

**THE PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE  
FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER**

**“LIFTING UP THE POOR:  
A DIALOGUE ON RELIGION, POVERTY  
AND WELFARE REFORM”**

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2003  
10:00 AM – 12:00 NOON**

**MODERATORS:**

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**FEATURED SPEAKERS:**

**MARY JO BANE**

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*Transcript by:  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

**E.J. DIONNE, JR.:** I would like us to begin, if we could. (Glass clinking.) Thank you, Ron. He used to run the Ways and Means Committee, so he's used to forcing order.

Welcome to all of you. Looking that folks in this room, this event would be worth having if we didn't have anybody up here. This is an extraordinary collection of people who care passionately about poverty and welfare and know what they're talking about. So first and foremost, I want to thank you all for coming.

I'm going to break with usual practice at events such as this and thank everybody I want to thank at the beginning because I think this is going to be a very exciting discussion, and I don't want to forget to do that at the end. Above all, and I will thank them again, I want to thank Larry Mead and Mary Jo Bane for their willingness to engage in this endeavor. As I will explain, this is the first in a series of dialogues, and we couldn't have had better people to do it.

I want to thank Rebecca Rimel and Luis Lugo of The Pew Charitable Trusts, who have supported this project and have supported our projects over a long period of time, and were courageous enough to let us take the chance on this series of dialogues. Luis, as some of you know, will become the director of the Pew Forum in a few months.

I also want to thank Melissa Rogers, the former executive director of the Pew Forum. The Pew Forum wouldn't have happened without her. Melissa, are you in the room? Melissa was here a moment ago. I just want to say a million thank-yous to Melissa, and also to Sandy Stencel, who has done such a great job, and the entire forum staff: Staci Simmons Waldvogel, Heather Morton, Grace McMillan, Kirsten Hunter. I also want to thank Katherine Moore, and above all, Kayla Meltzer Drogosz, who took the lead in organizing the event and did everything to make this work possible. Bless you, Kayla, and thank you.

We're indebted to Ron Haskins and Belle Sawhill for encouraging enthusiastically this collaborative effort with the Welfare Reform and Beyond Initiative, which so many people in this room have worked with in the past. A special thanks to Julie Clover, Joe Johnston, Andrea Kane and others from that project. A special thanks also to Bob Ferrety, who was excited about this project and jumped into it; it couldn't have happened without him. And to all the great people at the Brookings Press, thank you. By the way, the book is available today at a 20 percent discount. And since this is entirely a not-for-profit endeavor, you can know that this 20 percent doesn't even come out of our profits; it just goes to you.

I want to begin with the way the book begins, which is to ask, do prophets have useful things to say to politicians about appropriate policies toward the poor? Do social scientists reveal truths about the causes of poverty? Can religious sensibilities clarify our thinking about poverty? To all these questions, Mary Jo Bane and Larry Mead answered yes, and bless them for doing so because we wouldn't have had a book if they had actually answered all those questions no. The prophets have very much to teach us about

poverty and so do policy specialists, and those policy specialists can even be informed by their religious sensibilities and convictions. And that's what Mary Jo and Larry have done, and that is why their project is so exciting.

Hugh Heclo once said, "Government policy and religious matters are not the same thing, but neither do they exist in isolation from each other. The two are distinct but not separate from each other. The two domains intertwine," Heclo went on, "because both claim to give authoritative answers to important questions about how people should live." Heclo's words apply especially to the issue of poverty, a matter on which all of the great religious traditions have a great deal to say.

This book and the series of which it is part are built on the idea that religion always has and always will play an important role in American public life. Religion is not the only factor in public policy debates. Many who come to the public square reach their conclusions on matters of import, including poverty, for practical and ethical reasons that have little or nothing to do with faith, yet religious and secular alike can agree, I think, that our public deliberations are more honest and more enlightening when the participants are open and reflective about the interactions between their religious convictions and their commitments in the secular realm.

And it's our view that this doesn't happen often enough. Some participants in the public debate feel they will be misunderstood if they talk about their faith. Many worry, understandably, that being explicit about their religious convictions and faith commitments will be misinterpreted as an attempt to impose their religious views on the unwilling.

So Mary Jo Bane and Larry Mead should therefore be saluted for being willing to bring their respective faith traditions, political commitments and academic and public policy commitments together in their moving and pointed discussion of one of the most important issues facing our nation. I think all who care about poverty and the prospects of the poor recognize Bane and Mead as two of the most brilliant voices in our national debate about poverty, but we suspect that few who know their work also knew of the importance of their religious faith to their understanding about society's obligations to the poor.

Their ability to combine rigorous policy analysis with serious theological reflection I think might serve as a model for those who believe that religious voices have much to contribute to our nation's public life. In wrestling with each other's positions, Bane and Mead allow all who enter their conversation the chance to sort out for themselves why they believe what they believe about poverty and its alleviation. Thus does the religious imagination offer a gift to secular discourse.

One of the great things about this dialogue is that Mary Jo and Larry are friends who disagree, and at this moment in our political debate, that is very helpful. We have a lot of disagreement in Washington; there is no shortage of that. It's rare to have friends who can actually have the kind of dialogue that they have had: passionately disagree and

care about these matters, and yet talk about them in a humane, decent and civil way. And I thank them, although I really want them to mix it up today. They shouldn't take that as an invitation to too much civility.

We will have transcripts of this morning's discussion available early next week. You will find them at the Pew Forum Web site, [www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org), and at the Brookings Web site, [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our panel, including Ron Haskins. And again, Ron, thank you for all your help putting this together.

Mary Jo Bane is the Thornton Bradshaw Professor of Public Policy and Management at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. From 1993 to 1996, she was assistant secretary for children and families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She resigned from that position after President Clinton signed the 1996 welfare reform law that Ron Haskins wrote – that's not in the text. (laughter) From 1992 to 1993, she was commissioner of the New York State Department of Social Services, where she also served as executive deputy commissioner from 1984 to 1986. She was a professor at the Kennedy School from '87 to '92. She was director of The Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy. She's the author of a number of books on poverty, welfare and families, including *Welfare Realities* and *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*. That is a superb collection of essays, by the way, for those of you who have not seen it.

Larry Mead is a professor of politics at New York University, where he teaches public policy and American government. He has been – this is a great list – a visiting professor at Harvard, Princeton, the University of Wisconsin and the Hoover Institution at Stanford. He has written a number of books, including *Beyond Entitlement*, *The New Politics of Poverty* and *The New Paternalism*. Together, these books set out much of the theory and practice for mandatory work programs. You will hear some of the fruit of this labor in this dialogue. He has published many journal articles. Before going to NYU in 1979, he held several public policy and research positions in and around the federal government.

And now to the sainted Ron Haskins, who will be moderating this with me. Ron is a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution and a senior consultant at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In 2002, he was senior advisor to the president for welfare policy at the White House. He was majority staff director for the subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee that was involved in social welfare and all aspects of this question. He has co-edited several books, including *Welfare Reform and Beyond: The Future of the Safety Net*, *The New World of Welfare*, both Brookings books, *Policies for America's Public Schools*.

Mary Jo and Larry wanted Larry to go first today; that is the first thing they did agree on. And so, Larry Mead, I really want to thank you for doing the book and being here with us today.

**LAWRENCE M. MEAD:** Normally Mary Jo does go first, but we just thought that the sequence of our remarks would fit better if I went first. Let me apologize for the state of my voice, which is recovering from a cold. I want to thank many friends and associates for coming today. I really feel honored to have you all here.

I want to express gratitude to Pew and E.J. and Kayla and all those involved in making this project possible. For reasons I cannot totally explain, this has been a deeply satisfying enterprise. I can only say that in some way the spirit has come upon us, and that's about the only explanation I have.

To borrow a phrase from *Star Wars*, welfare reform created a “disturbance in the force.” It flouted what had been the orthodoxy in Washington for dealing with poverty, and it did this in two respects.

At a policy level, welfare reform rejected the view that had prevailed among most experts that the poor were kept from working and escaping poverty by a set of social barriers outside themselves. This implied that it was wrong to require poor adults to work. Rather, we should provide them with better opportunities, and then they would be able to work and escape poverty. Welfare reform said instead that we should go ahead and enforce work now, with the view that there were and would be sufficient jobs and other opportunities available to people leaving welfare.

Second, at a moral level, reform rejected the view that was, I think, dominant in Washington up until the '90s, that the poor were to be seen as victims to whom society owed an essentially unilateral obligation. These are people we should help, but we should not expect them to do anything in return. Instead, reform said no, we are going to expect that people work in return for assistance.

It's now almost 10 years after the welfare rolls began to fall, and I think it's fair to say that the disturbance in policy discourse has mostly been resolved. The effects of reform are moderately clear at this point. They are overwhelmingly positive, if not entirely so. It is now clear that barriers did not prevent a great many more welfare mothers going to work than anybody thought was possible at the outset. Of course, a good economy gets some of the credit, as does the Earned Income Tax Credit and other public subsidies.

It's also clear that it's not enough just to enforce work. We also have to do more to raise the earnings of mothers who have gone to work and we have to do something more to involve the fathers of welfare families. These are the two unanswered challenges that I think we still face.

So it's fair to say that at a policy level, reform is a success, but it's also incomplete. It remains a work in progress. I think at a policy level, we have some degree of consensus.

At a moral level, however, I would say the disturbance is not yet resolved. Many people who care about poverty deeply were offended by the way in which reform was carried out, the flagrant opposition that it expressed to what had been an accepted point of view. Many people who feel this way felt that reform violated the fundamental norm that society ought to give the poor whatever they need to survive, with no questions asked, and if we didn't do that, it simply reflected a lack of social generosity. Now, those who feel this way, it seems to me, have to reckon with the success of reform, because reform, although it did appear harsh, did have mostly good effects. And in public policy, good effects are the bottom line, that's what we finally care about.

