

## RELIGION &amp; PHILOSOPHY

one's benevolence is directed toward humanity as a whole, the less one is able to extend that special form of aid which one friend can give another.

Kekes does not argue for ignoring those in need outside of one's inner circle of friends, but rather that one's aid should not be grounded merely on a vague and general desire to "do good." People may properly be moved to save starving children or innocents under torture, for example, out of their particular sense of justice or decency.

There are many motives for acting charitably toward strangers, Kekes concludes—duty, prudence, avoidance of guilt or shame. But relying purely on benevolence as the grounds for aiding others produces an "unpersuasive and indefensible morality."

*Protestant Ethics*

"Protestantism and Poverty" by Max L. Stackhouse, in *This World* (Spring 1987), 934 North Main St., Rockford, Ill. 61103.

What actions should Protestants take to aid the poor? This question has been intensely debated by clergy and laymen in recent years. Does the "Protestant ethic" mean that people can escape poverty only by their own unassisted efforts? Or should Protestants follow the path of "liberation theology," and strive to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor?

These questions, says Stackhouse, professor of Christian social ethics and stewardship at Andover Newton Theological School, are not new. They have been debated ever since the Reformation began more than four centuries ago.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) divided poor people into two classes. Those who became poor "by force of circumstances" (such as old age or illness) were worthy recipients of church aid. But Luther had little patience for those who freely chose a life of poverty. He barred his priests from begging (a centuries-old practice in the Catholic church) and taught that only hard work could create riches. "It is not fitting that one man should live in idleness on another's labor," Luther wrote.

Thomas Müntzer (1490–1525) argued that the direct experience of the Holy Spirit, felt most acutely by the suffering poor, was the essence of Christianity. Therefore, he wrote, these "fighters and heralds," blessed with the light of the Holy Spirit, should be "an armed community of prophets" and fight the godless. Müntzer was executed after a "Peasants Revolt" that he led against the German nobility was crushed.

Luther's intellectual heirs include John Calvin (1509–1564), who taught that the "blessing of the Lord is on the hands of him who works," and the 17th-century Puritans, who created "limited-liability" associations, the precursors of the modern corporation. Müntzer's spiritual descendants include the Pietists, whose belief in the blessedness of the poor led to the creation of dozens of schools and hospitals, and Georg Hegel (1770–1831), who used Müntzer's theology to create a "scientific" metaphysics which held that historical change began with spiritual awakening.

Stackhouse concludes with a hope that the heirs of Müntzer and Luther will fuse their thought into a new synthesis. Their inability to confront change, he warns, might even signal "the end of the Protestant Era."