

Look Back | Will We Recover from Our Nation's Moral Deficits?

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When something has been said so well, so often, by so many, you wonder about stepping to the microphone of our collective reflection to say again what seems so obvious.

But if the recent battle to claim our guiding narrative has taught us anything, it has made clear that repetition is the key to success in getting ideas embraced.

Whatever is said most often, it seems, is accepted as the truth. So maybe we need to keep on saying some things, even though they have been better said before.

The focus of public attention on our economic deficits addresses a real problem. A multigenerational pattern of economic carelessness, coupled with a very effective exploitation of that carelessness by some who knew how to take advantage of the opportunity, has created an economic problem that cannot be denied.

Responses to the problem have been contentious and across the spectrum, from well-meaning to just plain mean. And that debate will continue.

What seems evident to the many who have looked through the lens of a biblical faith at the current menu of issues - economic recovery, immigration challenges, religious extremism, our collective responsibility as citizens - is that our economic deficit is not our only one, and maybe not even the most important.

The urgency of an economic challenge that will be passed on to future generations has called forth responses that reveal a moral deficit whose impact on our grandchildren and beyond will be even more devastating if not addressed.

[Insightful voices](#) have noted how economic proposals (that is, “spending cuts”) have favored those who continue to do quite well economically at the expense of those who need the most help.

[People “on the ground”](#) in the area of immigration concern have reminded us that much of the rhetoric of “immigration reform” proposals is based on inaccurate assumptions and “facts” designed to incite fear rather than provide light.

Care and concern for the poor, hospitality toward the alien and the stranger, advocacy for the less powerful, and the sacrament of shared sacrifice get dressed up as devils to be fought rather than as avenues to the new kingdom intended to be among us.

Perhaps most disturbing and revealing of all is the ease with which committed members of our faith communities can get drawn into this pattern of demonizing the voices that call us to our core values and become advocates of a counterfeit covenant and a disguised gospel, preferring comfortable fictions to challenging truths.

On this level, little of this is new.

When prophetic voices addressed this process long ago in ancient Israel, they spoke with Amos. “Hear this, you who trample the needy and bring ruin to the poor of the land, saying ... we will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 8:4-6).

Matthew reports Jesus addressing the self-righteous of his day as “hypocrites ... whited sepulcher” - looking all nice and beautiful on the outside while concealing inside the decaying evidence of life once lived (Matthew 23:27).

Our history reminds us that heresy is an ever-present danger for those whose treasure is in earthen vessels.

The danger of heresy is not that it is a head-on attack on a faith experience and its interpretation.

Rather, heresy is a subtle distortion, often couched in very appealing and relevant terms, which has all the appearance of faithfulness, but when followed to its consequences and conclusion clearly misrepresents what it claims to offer.

The heresy of a carefully coifed and costumed political gospel is alive and well among us, and it is leading us to the consequence of a morality that is a far cry from the kind of community espoused by the Master.

The good news, though, is that there is something else that isn't new in this matter of moral deficits: the opportunity to redirect one's thinking and embrace a different agenda for restoration that will have a holistic focus.

After his own indictment of religious superficiality and corruption, Isaiah voices the Word of Yahweh: “Come let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow ... if you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword” (Isaiah 1:18-20).

Economic deficits have long-lasting consequences and require many years to repair.

Moral deficits also have severe consequences, but they begin to be repaired in the relatively simple choice of which voices we choose to listen to. Maybe we all need to keep saying that.