But I think it's fair to say that the moral issue is unresolved, that we have not, in fact, reached a consensus about this, and there are two basic reasons for that. One of them is that attitudes about morals relating to poverty or other questions often are related to religion, and religion is something that we don't talk about in this country because we believe in a separation of church and state. So these matters are off stage; we don't really discuss them openly.

What you find among many people who follow poverty questions at conferences and at public discussions, you find a generalized earnestness, a kind of concern for the poor that overrides everything else, and there is this fascination with the latest data about what's happening to them down there, and we have this great concern to care for them. I often sense that that concern ultimately goes back to biblical confusions about who the poor are and what we owe them, but it's never discussed. Those ultimate roots of our concern are off stage.

There can be a second reason as well why these matters are unresolved, and that is that most of the research about welfare reform is relentlessly technical. It focuses on the concrete economic and social effects of reform. These are very important matters, of course, but they leave a lot undiscussed. A day never goes by when I don't get some e-mail from one of the research projects describing some new finding about the concrete effects of reform. Sometimes I want to scream out, enough already, enough already! ... What's remarkable is how little is said about other dimensions, about the effects of the institutions, the effects on government itself. That's the place where I focus my own research, and here, in fact, there's a tremendous story to tell.

It seems to me welfare reform is a triumph for government. This is often seen as an anti-government enterprise. Quite the contrary: this has been a victory, a triumph for government of the highest order. Take Wisconsin, for example. I have a book on Wisconsin coming out early next year, and here you see a master in dealing with the political and administrative dimensions of reform. It is quite inspiring. This is not an anti-government proceeding; in fact, it provides a basis for renewed conviction, that there can be an effective welfare state. So we're talking about statecraft, but above all there is almost no serious reflection about the explicit moral dimensions of the question, and, again, that's because we don't talk about these things openly.

What I think Mary Jo and I do in this book is try to bring into the open this missing dimension of our policy debate. To some extent we do discuss policy, but in that dimension our differences are less than they once were. Much more, we discuss what our biblical tradition says we ought to do about poverty. We operate in a biblical context familiar to Christians and Jews, but in other faiths – Islam or Buddhism, for example – have comparable issues. We try to interpret our traditions so that they apply to what government has done. This, in part, involves critiquing what government has done and finding it inadequate in certain respects, but it also involves criticizing our tradition in light of the success that we have had, because I think welfare reform does in fact bring into question some of the traditional attitudes towards the poverty obligation.

By bringing this debate out into the open, we find we are meeting a need that wasn't met before. We are not only authors of this book, but we have taken our debate on the road and we have spoken in front of several seminaries to bring them into this, and we find that people are absolutely riveted by what we have to say. It is not that they necessarily agree what we have to say. Quite the contrary: they may have very different views, but they're fascinated to hear open debate that connects religion and public policy in this explicit way, and that, I think, indicates the premise of the Pew project.

Where do we disagree? Mary Jo defends a tradition known as Catholic social teaching. It's a complex and eminent tradition in many respects. It, I think, makes three central assertions. One is that dealing with economic need and inequality is a central concern of the Bible. Secondly, that there is a preferential option for the poor. And thirdly, that the poor are to be helped on a non-judgmental basis, without stipulations about lifestyle. And many Protestant and Jewish groups take similar positions.

My own view, based largely simply on reading the Bible, is that in the Bible, there is a concern for helping the poor indeed, but doing this is not invested only in terms of economic need or equality. There is also a concern for the agency and autonomy of the poor. I see no preference for the poor. I see, in fact, a concern for people in trouble from various walks of life, rich and poor alike. I also don't see a stipulation that helping the poor can involve no expectations for them. In fact, there's a concern for good behavior, for doing the right thing. There is also a concern for forgiveness, for mercy, but the law is there as a statement of what we should do, the things that we ought to try to do.

A way to express this in general is that in the New Testament, I see Jesus as being responsive to the poor rather than protective. Our usual stance towards them is to be protective. We have people who are concerned about poverty who come to government and say, "There are these people suffering out there, these people who are at risk, who are vulnerable, and we should do things to protect them."

Well, I don't see that occurring in the Bible. What I see is that Jesus expects the poor to come to him and ask for things. He assumes that they can deal with their life, that they are fundamentally responsible for their life. They come to him and he responds to them very generously, but he does not take the initiative. He does not declare a need for

some new dispensation of justice. He's concerned about justice, but above all because of what it says about the mentality of the rich, who he also wants to save. But he does not act proactively. He does not take protective measures for the poor. He assumes that they should, in fact, come to him, and they do. And then he often admonishes them about what to do next. So there's a dialogue in which the wish, the will, the request of the poor person is actually primary.

I won't go into the policy questions surrounding welfare reauthorization; we can talk about those if you like in the questions. I think this position does imply a generalized support for our present policy and also for what the administration is proposing, but not in all respects. I think in some respects the administration is overreaching. We should not overreach. At the same time, we should not go back to the policy we had, which I think is inconsistent with the perspective that I have laid out.

Let me sum up by saying simply that I think the role of government is fundamental in reform. Reform is a triumph for the government, both political and administrative. We have much to be thankful for in our leaders and our administrators, and, indeed, the Wisconsin book, I dedicated to the welfare administrators of the state and the nation. But religion shapes our goals, our conception of what we should do, so it's always in the background. So I can sum it up in two classical phrases. Politics is the master science, but theology is the queen of the sciences. (Applause.)

**MARY JO BANE:** There are some seats up here in the front for anyone who is brave enough to –

**MR.DIONNE:** It's just like church. (Laughter.)

**MS. BANE:** Yes, it's just like church.

Let me echo E.J. and Larry in thanking you all for coming. This is a real honor for us to be here and to talk with you about the issues that we struggled with in putting this book together.

As E.J. said, Larry and I have known each other for a long time. We have often been on the opposite sides of the congressional hearings that Ron Haskins – (chuckles) – put together, but we share both a concern for the poor and for improving our ways of dealing with the poor. We also share a concern for thinking about implementation, and that is one of the things that we have carried on a conversation about over the years. So we came to this dialogue knowing a lot about each other, sharing a lot of both commitments and understandings and disagreeing on many issues.

What I would like to do in the time I have this morning is talk about some of the things that we learned in the course of doing this book. And I'm obviously speaking for myself, but I think Larry would probably agree with much of what I have to say, or – (chuckles) – may be not. And I really want to make four points.



The first point that we learn is that our religious traditions, our respective religious traditions, provide a very rich and very complex set of narratives, of traditions and of ethical teachings that interact for us with our empirical understandings, our more philosophical understandings, in defining our policy positions. We realize that these religious commitments, this part of ourselves which is profoundly religious, underlies a lot of what we have done and thought about it. And in the course of doing this book, I think for both of us, we articulated it for the first time in a systematic way. And articulating it for us was a way of learning for ourselves the importance of these commitments, and also the fact that by articulating our religious commitments, we could in fact have a dialogue; we could in fact talk with each other about what our religious traditions require.

Larry and I rely on somewhat different sources for our religious understandings, we interpret them somewhat differently, and our dialogue helped clarify a bit of this. Let me give a couple of examples of that. We can follow up more of this in questions if you like. By the way, it has been quite fun for us. As Larry said, we have done a couple of presentations now at seminaries where the people are theologians, and for Larry and me to be engaging in theological debate in front of a seminary audience has been quite a hoot. But, you know, they're –

**MR. MEAD:** It's an act of humility.

**MS. BANE:** It's an act of humility. (Chuckles.) People are very eager, by the way, to educate us. (Laughter.) So we have learned a lot from that. Larry comes from the Protestant tradition. Larry relies almost entirely on scripture for his interpretation of the Bible, and he relies on his own interpretation in the Protestant manner.

I am a Catholic. I come from the Catholic tradition and therefore bring to my understanding not only the scriptures but the teachings of the Church over the years, the traditions of the Church, the reading of the Church in dialogue with that we call the signs of the times, and something that I call a Catholic sensibility, a sensibility that is nurtured by participation in the liturgy, by prayer; a sensibility which comes home every day in the sense that men and women are created in the image and likeness of God, that they are precious, that we live in a community that God has called us to. And those sensibilities, I think, are as important as the ethical teachings of the Church, the social teachings of the Church, in determining where at least I come down.

Larry and I share a sense that our religious traditions emphasize very much both concern and compassion for the vulnerable and the poor in the society, and also the importance of membership in community and the importance of mutual responsibility. Larry, I think, overstates a little bit some of the aspects of our traditions when he says that we don't care about mutual responsibility or we don't care about participation in community. I think we actually do share that as a set of values, that we must judge policy in terms of its effects and including people and so on.

We do differ in the way we interpret the concern of our traditions for the poor. My Catholic tradition talks about a preferential option for the poor. We see that throughout the Bible, both in the Hebrew scriptures and in the New Testament, and I think many of the episodes in the life of Jesus do illustrate that.

We also disagree about the requirement of reciprocity. My religious tradition reads the scriptures and reads our tradition as saying that God is dealing with the world in an unconditional loving manner and that we are also called to deal with each other unconditionally; that we are required to forgive, that we are required to give generously, and although we encourage membership in the community and mutual responsibility, much of our dealings with each other must be in that spirit of reciprocity [generosity?].

I think part of the way these religious traditions influence our policy positions is in helping to shape where we come down in conditions of uncertainty. Much of policy analysis is uncertain in terms of what the facts show, in terms of what a philosophical analysis would show. We are often called as policymakers to say, well, on the one hand, on the other hand, guess I'm going to go here because on balance I feel that— And in writing some of the pieces for this book, I realize that for me at least, the Catholic tradition of generosity, of wanting to err on the side of generosity, not being maybe too concerned about some of those Calvinist values – (chuckles) – of self-reliance lead me to err in one direction rather than another in time of uncertainty, and that is a major difference between us.

