

Health Care for Everyone: A Moral Obligation

Availability of adequate health care is badly skewed in the United States. While we have extraordinary medical resources, millions of our citizens have only minimal access to basic necessities of treatment. More than 45 million lack insurance coverage; millions more are subject to the vagaries of loss of coverage due to unemployment, various policy exclusions, and often bankrupting financial burdens.

We believe that our society has a moral obligation to correct this injustice. For too long we have tended to view health care as a privilege to be earned or acquired by good fortune. It is time now to recognize it as a basic right to be sustained by enlightened public policy.

We believe that the core values of our society underwrite this obligation. Values inherent in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures stand at the headwaters of the American moral tradition. These ancient texts envision values rooted in a good order of creation: the social bonding of an inclusive community, wherein love for neighbor is a corollary of love for God, and the mutual obligation to extend human care to the dispossessed and marginalized neighbors among us. Such humane values are broadly shared among other spiritual and moral traditions as well.

We believe that biblical faith is not merely individualistic and otherworldly, but has immediate implications for social justice as well. The Hebrew prophets cry out urgently and repeatedly for this. Isaiah contrasts empty religious observance with the neglected community imperative to “seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (1:17).

Jesus speaks often of God’s reigning compassion not just beyond us but already among us (Luke 17:20-21). He reaffirms the commandments of love for God and neighbor as sum and substance of the divine imperative for our lives (Matthew 22:34-40). In vivid metaphor, Matthew’s Gospel envisions final judgment as separating those who have shown compassion for the suffering—the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner—and those who have not. “Truly I tell you,” says the Lord as depicted in the parable, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (25:31-46).

The moral mandate of love for neighbor must be made effective through practical structures of social justice. We believe it is incumbent upon our society to attend to this obligation. To this end, we endorse the efforts of the President and Congress to enact comprehensive health care reform legislation, including a viable public option.