

The idea of a 'faithful budget'

Maureen Fiedler | Mar. 26, 2012 NCR Today

There is no record in the Gospels that Jesus ever drew up a budget for anything. Nor, as far as I know, is there any church teaching about budgeting, personal or public.

But budgets are nonetheless concrete statements of values and priorities. "For where your treasure is, there is your heart ..." And this is the season for public budgets, to be sure.

So it is exciting to see that there is a "faithful budget" on the scene this year, put together by a coalition of Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders. It lays out priorities different from those of *either* President Barack Obama or Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI).

The basic message of these religious leaders, representing 35 different denominations or faith groups, is this:

Act with mercy and justice by serving the common good, robustly funding support for poor and vulnerable people, both at home and abroad, and exercising proper care and keeping of the earth.

It is wonderful to hear from groups who understand the difference between charity (choosing to share goods through individual or group benevolence) and justice (creating public structures and policies that promote economic justice and fairness).

Among those groups is a strong coalition of Catholic organizations:

- NETWORK: a Catholic Social Justice Lobby
- Franciscan Action Network
- Jesuit Conference
- Center of Concern
- Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns
- Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
- National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious
- Conference of Major Superiors of Men
- Institute Leadership Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
- Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
- Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, and
- Pax Christi USA

This faithful budget calls for fiscal responsibility while increasing support for the poor and vulnerable. It does this by focusing on job creation and economic revitalization, a fair and equitable tax system and lower military spending.

It quotes the scriptures of all three Abrahamic traditions:

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" -- Isaiah 58

"The Spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from our God." -- Jesus' words in Luke 4:18-19

"Never shall you attain to true piety unless you spend on others out of what you cherish yourselves; and whatever you spend -- verily, God has full knowledge thereof." -- The Holy Qur'an 3:92

I have not checked out the numbers in this faithful budget, but whatever they are, I'm sure this document could not get a passing number of votes on Capitol Hill.

But I wonder: If these were the messages heard from our pulpits (in many faith traditions) rather than the rants about contraception or same-sex marriage, the impossible might become possible, and we might move a step closer to a more just and equitable society.

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