The second thing we learned in the course of doing this book is an obvious one: Our policy positions are informed and enriched by our religious sensibilities; they are not determined by our religious sensibilities. We do not make policy based on “what would Jesus do?” That is not our democratic tradition and that is not the way we approach policy at all. As important as our different readings of the scriptures and religious traditions are, Larry and I have different readings of some of the empirical evidence – not all of the empirical evidence – although, obviously, much we agree on.

Larry and I disagree on the importance of racial stigma and the continuing legacy of racism in this country in explaining poverty. We disagree on the importance of some of the structural barriers in explaining poverty and non-work. We disagree on the importance of lack of certain services, of the continuing legacy of racism, and so on. Those differences in interpreting the large-scale empirical literature mean again that we come down in somewhat different places on some of the important – in the important issues.

But I think what is important to note is that our policy positions, though enriched by our religious sensibilities, also, of course, reflect our reading of the empirical literature. They also reflect how we translate our religious commitments into the principles that underlie policy analysis. One of the interesting things for me was to discover, that in writing this book and in explaining my values and my positions and my way of thinking in religious language, that I was doing something parallel to but not very different from what I have long done in terms of going through policy analysis and in

terms of more standard philosophical categories and realize that I indeed make translations between my religious language and the language of democratic politics, and that many of the values and sensibilities that in this book I am expressing in religious language can also be expressed in more secular language, and I have always done so. I think what we discovered, though, was that bringing the religious language in, bringing our religious traditions in, allowed us to articulate the basis of many of our sensibilities and policies, to see where there was overlap there as well as any other, and to enrich the dialogue in many ways.

The third thing we learned is that our policy differences are not as great – (chuckles) – as you might have imagined. We were indeed on opposite sides on many of the provisions of the 1996 welfare reform law. As many of you know, I resigned when that law was signed. My opposition to that law was primarily, though, to the abolition of the entitlement, to what I saw as overly strict time limits, and to a failure to provide what I thought was necessary to support people in work, both in provision of job opportunities for those who could not find them and in provisions of support for those who were working. I did not object to the emphasis in the law on work. Indeed, as many of you recall, the ill-fated Clinton attempt to formulate a welfare reform bill very much emphasized work as well.

Larry and I do, I think, differ in the extent to which we see the necessity of work requirements as being a strict one, and I think we also disagree on the extent to which benefits, other kinds of benefits – food stamps, SSI, housing supports, and so on – need to be available without requirements of reciprocity. Again, though, I think one of the important differences between us is where we come down in times of uncertainty, where we come down when the evidence is not clear; we come down on somewhat different sides in that. So that's point number three.

Point number four, which Larry didn't talk about but I will mention: Both of us are somewhat critical of the role of what we call the institutional church or the hierarchy, the religious lobbyists in the poverty and welfare debates. I, of course, watched carefully the role of Catholic lobbyists during the welfare reform debate. Larry is – (chuckles) – critical of them and also of the role of the Protestant denominational leaders in those debates. Larry thinks they were on the wrong side – (chuckles) – that they in fact put too much emphasis on the entitlement aspect of caring for the poor and not enough emphasis on the community aspect, on the mutual responsibilities aspect.

I actually thought they were mostly on the right side, but I was then and continue to be critical of the way in which at least the lobbyists for my church related to the policy prospect. My sense was that they were actually quite good at what they did. They were pretty well informed. They had pretty strong positions. They were not, however, seen as representing 60 million Catholics. They were not feared in the way that the organizations that do in fact represent X million old people or X million gun lobbyists are feared. (Laughter.) My criticism is indeed that the religious organizations in Washington need to be more in dialogue with the members of their own churches if they are indeed to be effective in both educating the population and in participating in the welfare debate.

Those are the four points that I want to make. I think we will now go over to Ron to generate the discussion. Thank you.

**RON HASKINS:** In, I think, 1999, I was invited by the Catholic Bishops Organization to come and make a presentation at their annual meeting here in Washington. And I was somewhat busy at the time and I didn't pay much attention, and when I arrived I discovered that Mary Jo Bane was also on the podium with me, whereupon my heart rate increased quite dramatically. However, she got up and she said that she knew that a lot of people thought that she had come to debate me on the effects of welfare reform insofar as we knew them in '99, or whatever year it was, and she said that she wasn't going to do that; that rather she wanted to talk about – very much as she did here today – about how her religious experience and her religious beliefs, and specifically Catholic beliefs, formed her views of public policy and social welfare. And she proceeded to give a presentation that I was in complete awe of. I still have my notes, and I read them occasionally, and I have to tell you, my first reaction was, I thought she was a professor at Harvard. (Laughter.)

So I think it's worthwhile to reflect for just a moment on the two people who are up here and who have undertaken this project: They're both professors in a milieu that is hardly conducive to religious thought, even to the mention of God, and in fact I am tempted to think that they're both deviants. Both deviants – that's part of a joke. (Laughter.) So we are extremely fortunate to have them here.

I often think of Mary Jo as kind of a poor man's Daniel Patrick Moynihan. She's done everything – she's administered programs, she's a policymaker, she's a brilliant professor, wrote wonderful books – so it's amazing that she also is deeply religious and has applied her acumen to this magnificent project. And of course Larry is part of the Republican triumvirate. I would say that Charles Murray and Robert Rector, who happens to be here, and Larry Mead are the three greatest outside influences on Republican social policy. They certainly were on the welfare reform bill in 1996, and I have been inspired by Larry ever since I first read his book *Beyond Entitlement*, which turned out to be quite a predictive title. In 1986 I believe that was; long before I met him.

So we are very fortunate to have these two remarkable individuals here and involved in this project. I can't understand how E.J. made such a mistake and fell into having two such great people, but –

**MR. DIONNE:** The Holy Spirit.

**MR. HASKINS:** The Holy Spirit. Yes, it must have been.

Okay, here is what I would like to do. I was a professor at one time, but I've been in Washington a long time and I really like specifics, and although I enjoy these books and their papers and I've read some of their speeches, they do tend to drive you nuts because they're so abstract, so my question is, what do we get out of this? What does it

really change? And why would I think it's important to have religious convictions if I'm making policy for the country?

So I would like to pose a couple questions to them, and I would like to hear their answers. Not just what their views are, but why these views are informed and shaped – and in Larry's case, even compatible with the public policy views that they have. First of all, I'm going to take the obvious examples. Larry has said we pretty much have settled business here now in welfare reform, and maybe we have, but to the extent that it's not settled – and certainly one of the most controversial features of the bill was the sanctions. Every state has to have sanctions, and to our amazement, the states really took this seriously and they sanction people. Some states have 20 percent of their caseload in sanction status, so Mary Jo and Larry, from your religious perspective, is it good public policy to sanction people who refuse to meet their obligation to work and especially in many states, in fact a majority of states, to completely end their cash benefit? Do your religious views support that policy? How?

**MR. MEAD:** I don't begin with sanctions. I begin with there being a serious work obligation, which I think should be presumptive. That is, we should levy this in general, and we should not hand tailor it to individual cases; the need to deal with people who have difficulties comes further down the road, after there's been some effort to comply. If you have a serious work obligation, you must have sanctions. That is the lever. That is the way in which you make clear that this is serious. I don't think you lead with sanctions. My research would suggest that if you're clear about the expectations, sanction levels actually fall. Sanctions often result because people are unaware of what's expected of them. When they become clear about that, then they often comply – usually they comply.

So sanctions are a necessary cost, I think, to make clear that the expectations are serious. I think the idea that we should have serious expectations follows from the gospels. That's what I see there. Now I don't just see that. I also see forgiveness or a concern that people have a second chance, and I also favor that. I think sanctions are a way of making clear that there's an expectation, but that we should also seek to work with people who are sanctioned to bring them back into compliance. It's not the end of the road, it's a turning of the road: a road that we have to have.

Another way to justify it, which I think is also consistent with the gospels, is that sanctions are a necessary instrument in actual government. It's not enough to have good intentions; you have to be able to bring them to bear. You have to be able to execute them with public policy, and we know as a practical matter that we have to have sanctions before much of the caseload realizes the work expectation is serious. So if we think government is legitimate, and I think it is, then we must be willing to have sanctions, but again, that's not where I start; that's merely an implication of having there be serious expectations.

**MR. HASKINS:** Okay, but, Larry, I do not want you to be able to avoid the issue here.

**MR. MEAD:** Okay.

**MR. HASKINS:** Sanctions are in the law. They're required by the federal government. The states, in fact, use sanctions, and I want to seize on something that you said. We know that a number of people who are sanctioned – in fact we're having a session on this at Brookings in the near future – we know that many people who are sanctioned are really destitute. If you compare them to other people on welfare and other people who leave welfare, they are really in bad shape. And you said you think that if a state sanctioned someone and the person leaves the rolls or has benefits severely cut, then there should be some follow-up activity.

**MR. MEAD:** Yeah.

**MR. HASKINS:** Would you say that your religious sensibility would require you –

**MR. MEAD:** Yes. Yes.

**MR. HASKINS:** – to say to government officials, you must do this?

**MR. MEAD:** I would think so. I think they mostly are doing it, and if they're not, it's because of governmental limitations. I can't imagine that there would be serious support for the idea in this country, and certainly I would not support an idea, of sanctions where you simply forget about people and you don't follow up.

Now, let's remember, many who are sanctioned go off and get a job and their problems are actually alleviated, so sanctions could simply be part of the enforcement process. But the cases where people leave welfare and don't get a job and where there's some reason to think that there's hardship – and that's a small percentage of the total – for those cases, yes, outreach I think is required. I think that would fall under the general rubric of forgiveness, mercy, but, again, it doesn't mean that you suspend the expectation. I think the traditional view of the churches has been that forgiveness, mercy, charity requires setting aside social standards. I would not do that. I would have an outreach. I would try to bring people back into compliance, but the standards remain. The standards remain clear.

