

TENTMAKERS

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A CLERGYMAN'S SECURITY

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By next April those of us who have not already entered the federal social security scheme will have to decide whether or not to enter it. * The decision once made is ~~irrevocable~~. ~~Most of our parishioners have no choice.~~ They are forced by law to enter the plan. Ministers who have not yet entered the plan have until April to decide whether or not they will participate. Clergymen near retirement age will probably gain financially by entering. Others with large families feel that social security provides good insurance for their wives and children – an insurance that they may not be able to afford otherwise on their small salaries.

It seems evident that from the standpoint of sound economics, appearances of getting something for nothing to the contrary notwithstanding, social security is bound to be a poor investment. Other forms of investment bring far better returns from the simple fact that the money is being used creatively and realizes a profit. The taxes paid to the government as social security taxes, on the other hand, are currently spent and not invested profitably. Economists, however, can demonstrate the financial unsoundness of social security as an investment far better than I can. ¹

To clergymen whose field is theology and not economics, the question arises as to whether there are any other criteria by which ~~we can decide whether or not to enter this plan.~~ Is the matter in any way related to morals? Is it related in any way to the laws of God? If the issues involved are moral ones, then we, as clergymen, ought to be able not only to decide for ourselves but also to give leadership to others who look to us for guidance in the realm of morals.

In the brief compass of this letter I can touch upon only a few of the ways in which the social security scheme violates the moral law of God. The moral law of God is succinctly summarized in the Ten Commandments. The Christian belief is that disobedience to these commands of God constitutes sin.

"Thou Shalt Not Kill"

One of the Commandments in God's moral law states, ~~"Thou shalt not kill."~~ Are we not agreed that this command forbids not only overt acts of murder but all coercion and violence except for the restraint of evil? I once had the unhappy experience of being robbed by a group of armed bandits. When argument failed and the gun of one of the bandits was waved at my head amidst threats to myself and family, I met their demands and parted with the little money I had on hand. These particular bandits were probably men of less material possessions than myself and their act of violence made for a greater equality in our status. But even so, did that justify their act? All of us would agree that it did not. But is there any difference from the point of view of morality, in the government, under the cloak of legislation, forcing its citizens to pay social security taxes in order to help provide for the aged? Is this act of coercion on the part of the government any less a violation of the command of God than the above act of the bandits?

The government through its social security legislation uses force as a means to its ends. Can coercion on the part of the government except for the purpose of restraining evil ever be countenanced by the Christian citizen as in accord with God's law? ~~Compulsory taxation~~ by the government for any other reason than to obtain funds for the proper function of government cannot be sanctioned as in accord with the moral law.

The government also through this legislation uses compulsion to retire people at the age of sixty-five. It would be hard for the most enthusiastic advocate of the Welfare State to justify such compulsion as in any way in accord with the moral law of God. The prohibitions of the moral law as it relates to man's relationship with man gives the individual freedom except to harm or to do evil to others. Coercion to retire at a certain age and compulsion to support so-called "charity" schemes of government are quite opposed to the command that forbids the use of force except to restrain evil.

"Thou Shalt Not Steal"

Another one of God's commands in the moral law

¹ See Paul L. Poirot's booklet, *Social Security*. Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y., Foundation for Economic Education, Inc. Single copy on request.

reads, "Thou shalt not steal." Stealing is in violation of the moral law whether done by a bandit with a gun or by the State under the cloak of legislation. Stealing is no less theft if the money is used for benevolent purposes than if it is used for evil purposes. The social security tax is a way of taking money from one taxpayer in order to give it to another person or group. It is the robbing of Peter to pay Paul.

Our Lord gives us a fuller application of this Commandment in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Here Jesus teaches thrift and a wise use of money. It is a sin for one to waste, destroy, or not to make good use of his material possessions. The law of God, however, is just as mandatory for the State as for the individual. The taxes collected for social security are being currently spent by the government rather than invested to bring a profitable return. This is certainly poor stewardship. The State has no more right to be careless with public funds than the individual does with his own money.

The government under the social security legislation assumes financial obligations for those retired over sixty-five years of age. The funds collected for this purpose fall far short of the amount the government is obligated to pay. The government, however, can and does meet its obligations by its monetary policies that inflate the currency. So while actually paying the number of dollars promised, the real value of the dollars is so reduced that the recipient receives far less than he had reason to expect from the promise of the government. Can this in any way be justified on the basis of God's command, "Thou shalt not steal"?

"Honor Thy Parents"

Another one of God's commands in the moral law reads, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." One can hardly properly fulfill this command by turning over the care of his aged parents to the State. There is none of the warmth of filial love and devotion in government "charity." Charity according to God's Word is always voluntary. Children are to care for their parents as an act of love and gratitude to them. The New Testament teaches that the Church through its deacons is to care for those otherwise neglected. Nowhere in the Bible is charity looked upon as a work of the State. To turn this work over to the State is to deny to individuals and the Church their God-given responsibility and privilege to care for the needy.

A notion prevalent today even among clergymen is that since individuals are not as charitable as they should be,

the State must by taxation and schemes of "charity" make up for this lack. History refutes the notion that "charity" of the State ever leads to anything but injustice and tyranny. Give the State the power to administer "charity" by force and you have taken the heart out of charity. Even worse than that, you are saying that the State is not subject to the law of God as individuals are. Charity is certainly a Christian obligation. However, the obligation that men have to their elders and others is one of love, respect, and voluntary assistance in time of material need. There is no such thing as charity by force.

The Morality of Social Security

The whole question of social security is in its very roots a moral one. The choice which faces us as clergymen ought not to be a difficult one to make. We are leaders in spiritual matters. Christian morality relates to every phase of man's life and also to the State. Do we not forfeit our right to speak on matters of morals if, when given the freedom of choice in a matter that involves obedience to the laws of God, we choose to disobey God for some hoped-for material reward or for some other reason? Let our voices be heard clearly against all sin, be it the sin of individuals directly or of individuals through their elected representatives in government. As for me, I feel that I must set an example of respect for the law of God by choosing to stay out of this government scheme that is opposed to God's law.

Editor's Note: In a transmittal note, the Reverend Mr. Mahaffy, who formerly served as a missionary of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Eritrea, East Africa, explains that his views about social security have grown out of a long correspondence with a group of ministers.

"Most of us have been trained in theology," he says, "but have given very little thought to the relationship of God's law to the Welfare State. It is my conviction that only as ministers realize that these problems are basically questions of Christian morals, will they give enthusiastic leadership to help guard our God-given freedoms. I have written this article in the form of an Open Letter to Fellow Clergymen in the hope that it will contribute to the end."

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