become a danger to the world because we have allowed our government to misuse our stunning power, wealth and resources. We are a danger to Africa, for by seeking to define Africa's agenda and by arrogantly wielding our power to insist that they honor our definition, we prevent Africans from naming their own hopes and needs and from taking responsibility for a more hopeful future. We are a danger to Africa and the rest of the world by our unilateral and militaristic wielding of power. We are a danger to ourselves as well, for by undermining civil rights, violating human rights, and opting to protect the wealthy and powerful, we have set for ourselves an agenda that ultimately says nothing about the community and our interrelatedness as a people.

We are dangerous not because we are worse than others, but because we have the power to control the global agenda and because our misguided policies make us want to do so in a manner that serves narrow-minded self-interest.

We are called to be a good and decent people who affirm the dignity of every person as a child of God, who seek to love our universal neighbor as ourselves, and who give priority to the needs of those among us who live in an alienating poverty and marginalization. This indictment is to suggest that that is precisely what we do *not* do. And "when we diminish or destroy others in pursuit of our own wealth, prosperity and even security," Maria Riley at the Center of Concern writes, "we are at risk of losing our very soul as a people."¹⁰²

Our national agenda is so stunningly a contradiction of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we people of faith should be outraged. And yet, we are not. This manifesto calls us, in its – my – own halting and inadequate way, to return.

¹⁰¹ Speech on receiving the Lifetime Leadership Award at the Take Back America conference, June 10, 2003.

¹⁰² In *Center Focus*, issue 158, November 2002.

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I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. Ezekiel 34:16

This manifesto calls people of faith who are US citizens to...

Find our voices to confront injustice in our society and nation, recognizing that when we avoid justice activism in the political realm, we are declaring that there are aspects of human existence that are beyond the sovereignty of God.

Resolve to speak “prophetically” and forcefully about injustice and human need in our nation and in the world, recognizing that the impulse to be “balanced” and “reasonable” is wrong when it is used to treat injustice and justice “equitably.” The biblical call is to “do justice,” not “be nice.”

Accept that we are *not* God’s chosen people, that we are human, as others are, with the capacity for both good and evil, as Christian theology affirms. The indictment of the acts and priorities of our government outlined in this manifesto is not meant to say that we are somehow worse than other nations and peoples, certainly not that we or our government are evil; in fact, in many ways our institutions are worthy of admiration. The difficulty arises when we presume that our power is proof of our goodness and validates the rightness of our efforts to dominate the world with our agenda. Such a presumption stands up neither to factual scrutiny nor to sound theology.

Consider that a faithful use of our national power would be to seek to restore right relationship, which requires that we view all humanity as children of God, and that we found our relationships with our brothers and sisters upon respect and humility, not denigration and arrogance. However, right relationship does not imply a blurring of the sharp divisions within our society, where those who seek to protect property and wealth confront those who seek the common good.

Examine carefully the proposition that our national goal is not security for us alone, but security expressed through a recognition that vulnerability is global, and that most of the world lives with vulnerability constantly. Our task is *together* to discover ways to accept our common vulnerability as the foundation for a global security.

Make no presumption that by definition we and our government are committed to peace, just governance, economic justice, and human dignity. We need to look toward our African partners as ones who face difficulties the extremes of which may often exceed ours, but accept that we face, and are responsible for, similar failures.

Explore the reality that Africa has insights, gifts, goodness, and ways of being community from which we can learn. Our government needs to overcome its arrogant behavior and demonstrate an openness to alternatives that we did not initiate.

Work in solidarity. There are obstacles to becoming effective partners with Africans in justice advocacy, but we need to find ways to confront those with power and wealth who control our political and economic institutions, *together*. In particular, we need to welcome African voices in confronting US-American injustice.

Insist that our government work for a just peace, through multinational structures, wherever there is conflict. Our nation needs to repudiate a doctrine of military *preemption* and open-ended war.

Insist that our government undertake fundamental changes in our own governance, so that the corrupt environment in which decisions are now made ends. When we accept our own failures at just governance and work cooperatively with other nations, the vision of just governance will have a chance at emerging throughout the world.

Insist that our government give economic priority to the fundamental needs of all people, that their – our – essential needs be met, rather than that we protect and reward those with wealth far beyond their needs. Our policies need to promote economic relations that advance human development and poverty reduction around the world, rather than an increasing division into a world of obscene wealth and extreme poverty.

Demand that we as a nation reset our priorities to embrace the alienated and poor in our own society, and those whose essential human dignity is violated each day in Africa and throughout the world. By placing poverty reduction ahead of an out-of-control military budget, diplomacy ahead of militarism, and the basic needs of all people ahead of corporate profit, we would begin to give meaning to an elusive common good, and the dignity of all would begin to be respected and advanced.

A PERSONAL MANIFESTO FOR JUSTICE IN AFRICA AND THE UNITED STATES

A different nation and world are possible – not perfect worlds, but worlds that are somehow better because we have sought to be a good people, not a powerful nation and dominating power. The power is there, of course. To have secured such stunning power, the United States now has the potential to advance the common good. We fail abysmally. We have made choices, in economic policy and political process, that prevent the realization of that potential.

We are in *no* position as a nation – as so many in Africa are – to say that we lack the resources to keep children from dying of preventable diseases, or to provide meaningful employment, or food and clothing and shelter. *We have the resources.* We just make tragic choices, and people are suffering and dying from them, here and in Africa.

It is time – past time – for people in our Christian tradition, in other faiths, and for those for whom faith is unimportant, to find strong voices declaring that what we as a nation have done with our power is unacceptable to us. It is time for us to confront the tragic abuse of power that poses as *our* caring and compassionate government.

A luta continua. The struggle continues. And, I pray, not just in Africa.

I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

*Leon Spencer
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