**MR. HASKINS:** Mary Jo.

**MS. BANE:** The question of sanctions, obviously, is preceded by the question of work obligations and work requirements. And it seems to me that in the TANF program, work obligations are appropriate. I think that is not true with regard to some of the other programs, food stamps for example, but with regard to TANF, I think work obligations are, in fact, appropriate.

My thinking on that has been shaped by a couple of things. I mean, one is the sense that simply supporting people through income support does not recognize much of what people actually want. They want to participate in the society, and our obligation is

to help people participate in the society. Participating in the society means participating in the labor market, participating in the work force, and I think that that is entirely appropriate.

I had many, many conversations with both welfare workers and welfare recipients while I was commissioner and then assistant secretary. One of the things that struck me the most in some of those conversations were the women who said, “I needed those requirements to get me up and to get me out doing the things that I know I should have done.” I think in some ways it’s similar to seat belt laws; that we need the law to help us do what it is that we know we ought to do anyway. So I am supportive of the work obligations.

In terms of sanctions, my position has been and continues to be that some sanctions are appropriate, but full-family sanctions are not appropriate; i.e., sanctions that are so severe that they cut off people’s benefits entirely, I think, are ignoring the fact that AFDC is primarily – TANF, sorry; time flies – TANF is primarily a program that supports children, not a program that supports adults, so my position has been that sanctioning the adult portion of the grant is appropriate.

Another alternative to accomplishing the same end is to provide, instead of the cash grant, vouchers for basic needs to ensure that those needs are met, but at the same time delivering to the adult the message that work obligations and participation in the community are, in fact, important. And I would agree with Larry that for families who are sanctioned, outreach by the state to establish their condition and to meet the basic needs of the family is appropriate.

**MR. HASKINS:** But be explicit about why this position is informed by your religious views. What is it about the Catholic tradition that informs this position? If you read *Economic Justice for All*, and if you listen to the lobbyists, which I had many opportunities to do at the time that the welfare debate was taking place –

**MR. DIONNE:** (Off mike) – you have a chance to defend yourself. I want you to take it at some point. Go ahead, Ron.

**MR. HASKINS:** I don’t know who John Carr is, but I agree, you have a right to defend yourself. And they [the bishops] certainly thought that sanctions were totally inappropriate. Now you are saying that they are appropriate, what I’m interested in is flushing out why your religious views allow that, and then why they draw the line at full-family sanction?

**MS. BANE:** Let me make a couple of points about the bishops’ 1986 letter, which I think are important to make. For one thing, it was a 1986 letter. Time has passed and things have changed. The most important thing about the 1986 letter, at least I think, or one of the most important things to remember is that the letter was in two parts, and in the first part, the bishops state that they were teaching authoritatively for Catholics. In the first part, the bishops outlined the biblical foundations and the ethical foundations for

an ethic which was both compassionate and oriented towards community and towards responsibility, and they outlined both of those features in both the scriptural and the ethical context.

In the second part of the letter, the bishops said, we are now going to take up a couple of specific policy issues. We are doing that not because we believe that we are entitled to teach authoritatively on what particular policy responses should be, but because we want to illustrate an application of the principles that we have just laid out to specific policy issues. I think if you look back at some of those specific policy issues now, you say, well, gee, they didn't quite get those right. They didn't get some of the empirical stuff right. They didn't appreciate the extent to which everybody in the society was working and that that was appropriate, and so I think when you go back to those particular positions, you can say, well, I would now take the first part of the letter and apply it in a somewhat different way because it is a balance. You know, of course it sounds wishy-washy to say not full-family sanctions, but only partial-family sanctions, but yeah, that's what balancing is about. It's about trying to get that right balance between the obligation and the compassion.

**MR. DIONNE:** I'd like to ask, and then I want to open it up to the audience and then Ron, obviously, will jump in, as I will, as we go. Reading you – and this is at the risk of vast oversimplification, which I enjoy – Mary Jo believes in a preferential option for the poor; Larry does not. On the sociological level, Larry views poverty as rooted in significant part in individual behavior and culture. Mary Jo puts more emphasis on economic structures and racism. If those two assumptions are fair, what I'd like – and partly by way of spurring the discussion – is a discussion of this: We are facing the renewal of welfare reform. Congress will get around to it at some point. What three or four changes in the current system do you think would be most important? If you had the authority to cast 218 votes in the House and 60 in the Senate, what would you do with those 218 and 60 votes? Either of you can start.

**MR. MEAD:** Okay. Well, let me start off with – what was your question before you got to the detailed issue about welfare reform?

**MR. DIONNE:** Oh, I was just saying that it seemed to me that what struck me in the dialogue is there was a deep theological difference on the preferential option for the poor or not and a sociological difference on where poverty comes from. I think the two might be connected. And then I wanted to take it from there to ask what you would do with welfare reform.

**MR. MEAD:** Let me amend your statement of our difference on the structural issues: I do think that a serious part of long-term poverty is strongly related to culture, but I would not say individual behavior. I would say, really, almost collective behavior. The behaviors that contribute to poverty, particularly non-employment and also unwed pregnancy, are not experienced by people in those situations as individual choices, but rather as necessities, and that's the feature of the culture of poverty – that people feel unable to do the thing that they want to do. They have conventional values: they would



like to work, and keep their families together, and avoid the problems that they get into, but somehow that seems impossible.

That isn't individual behavior, that's almost, as I say, a collective form of behavior. Indeed, that's the whole problem right there: that people do not experience themselves as individually able to make choices. In a way, our problem is exactly to get them to the point where they can make individual choices. I see welfare reform as a way of instituting a regime combining what I would call help and hassle, where, in certain respects, we say, "You can now make individual choices. We are going to empower you, and we are going to require you to do certain specific things like work or keep your children in school or get your children vaccinated or whatever." In those specific ways, we now say it is possible to speak about individual choice, and that's the goal, to bring people to a situation where they are able to choose and are able to be held accountable for that.

Now, what would I change? Well, I think the two main problems with the law as we had it in '96 were that the work requirements – the much ballyhooed work requirements in the law – actually were weaker than they appeared, because there was what was called the caseload fall credit, which allowed states to reduce their work participation targets by any percent by which the caseload had fallen since '95. And since the caseload fall was unexpectedly great, the effect was to knock the bottom out of the work requirements for most states. Many states moved ahead anyway, to implement tougher requirements. That momentum, I would say, went back somewhat before the '96 act and it continued and work levels did in fact rise, but many states were not under it – had a serious obligation to move in that direction because of this legal feature.

Now, it has been agreed, as I understand it, in the law as proposed in Congress – the reauthorization – that the caseload fall credit will be withdrawn or it will be modified in such a way that there will now be higher levels of work expectation placed on the states, and they will now have to reach, in fact, the 50 percent that was specified originally; indeed, maybe 70 percent, depending on how you calculate it. There are details I am not fully informed about. So that's one thing I would say should be changed from the original law, and apparently that's going to happen.

Another thing I would say is, in fact, the sanctions: As I understand it, neither the '96 bill nor the renewal has in it a requirement for full-family sanctions. Here is a place where I think Mary Jo and I do differ. I differ, first, empirically, because it's my experience that states that do not have full-family sanctions are not really able to implement the work requirement because very many cases are willing to take a sanction for the adult share of the grant and keep the rest of the grant. Many of these states are high-benefit, northern states, like New York and California, and because of that, they have not seriously been able to break the mold of the old welfare. There is still a psychology of entitlement that allows families to ignore the work test. It's not clear why they do it, but a great many families are doing it. That is the main problem in New York City right now in welfare reform, and that has to be changed, and the way to change it is to require that states have full-family sanction.

Now this does, in fact, reflect the theological difference. In Mary Jo's view, she does talk of responsibility, and I think that is an important theme in Catholic thinking, but the theme of protection – of treating the poor as a privilege, as having a preferential position – is stronger. And when there's a choice forced, then that priority takes over and the concern about the children, about the family, overrides the desire to enforce responsibility. From my point of view, I am more prepared to see that requirement as stronger, as having a peremptory force unless you can show individual circumstances that make it unrealistic, and so I am prepared to say we should have a full-family sanction.

I assume that we're still going to have other benefits that are not work-conditioned, like food stamps, Medicaid, and so on, so it's not as if the family has no weight at all, but they would lose their cash aid. And I say that as necessary to make the expectation serious. So this, I think, does reflect a theological difference and also an empirical view about the facts.

**MR. HASKINS:** Mary Jo?

**MS. BANE:** Larry is right about our differences on that issue. One point I would like to make is that the last time the Census Bureau counted the number of the poor, there were 33 – Dan can correct me – 33 million people counted as poor in the United States. The last time I looked at the welfare caseload numbers, there were about 1.5 million adults receiving TANF benefits, so my first point is, why are we so obsessed with such a small proportion of the population that is poor in the United States?

Part of what I would want to do in thinking about the welfare reform bill is, you know, geez, let's think about poverty. Let's not think about those 1.5 million adults, which is such a small proportion. Having said that, I would, in fact, as Larry would predict, suggest that what is needed now is a couple of things. Those 1.5 million adults who continue to be on TANF are not randomly selected. We have had the best economy in the world. Up until about 2000, most of the folks who could get jobs in fact got them. The people who remain on the welfare caseloads are more troubled than we have seen in the past and need, indeed, more comprehensive services, so I would advocate that. And I would also advocate continued expansion of our supports for people who do, in fact, go to work, more importantly, of course, daycare.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you. I want to go to the audience and Sharon Parrott of the Center on Budget kindly agreed to open the questioning because no one likes to ask the first question, so this is the second question from Sharon Parrott. Please.

We've got mikes going around, by the way, and if you could say who you are – identify yourself, I'd appreciate it. Please.

