

## **Saving the Soul of the Nation**

In Matthew's Gospel we find one of the most discomfiting of Jesus' stories, that of a final dispensation, when the "Son of Man" will judge "all the nations," separating the people who are "sheep" from those judged to be "goats." The criterion for this judgment will not be right belief, but the doing of right actions--in particular, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. It is noteworthy that this story speaks of a universal judgment of the peoples of "all the nations."

How would we who are Americans fare in such judgment? It is frequently pointed out that only a fraction of what our nation has expended in Afghanistan and Iraq would be necessary to provide clean water to virtually all of the planet's inhabitants, and feed them as well. Adequate food and clean water would also effect drastic reductions in illness and death rates, and especially infant mortality rates due to malnourishment and unsafe water. Agricultural assistance and/or micro-loans could help effect quantum leaps in human well-being around the globe. Our country has more than enough resources. In most cases the major barriers would be political, not economic. Welcoming the stranger would require more open, rather than restrictive, immigration policies. Looking after those in prison would demand a different mind-set from the current culture of punishment, solitary confinement, and indefinite pre-judicial detention.

In short, most Americans today would be among the goats, not the sheep, in such a dispensation. Whatever we are doing to care for the world's needy, it falls unconscionably short of what we could do. And the answer is not simply for non-governmental organizations to fill the void. In many cases NGOs are hamstrung by US policies abroad. Their resources are hardly equal to the task.

Imagine the good will that would attend a full-scale effort by our nation to make meeting the needs of the world's most dispossessed the centerpiece of our foreign policy! What better way to counter terrorism than to help others help themselves! It will take time to win the trust of other peoples and nations. We've squandered all the good will that came our way after 9/11, and made the world an increasingly more desperate and dangerous place. But it's hard to see what other options we have if we are to save the soul of the nation.

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