**SHARON PARROTT:** Hi, I'm Sharon Parrott from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. I want to pick up on, actually, something that Mary Jo just said, which is the extent of poverty outside the extent of welfare. So depending on how you look at it, if we

just want to talk about families with kids, which really is a different set of issues, although not unrelated, but a different set of issues than elderly poverty, poverty among people with serious disabilities. If you look at families with children, depending on how you count them, you're talking about 15 to 19 million people in poor families with kids, and the overwhelming majority of them working – well over 60 percent; 62, 63 – about two-thirds working, some full time, some half time; about an equal part.

And then if you look at people below 200 percent of poverty – and I dare say that most people in this room would look at a family at 150 percent of poverty and think they're poor – you're talking about \$34,000 for a family of four, particularly if they've got childcare costs. You're talking about a family that's struggling, whether you want to define them as poor or not. And then you're talking about almost 40 percent of families with kids and about 50 million people in families below 200 percent of poverty, and so I think the problem of people struggling in a country of plenty is well beyond the sort of narrowness of TANF. And, in fact, some of the debates and arguments around TANF reauthorization is precisely about how much emphasis to put on the people on TANF versus the larger problem, particularly among the working poor. And so it would be interesting, I think, to hear from both panelists about religious traditions and this much broader set of policy and poverty issues, and also what you think the role of government is in putting this on the agenda in a much more prominent way than certainly has been the case – I would argue – for some time.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

**MR. MEAD:** I think once the poor are working, then the issues shift in nature and the question of economic redistribution, equality, and so on, gets on the agenda in a much more serious way than it did before. The issues you raise about adequate income for people who are employed are, I think, legitimate questions, and they should come on the agenda, and they are coming on the agenda. Indeed, I predicted this in a book that I wrote in '92, that if welfare were reformed in the way that it has been, we would, in fact, see a shift to the left in the politics surrounding social policy.

And as everyone knows in this room, probably, we are spending more on the poor today than we did in the days of AFDC. We now have EITC and we have childcare subsidies, and we have expanded Medicaid, and so on, so we are, in fact, spending a lot of money on the working poor, and we should. I'm in favor of that. Many of the arguments here would come from the kind of reasoning that Mary Jo might sympathize with, and this reflects an assumption we share, and that is that society does have an obligation to the poor, and particularly when the lifestyle questions are addressed, and they have been for this part of the population, then these other issues come on the agenda.

I don't have strong feelings about where that debate should come out. It might not lead to as much redistribution as you might want, but it's entirely legitimate question, and it should be addressed.

Now, at the same time, having said that, I think your statement expressed very well an attitude that I question in my essay, and it's this generalized earnestness, this protective stance towards those whom we think to be vulnerable out there somewhere. People who are different from ourselves, we stand up for them; we say that they should somehow be taken care of. I am suspicious of that. That's exactly that kind of generalized concern, that angst, about the vulnerable out there that I think got us in trouble under AFDC, and I hear in your tone of voice perhaps an inclination to go down that road again, and I urge you against that. I do not see that in the Bible. I do not see people talking in protective ways about people other than themselves who are vulnerable and who are threatened. Let's not treat them, once again, as victims rather than as fellow citizens.

**MR. DIONNE:** Before Mary Jo jumps in I'd like to defend generalized earnestness by redefining it, because I don't think it's generalized earnestness necessarily; it's a sense of injustice. In other words, the issue is not a sense that these are helpless victims out there who have nothing to do with their fate, it is – and Mary Jo will probably pick up on this – a sense that these are folks who actually are moral agents, who do the right thing, and for reasons that are structural in nature, their paths are blocked in certain ways. That is not a condescending view; it's simply looking at a structure and saying, "This is unfair this way. If it were done differently these folks would do perfectly fine." You might say that's generalized earnestness, but I think there's a distinction between seeing injustice and earnestness.

**MR. MEAD:** My response? That's a good comeback. I think that gets us to the core issues here. My stance, straight from the Sermon on the Mount, is, "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened." I want the poor people you talk about to come and ask themselves what they need, and we will negotiate with them, and we will come to an understanding. That is a citizenship proceeding.

I didn't hear a lot of concern for justice in your tone. I heard more protection. I'd rather hear talk of justice, and I particularly like to see the people you talk about demonstrating on the street outside here and saying that we are indifferent to them and we ought to have a higher minimum wage and we ought to have other acts of – I'd love that to see that. I'd love to see that, because that would mean they would be taking responsibility for their own futures. That's what politics ought to be about. It ought to be precisely about citizens contending for mutual advantage under rival conception of justice. It shouldn't be about compassion. It should be about justice.

**MR. DIONNE:** By the way, there's a group of Democratic clergy people meeting nearby, so we could probably arrange that demonstration pretty quickly. (Laughter.)

Mary Jo.

**MS. BANE:** Well, one of the reasons they're not demonstrating outside is that they're working two jobs. (Applause.)

I, like E.J., want to pick up the notion of justice and fairness because I think that is the right language to be thinking about, and I actually think Larry is quite right to chide us when we fall into language which implies, whether by our tone of voice or by the words we use, that the poor are not full citizens, are not agents with full responsibility for themselves, and I take that criticism, and I think we all should.

But I would, as E.J. did, reframe the issue as one of justice and one of fairness and make the point that for many people, many people who are African-American, who are Latino, who are recent immigrants, there are, in fact, legacies of our not too distinguished history, which get in the way of their being able to achieve the benefits of a working life. Because of our not always wonderful education systems, people often do not have the opportunities that as a just society we ought to be providing to everyone – not as a matter of compassion, but as a matter of fairness – opportunities for everyone to develop and to have those responsibilities, so I would just respond in that way. And also reinforce the point made in the question that we genuinely ought to be concerned about the poor and about inequality more broadly, not just about welfare recipients.

**MR. DIONNE:** Ron, before we go to the audience, I thought you might want to take up the “importance of not being earnest” issue here. Do you –

**MR. HASKINS:** And why would I want to take that up, E.J.? (Laughter.)

I agree with Larry, and I think this is a problem with communication, I think, generally between people on the left and people on the right. There is a generalized compassion or whatever you want to call it that is not necessarily a good basis for making public policy. It is precisely what caused us to have such a crummy system for so many years, where we did increase dependency, and, in my view, we increased births outside marriage, we ruined whole neighborhoods and cities, and it was because of this what I would say is a mistaken, misguided compassion. So I completely agree with Larry that, “knock and the door shall be opened,” that there should be political activity, and as long as it’s within the bounds of the Constitution and local laws and so forth, that that is a very healthy thing for the system.

Most of the lobbying on behalf of the poor is conducted by people other than the poor, and in the case of welfare reform, a lot of the lobbying, including lobbying that I was a recipient of from the Catholic Church, including several bishops personally, they were wrong. They didn’t even represent the poor. The poor knew that they had to work. They said it over and over again. There was an abundance of data, and yet our system created incentives that discouraged work, so when we changed the system, they did exactly what many people on the left predicted they would not do: they went out and they got a job and they worked. We gave them EITC, which in most cases was worth more than cash welfare. We gave them Medicaid. We changed the whole system. We spend more, as Larry has said, than we did in the past, so we had both, but it was based much more on justice and equal access and equal expectations than on compassion.

**MR. DIONNE:** Sir? By the way, John Carr – I want to let you get in – this gentleman here, Pat, and John Carr. Or John Carr and Pat.

**PAT RECTOR:** I'm Robert Rector from the Heritage Foundation. My questions will really be about the degree to which anything has actually changed in the last 20 years, and I'll make two points here. One is, in my experience in 20 years on welfare is that this debate is simply smothered by misinformation, and it makes any type of rational discussion about these problems very difficult. I'll just exemplify that by two comments here today: the working poor. Okay? Well, the reality is that the median family with poor children works between 600 and 800 hours a year.

Now both the commenter here from the Center as well as Mary Jo – Mary Jo says they're out working two jobs. Mary Jo, that's just not true. Okay? There are some families like that, but the bulk of poor families with children are not working two jobs. A third of them aren't working at all at any time during the year, and most of them are working relatively few hours during the course of the year. And in fact, if you could raise that work rate to 2,000 hours per household per year, or one adult working 50 weeks at 40 hours, you would cut the child poverty rate by 75 percent, just like that.

The second largest group of poor people in the United States are able-bodied adults without children who ain't working much at all. Okay? Now we know very little about that group, but one thing we know about them is they're not working. Okay?

But here we are again: We start out this discussion by talking about poor families who are holding down two jobs. They exist. They, in fact, are about 20 percent of poor families with children, but they are a distinct minority, so we specifically avoid talking about the reality of what's going on here, which is that poverty is primarily caused by high levels of single parenthood and low levels of parental work.

That's very, very typical of what I've always experienced at almost every one of these meetings for 15 years. Okay? So if we are seriously concerned about the poor, we ought to begin by honestly describing what's going on here instead of creating these very virtuous representations of very virtuous poor people who are doing everything right and still poor. Not that they don't exist; they do, but they are the minority, and let's focus on the substance of the real problem, which is for the most part, poor families are poor because they're not working very much, and we ought to ask, why is that and what can we do to change that?

Now I'll get to my question after my diatribe – my question is for Larry: I don't perceive much change in this dialogue since you wrote *Beyond Entitlement*, which I think is the most influential book that's been written about welfare, but I perceive some rather flaccid rhetorical change, but in fact very little substantial change about these issues. Has anything changed?

And then, to Mary Jo, essentially another version of the same question: One of the key debates here, or one of the key issues, is the difference between what I would call

permissive and unconditional aid, which is you're in need, okay, we're going to give you free stuff – free cash, free food, free housing – as opposed to aid which is based on reciprocal obligation, which is based on a demand and requirement of constructive behavior on the part of the individual, which I believe is absolutely essential to truly benefiting the poor. And when I look at the system, what you seem to be saying is, okay, we've got public housing. That's unconditional, permissive aid. We've got food stamps. That's unconditional, permissive aid. We've got Medicaid. That's unconditional, permissive aid. We've got TANF, but half the TANF caseload isn't working, and for those that are working what we're going to do is sanction the adult portion of the TANF check if they refuse to participate, which is about \$60 a month. I mean, in my view that leaves about 95 percent of all the aid we're giving to able-bodied people as unconditional, permissive, no requirement – doesn't seem to be actually much of a change. Seems to be we're pretty much stuck where we were 15 years ago.

**MR. DIONNE:** The fat is in the fire. Could I just ask Mary Jo on the numbers first, because to take the two halves, it does not seem like you or Sharon see the numbers as Robert Rector does. Could you talk about that first, and then Larry can come in on the answer to the second question – both of you can.

**MS. BANE:** I mean, we'll just have to figure out the numbers. That doesn't sound wrong to me in terms of numbers of people working. There is certainly, as you say, a large proportion of single adults outside of families who are not working or working very little that we know very little about.

Let me answer two parts of your question. When has anything changed in terms of policy? Things have changed really quite dramatically, and we see the dramatic change not, I think, in the TANF program so much, although we have obviously seen dramatic declines in that program, but in the way our spending on the poor is now structured. The largest program for low-income families now is indeed the Earned Income Tax Credit. Medicaid is also extremely important, and food stamps. And what we have seen, I think, especially if you focus on the Earned Income Tax Credit and the fact that we spend a good deal more on that now than we do on TANF, what we have there is work incentives, strong work incentives. And you could say, I suppose, that the Earned Income Tax Credit contains a work requirement. You don't get it if you don't work. That's the way it's structured, and so I think we have seen a change in the structure of aid to low-income families very much in the direction of providing work incentives and supports for working families and away from the cash assistance.

I guess the other thing I would want to ask – I don't want to get into this business of reading people's tones of voice, but there does seem to be an implication in the way you talk about it, Bob, that the people who are not working if they simply put their mind to it and, you know, kind of pulled up their socks, would have no trouble finding jobs that would enable them to support their families, and my experience suggests that, yes, that's true for some of them, but it's certainly not true for everybody. There are, in fact, many families – and they show up in the poverty statistics – who have a lot of difficulties and those difficulties ought to be recognized and ought to be spoken to before we simply

pound our fists on the table and say, “You know, if you really tried you wouldn’t be poor.”

**MR. DIONNE:** Larry, this is the first time you’ve ever been accused of supporting flaccid welfare policies. (Laughter.)

**MR. MEAD:** Actually, I don’t think Bob and I differ. I would agree with you, Bob, that work levels are even now quite low, and that’s the reason why many remain poor. I would also say that many of the single poor, and especially men, have the same problem. They also are not working regularly. Our problem is to find a way to raise those work levels for people many of whom are not on a benefit, and therefore we don’t have the same leverage that we had on TANF, so you’re quite right: The work issue is not completely solved.

On the other hand, I would agree with Mary Jo that there’s been a sharp change in expectations. I don’t think the debate is unchanged from 15 years ago. The success of welfare reform has, I think, shattered a lot of preconceptions that many people had about this question, and as a result there is now a broad acceptance of the need to enforce work amongst two large classes of people. One of them, the most important, is average Americans – the voters – who always believed in this. The second group is politicians, most of whom – left, right and center – now embrace the policy that we have because of its manifest success, and they’re not about to get out of step with the public on this in light of the mostly good consequences of what we’ve seen.

There are dissenters. Two groups I think clearly dissent from this. The first is community groups involved in serving poor populations in cities. They continue to believe in entitlement. They oppose work requirements. They really wanted the policy we had. They wanted a policy of generosity without work expectations. And the other group that dissents is most academic experts on this question. Most of them continue to believe in a barrier-oriented view of poverty, and they have not taken on board the full implications of the recent success that we’ve had.

It’s notable, actually, that Mary Jo is one of the few academic experts who now in public and in print embraces work requirements. I don’t know more than a couple of other people of whom I could say that. The vast majority are in dissent.

Now, the last thing to say is that the issue Mary Jo raised about whether the nonworking or semi-working poor could work more – the issue where Bob assumes they could and Mary Jo has doubts; that gets to what I think to be the core empirical issue in this matter. It isn’t all about religious values; it also has to do with how you judge the opportunity structure out there. Do you think that there is the opportunity for people to work more than they do? I think there is. Mary Jo might doubt it. I think that those positions reflect not only contrary judgments of the empirical facts, but also contrary judgments of the human nature of the poor. Do we think that they are able to make headway against challenges, or do we think that they are overwhelmed by an unjust society?



Conservatives, though they sound more hostile to the poor, are actually more respectful of their capacities, more ready to hold them responsible for doing something to help themselves, and those who doubt the presence of opportunity are more cautious about assuming capability and responsibility. I think related in part to religious values, because the Bible that I read is one in which Jesus, or indeed the prophets in the Old Testament, do not exempt people from normal expectations because of a belief that they face overwhelming barriers. The style of analysis that appeals to barriers is a non-biblical one; it reflects on modern social science, determinist views of the nature of the society. It is not biblical.

What's remarkable about the Bible is that even in a world which we would say had vastly greater structural barriers than we face today, we find a willingness to hold people accountable – rich and poor – for certain moral expectations; expectations which are maintained, I would say, by the New Testament. Now there is also forgiveness – we are supposed to forgive people seventy times seven – but the notions of good behavior remain in being. They are not suspended because people face social barriers, and I think we should have the same attitudes today.

**MR. DIONNE:** Could I call in John Carr. The Catholic bishops have been knocked around a little bit. John, tell everybody who you are.

**JOHN CARR:** My name is John Carr, and I work for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. And it's an honor to be criticized by both Mary Jo Bane and Larry. (Laughter.) Some of the criticism is well taken, some of it I think is oversimplified, and some of it I think is wrong. But this is a wonderful thing. It's great to be talking about welfare in terms of principles, not politics. It's great to be talking about how it touches people and how our faith touches us and how it shapes our views towards this.

We've had the privilege of having all four of the people at the podium, as well as people to their left and their right, address our bishops' committee and our national leadership. And very often people who disagree don't talk to each other, and they are not heard by an audience as diverse as this but, however, I think there's something missing in this conversation in terms of religion and poverty, and then I'll go on to my defensive statement.

But what's missing here, for religion and poverty, is not simply a matter of principles or studies, it's a matter of experience. I'll speak for my own community. We're not a middle-class church; we're an immigrant church increasingly, for the second time. We're a poor church in some ways. There are 13 inner city schools here in Washington serving poor families. Tonight, hundreds of people will find a bed because of the work of the religious community in Washington – actually thousands. We do foster care. We see the failures of moral responsibility; we see the damage done to kids. And probably least appreciated is the work that's done by individual congregations of reaching out to the poor in their own community, and those who are not members of their community.

In my little parish there are eight or 10 people who help folks, not just at Thanksgiving, not just at Christmas, but every week of the year. And they have no illusions. They're not particularly earnest. They have no illusions about the virtues of themselves or the poor. They see kids being hurt and they see families being torn apart, and they see terrible mistakes and misjudgments made by parents.

So what we bring is not just a set of ideas or a certain vague earnestness. There is nothing vague about that experience. We do bring a priority for the poor. It's one of the things I disagree profoundly about. I think Jesus began his public life talking about bringing good news to the poor and liberty to captives. I think he said we would be judged by how we respond to the "least of these." These two people, and a lot of us, disagree about how to do that, and it's important that we talk about that. I don't think we should disagree about whether they were a priority for Jesus. And if we want to follow Jesus – some of us do – that has to be a central question.

For example, the reason we oppose the mandatory family cap and fought desperately to defeat it was not abstract principles. It was because we're involved in helping pregnant women. This was a policy that was going to say, in 20 states in this country, we'll pay for your abortion but we won't help you raise the child. And so, for reasons having to do with our views of human life, and our priority for the poor, and our concern for children, we fought that. And it wasn't a matter of abstraction or earnestness at all.

The one thing I would say to both of our panelists, who I admire very much, even though I disagree with them on occasion, some more than others, that I think the references, at least in the book – I've only been able to skim it, and was both pleased and scared to see the references to our work in the index – that I think the stuff you're dealing with is pretty outdated. The Pastoral Letter was more than 20 years ago, though that's the principal reference here. Our criteria for welfare reform, I'll be glad to remind you or share it with anybody else who's here, and our testimony on the reform of welfare reform I'll be happy to share with you.

For us, what led to our opposition was not that we were for the system as it was. We said everyday that the system did not serve the dignity of the poor or the needs of the nation, that it was anti-family, anti-work. But it was about how to encourage work. And for us, the thing that broke us in the end was for budgetary reasons – and I'm sure Ron remembers that and probably didn't like it – was immigrants took it in the end. The most vulnerable group, for reasons of budgets, their kids were cut off. And for us, that's not a matter of ideology or politics. Those are people in our parishes, people we serve every day.

So I think some of the reading of our role is selective or oversimplified. I think some of the criticisms are accurate. I think Mary Jo's point – Ron thinks too many bishops were involved. I'd love to meet the bishop who said, let's not encourage work.

That's not my experience. The idea that the Roman Catholic Church is sort of weak on responsibility will come as news to every Catholic high schooler. (Laughter.)

But New England is not the whole church, and there was lots of activity going on around the country and there was lots of activity going around in statehouses today. And most important, not only for my community but for all religious communities, there is all kinds of work going on every day to serve the poor and try to defend their dignity, not through earnestness or virtuousness or anything else, but because that's who we are and what we believe.

(Applause.)

**MR. DIONNE:** Ron.

**MR. HASKINS:** I just have pick out one thing you said. And it would be impossible to set the record straight, because I've done this a million times and written and so forth. The reason that Republicans were against public benefits for non-citizens was not to save money. It did save money. But as early as '92 we adopted this policy because it was already the law and had been since 1872. The expectation is that we bring to the United States, allow them to come to the United States for opportunity and to enjoy freedom, religious freedom and other freedoms in the world's greatest economy, and in return we ask that you obey our laws and not go on welfare until you become a citizen. It does not make sense to allow people to come to your country for opportunity and put them on welfare. And when we passed the welfare law in '96, households that had non-citizens, according to the Census Bureau, were more likely to have at least one welfare benefit than households composed just of citizens.

And we fashioned a law so that the EITC, Head Start education training programs, non-citizens remained eligible for them a kind of Horatio Alger story. You spoke about oversimplification; it is really oversimplification to say that all of a sudden we needed money so we came up with this idea of hurting immigrant kids. That was not the reason that it was in the law. And it's not the reason it's supported by the American public.

**Q:** Just one comment. We're repairing some of the damage that was done by that law with the support of a lot of Republicans, and we're glad we are.

**MR. DIONNE:** Could I bring in several voices here and then let Mary Jo and Larry respond? Also, I feel that a great injustice has been done because Sharon Parrott got stuck with the earnest charge, and she's one of the best-humored people I know. So I want her to come back in at any point that you want to, Sharon.

But let's collect some comments here. This gentleman has been very patient. Pat has been very patient. Go ahead.

**GENE BETIT:** My name is Gene Betit. I'm Social Justice minister at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Arlington. At the risk of being earnest, I'd like to get us back to the topic of the working poor. I think those are two words that should shame every American; the idea that you could work 40 hours a week – and some don't get 40 hours a week, but that's not always their choice – and be poor.

In Arlington, to pay for the average apartment – rents have gone out of sight – takes about eight bucks an hour. At \$6 or \$7 an hour, that's a lot of different jobs, multiple people in the household. Congress hasn't done too well – or maybe it's the other way around: they have done very well at tap dancing away from the minimum wage.

But Larry mentioned that people haven't been out in the streets. They have been. Evidently many of us have missed them because in over 100 municipalities in this United States, living wage ordinances have been passed.

This is directly to the welfare reform – and this is the “beyond” part. And I'm really looking forward to your next book about whether the market is moral, because right now, I'd have to say, evidently not, and that Marx and Engels had a point.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you very much.

Pat? Also, if you could be brief, and then I'll bring in another round of folks.

**PAT CONOVER:** I'm Pat Conover. I've legislative director for the United Church of Christ. When I went to see Ron Haskins during this time, he wasn't fearing me or anybody else, as far as I could tell. He was very much a warrior, and I enjoyed our times back then.

Whether I'm feared or not, whether I know anything about poverty or not, I do know something about the theology of the Protestant denominations and the pastoral letters they wrote, and I want to make everyone in this audience clear that while Professor Mead has certainly a right to express his own opinions about the Bible, he is not expressing the opinions of the Protestant denominations who have spoken on this through their pastoral letters, and is not representative of either the traditional biblical theology or contemporary biblical theology on the issues of poverty and what Jesus had to say about it.

So I want to be really clear about that. When I speak of my denomination's understanding and, as far as I know, of most of Protestant theology about this, I'm coming from a very different place. And the place that I'm coming from is the word “solidarity.” And when you stand in the place where poor people stand, as I have intimately, in rural southern poverty and inner city poverty in the North, you see barriers, and it shocks me when you say you can't see barriers.

And I particularly remember during this time the way the book *Beyond Entitlement* and its bankrupt theory of the culture of poverty was used in this debate. It was used to switch the attention from the people we were trying to protect, which were the children, to the parents, and the parents were portrayed as single mothers and therefore immoral, and they were commonly portrayed in the press as being black, and they were commonly portrayed in the press as being failed morally because of drugs or for other reasons, and that assault had nothing to do with either the Protestant base nor with the true facts about who the poor were and the way that they were trying to overcome their concerns.

So I have a bunch of other stuff to say, but I'm going to take Dionne's hint and stop –

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

**MR. CONOVER:** But I do want people to be clear that whatever the accuracy and adequacy of Mr. Mead's presentation of biblical point of view, it does not represent a great proportion, at least, of Protestant positions on what biblical theology is.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you. I appreciate both comments, because they do bring us back to this question, if I could use the phrase, "What would Jesus do?" but what does the tradition say?

So, Larry, why don't you begin? And also the other part of Pat's question on your general theory of entitlement, your comment.

**MR. MEAD:** John, I'm aware that the bishops letter, and indeed papal encyclicals, speak of responsibility to contribute to the society, and specifically the responsibility to work. And there is no question that that idea can be reconciled with Catholic tradition. I think Mary Jo has done an excellent job of doing that. I see her as saving the tradition from its recent expressions. At the same time, those recent expressions contain an explicit prohibition against requiring single mothers to work. And to the extent they talk about employment, they tend to treat it, despite the talk of responsibility, as something that government must guarantee to people by various further acts of policy.

So, yes, we promote employment – that was your word – but we don't require employment. We'd rather pass the obligation for employment back to government. It is something that it must provide people, alongside the benefits that it gives, such as welfare or food stamps, or whatever.

That misses the point. The problem is largely that with some opportunity to work, many poor adults, for a series of reasons, do not avail themselves of the jobs that are available. Merely to promote employment does not solve the core problem, which is the fact that people do not work regularly when it appears that they could. That's why we have to move to an obligation. So, the talk of employment isn't enough. It must be seen

as something where there's a joint responsibility. Government must do things to facilitate employment, but it must also require employment.

Now, you mentioned local Catholic institutions like high schools, which are intense about responsibility. Indeed they are, and I'm puzzled that the local insistence by Catholic institutions on good behavior, on responsibility, somehow doesn't penetrate to the political level. So what the bishops advocate is very different from the style of local Catholic administrators. I think the hierarchy should listen to the administrators because they are wiser in what it really takes to deal with poverty.

Why is there the difference? I think largely because – and this is also relevant to Pat Conover's statement – at the top level, at the political level, the churches think that they have a responsibility to exercise the prophetic voice, to defend the poor against what they see as society's indifference. They're all the time contending for greater public commitment, and in that voice, in that concern, they fail to express what the public is concerned about and what the problem really requires, which is that there be some joint responsibility where the poor also bear on onus. That gets lost in the discourse because of his concern about being prophetic.

Now, relevant to your comment but also more to Pat Conover's comment, I'm thoroughly aware that my position in this book is different from that taken by the traditional Protestant denominations. Thank goodness. I think that they had it wrong and that they need to own up to that. I'm glad that our views differ on this, and I frankly am puzzled that there has not been an appreciation of the gospels like mine before this, according to what I hear. That's a mystery to me. I cannot account for it. And all I can say, Pat, is that I honor your intentions, I think you're trying to be good, but I also think that the stance you're taking here is in denial about the facts, and therefore should be reconsidered.

**MR. DIONNE:** Mary Jo?

**MS. BANE:** I'm not sure I have much to add to what John said, and don't know if he wants to come back in.

The Catholic position on many issues, I believe rightly, is shaped by an attitude which I often describe as pro-life, pro-family and pro-poor. And I think that in many ways, on the occasions when the Catholic bishops have opposed work requirements, or as John said, opposed the family cap, which I also oppose, they are speaking from their pro-life and pro-family traditions as much as from their pro-poor decisions. And so I think that in their concern for the potential effects of work requirements on mothers of very young children, it was really responsive to a concern for the family and for children. I don't always agree with their exact positions on various positions. I think some of the Catholic bishops' positions are informed by a view on women which I don't always share.

**MR. :** That was diplomatic.

**MS. BANE:** I thought so. I thought so. (Laughter.) This is a public forum. But I don't disagree fundamentally with anything that John said.

**MR. DIONNE:** Could I say, we've got a lot of people who want to come in. The good thing about people in this room is they feel passionately about a subject that people should feel passionately about. On the other hand, charity toward your brothers and sisters means that if you could keep your comments a little shorter, we could get a lot more people in the discussion. I'm sorry to do that, but it's a limited time.

Ma'am?

**LISA JACOBS:** Why does it always get shortened when it comes to me? (Laughs.) I'm Lisa Jacobs from NOW Legal Defense. I'm going to keep it brief but I want to begin by looking around the room and commenting on how different this room looks than it would look if we were standing in a roomful of people applying for AFDC, and I think it is in part because we have the luxury of employment and other things that allows us to be here and that does not allow some of the folks to protest in the street or do some of the other things that you've suggested be done.

I think that clearly marks me as one of the people who are on the earnest side of the street. And what that evoked in me, as somebody who has debated Melissa Pardue of Heritage twice, and as somebody who has listened to Senator Rick Santorum, is their words when they talk about folk who are affected by these policies – and this is a direct quote – “These people don't have good role models for marriage,” is almost a literal quote from both of their mouths. So, to the extent that we need to examine our houses on issues associated with whether or not we're being condescending, I think perhaps folks on the other side of the aisle also need to look at some of the biases and stereotypes that they have when they come to the table to talk about these issues.

The only other issue that I wanted to raise really quickly was in the talking about people needing to work. I'm interested in sort of hearing where both of you are on the provisions in the current proposals on education and training, because I think that we know, to the extent that jobs exist – and that's questionable in this economy – that they're jobs that people won't be able to make a living wage with, and to the extent that we don't expend adequate resources for education and training, and there seems to be much more of an inclination to do work first. If we don't focus more on education and training, I don't really think we're going to be equipping people to actually escape poverty, which is what I understand this program is supposed to do.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you very much.

Sir?

**ARTHUR MCKEE:** Yes, I have a question for Professor Mead. I'm Arthur McKee from the Advisory Board Foundation. I see you struggling in the book, and in your most

recent comment to Mr. Carr, with the question in principle: Is it necessary for government to not only demand work, but provide work? And I'm wondering if you could, in principle, outside of the question of how that might actually happen in practice, elaborate a bit as what you think the joint responsibility of citizens and government is to both provide and work?

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you very much.

**JACK DEKDUS:** My name is Jack Dekdus . On a more theoretical note, I'm just curious if you think it's even possible for this country to evolve to the point where there is no poverty.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

This gentleman right here, and then there was someone else right nearby.

**MIKE CRUZ:** Hi. My name is Mike Cruz. My question is about entering religion into the public policy question. How does it help the debate to take an already divisive issue like public policy over poverty and inject something that seems even more divisive, like religion? I'd just like to know if it seems to have helped your personal debate between the two of you.

**MR. DIONNE:** It's really good to question an entire enterprise. (Laughter.) That's very good, thank you.

One more. Yes?

**JANICE CROUSE:** I'm from the Beverly LaHaye Institute, which is a think tank for Concerned Women for America. I'm a senior fellow there. My name is Janice Crouse.

The Pew forums are supposed to be founded on research, facts, data and sound pedagogy, and I'm astounded at the demagoguery that we've heard this morning, not just from the audience but also from the speakers. I'm astounded that two academics from very respected institutions would be very fuzzy on the data that Robert Rector presented on the working poor, and say, well, I'm not quite sure about those numbers and so forth. I'm astounded that a theologian, behind me here, would say that his views reflect biblical theology when, for over 2,000 years, traditional biblical theology has respected the poor and ministered to the poor, and recognized the responsibility for dealing with the poor, and yet have said that it's not the poor who determine what ought to be done but the principles of the Bible that determine that.

I'm also astounded that Mary Jo could get away with saying – (chuckles) – that Catholics have more sensibilities than Protestants do.

**MR. DIONNE:** I don't think she said that. Just --



**MS. CROUSE:** I think she did.

**MR. DIONNE:** I'm sorry? Well, anyway, I just want to point out that this is one of the only theological books that does have extensive charts and tables in it. (Laughter.) There's a lot of data in this book.

Thank you for your comment. You've got a lot on the table here. Again, whichever one of you wants to start first. Also, Ron, come on back in also, please.

Larry.

**MR. MEAD:** Lisa Jacobs, you raised the marriage question. This is a matter which I think it's too soon to address and force away my policy. I think we don't yet have a clear-cut consensus about it at a political level; we also don't have clear-cut programs that can deal with it. So I think the posture taken in the reauthorization, where there would be some experimentation in this area, is the proper one. These programs are not ready for primetime – perhaps at some point in the future.

On the education and training question, I basically support current policy. As you probably know, the research favors a work-first policy in terms of having more effects on income and employment. The need for education is there, but it should be exercised, I think, after people are working rather than before. It should not be a substitute for employment, which is what it has been in the past. So I'm all in favor of people training for better jobs, but it should be after they're working, rather than before.

**MS. :** (Off mike.)

**MR. MEAD:** Yeah, I'm sorry. My voice is probably giving out.

The question of should government provide work as well as encourage it? I think in extremis, yes. I think there are situations where jobs are clearly unavailable, and then they would have to be provided, but in the economy we've had for the last 10 years, that clearly wasn't necessary in most places. In Wisconsin and New York, the only localities that did provide government jobs on a large scale, there were special conditions that made that necessary. It wasn't that there was a literal lack of employment.

So I do accept joint responsibility, that people have to work or seek to work and government has to promote work, including, if necessary, providing jobs. But whether one has to do it and when is a matter of local judgment.

The question, can there be an end to poverty? I'm not sure. I think we can reduce it by a lot. We haven't found out how to reduce it, but in principle we could. It's a policy problem that I think is solvable, but I don't know that we can entirely eliminate it.

The most interesting question that I've heard in this batch was, was it wise to bring religion into a policy debate that is already divisive? I think the answer to that is

Jesus spoke of bringing division and the sword rather than harmony. I don't think Mary Jo and I have proposed, nor does the Pew project propose, to eliminate division. I think bringing religion into the picture may increase division possibly, but it will also be more honest. What we're saying, really, is that our beliefs about many of these questions go back to religious convictions and we should bring those out on the table. And we have to believe that over time that would promote consensus.

Janice Crouse, I'm afraid I didn't discern a question in your comments.

**MS. BANE:** Let me speak to some of the same questions. There's quite a lot of good research, which suggests that work-first policies are effective, at least in the short term. I think that research has been definitive in the ways many states structure their programs, and I think the logic behind work first is that indeed many people who are in the situation where they need aid have dropped out of school or not completed school because they don't like school and didn't do well, and that getting a job first is one of the ways that they become motivated to go back and increase their skills.

So I agree with Larry on the sequence of work and education and training. I would emphasize the importance of education and training, and I would also emphasize the importance of education and training, not just for welfare recipients, but for low-income adults more generally. I think the receipt of education and training should not, I think, be tied to the receipt of welfare. That seems to me a quite perverse incentive.

Does the government ever need to provide work? Yes, I believe so. We have not seen, in the last 10 years, much of a need for that because the economy has been so good, but I think when it is necessary it should be done.

Will we evolve to the point of no poverty? Partly it depends on how you define it, of course, whether you define it in an absolute way or if you define it in a relative way. The World Bank uses a definition of poverty in the world of \$2 per day per person. Have we eliminated poverty in that sense in this country? Yes, we have. Will we be able to do much better in the way we deal with our low-income population? I believe we can.

I, too, think that the question of the role of religion in this debate is the most difficult and the most interesting one. I guess I would respond to that by saying religion is there, that the fact that the large majority of American claim affiliation to one or another religious denomination and have been formed by their religious traditions means that their ethics, their response to the world and so on, are shaped by those religious traditions. I think we do ourselves a disservice by keeping that important set of influences under the table, and I think what Larry and I are both advocating and trying to exemplify here is that we can indeed articulate those sensibilities, those beliefs that are there in ways that help the debate rather than impede it.

**MR. DIONNE:** We're supposed to close, but I am a Catholic; I feel guilty. This lady right in the middle had her hand up a long time ago. This gentleman – if you can be

really brief, because we'll have to – this gentleman over here and the lady right down in the middle that I'm pointing to impolitely.

Sir?

**BILL FRANCONIA:** Bill Franconia, sociologist. For those who are shocked to discover that religion might be playing a part in American politics, I recommend Benson and Williams classic 1982 study of religion on Capitol Hill. They're two political scientists. They found only a minority of members of our Congress, even at that time, thought that religion was not important in their lives. The great majority said it either "greatly" or "somewhat" affects every one of their votes, so we ought to know that. I'm surprised people don't.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

Ma'am?

**DEMETRA NIGHTINGALE:** Yes, I'm Demetra Nightingale from Johns Hopkins University. Some of the others, more eloquently than I, talked about the preferential position of the poor, as Mary Jo did. I would flip it around also and say I would like to hear something about the religious, especially Christian, message to the rich, and the challenge to the rich, and the obligation of the rich in this world, and the difficulty that a rich man will have in making it to heaven, and that from that I would take that then to translate that also to the responsibilities of rich nations and the obligation that rich nations and rich governments also have while on this earth.

**MR. DIONNE:** I want to thank you. I want to just note that Larry, in his essay, cites Ron Sider, the evangelical, who said that if the affluent, quote, "do not feed the hungry and clothe the naked, they go to hell," close quotes. (Laughter.) And as we said, in a good Brookings fashion, at the least, to use the language of social science, Sider's view certainly broadens the range of incentives – (laughter) – to which politicians and policymakers might respond.

Larry and Mary Jo, to close, and Ron, and then I just want to say thank you.

**MR. MEAD:** Actually, you've hit on one of the major reasons for the position I take about poverty in my essay, and that is I think Jesus has a ministry to the rich as well as to the poor, and he doesn't construe the rich as servants of the poor. I think the liberal church, in general, does exactly that. They say the rich are welcome in the church and in the community, provided they are the servants of the poor. That is my experience in the liberal churches that I've been a member of. I also want to be a member of the community. I want there to be some delight taken, even in a white man with an English name and a Harvard degree, rather than in the poor alone.

And I feel that in the gospels; I do not feel it in the liberal church, and that's part of the reason why I reject the idea of a preferential option. I don't think that the poor are

of no concern; they are of special concern, but so are the rich, so is everybody. And therefore, that's why I don't really accept the idea of a preference. The preference sets us off in the direction of a policy of unilateral obligation, which has led to our problems, and it makes community impossible. So, indeed, that is at the core of my position.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

**MS. BANE:** All men and women, male and female, rich and poor, are precious in the sight of God. All are called to the community of discipleship. All are called to be responsible for each other in the community, and I think that is an important part of our tradition. Having said that, the statements about the rich in the gospels are pretty strong: "Woe to you rich; it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle ..." and all that sort of thing. So I think that the statements about the obligations of the rich to the community are very, very strong, and that we ignore them at our peril.

Demetra, I think one of the most difficult questions that we don't speak to in this book and tend not to speak to in these forums is the question of the obligations of rich nations towards poor nations. I've been kind of trying to think a bit about that. It's a departure for me. I think I don't know what I think about it, but I think it is the most important question facing us as we go forward.

**MR. DIONNE:** Thank you.

Ron?

**MR. HASKINS:** (Off mike.)

**MR. DIONNE:** Well, then I just want to say thanks. I want to give my answer to the gentleman's question, and it really is similar to what Mary Jo and Larry said, which is, I think the passion represented in this room among religious people – many of them religious people – suggests that the passion in this debate is already there, that a lot of people have a set of religious assumptions when they come to this debate, and I do think it is much better to be explicit about these things because it's more honest.

And I think the other thing we've seen today in this great exchange – and I want to thank you all again, and particularly to Larry and Mary Jo – is a great deal of courage. When you heard some of the comments that came back to them, you realize what courage it takes to engage in this, because they took their share of grief today, which is good in a discussion of this sort. You can't talk about moral questions without dealing with empirical questions, we learned. You can't deal with empirical questions without dealing with moral questions. And again, where moral visions are rooted in religious traditions, it's more honest and enlightening to explore them openly. And I want to thank Ron and Larry and Mary Jo and you all. Stay with us. We'll do this again on the market.

Thank you very much.  
(Applause.) (End of event.)