

# ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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As many of you know, I have announced my retirement as Grace University's President, effective 30 June 2012. An important aspect of my retirement is the decision to end the radio edition of Issues in Perspective. Therefore, this weekend of 28-29 January 2012 is the last radio broadcast of "Issues." However, I will continue writing the weekly edition of Issues in Perspective, which you can access at [www.issuesinperspective.com](http://www.issuesinperspective.com). (The archive of past editions of Issues will remain at that site.) Thank you for being a faithful listener and supporter of "Issues." To have had this radio ministry for nearly twenty years has been one of the joys of my life. I hope that you will continue to read Issues in Perspective at the website, [www.issuesinperspective.com](http://www.issuesinperspective.com).

## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

### *Are You Guilty of Speciesism?*

One of my favorite writers is Andree Seu, who writes for the magazine *World*. In her most recent column, she writes of reading through a bird magazine she bought at a local PetSmart store. One article particularly in this magazine caused her to write of the author: ". . . by the end of her remarks I felt just a little bit ashamed of being human. It's hard to put your finger on a tone of voice, but here is a sampler: 'We love our avian family members and know they love us. Unfortunately, we often hinder the development of a deeper and more precious relationship with them because of how we have been trained to think of animals. . . [A]s humans we are hindered by our egocentric tendency toward assessing intelligence by how much an animal thinks or behaves as we do . . . Their ability to adapt to our world is usually far superior to our ability to function in theirs. . . The animal world . . . possesses a state of sophistication that is inconceivable and unattainable to most human beings, yet we like to hold ourselves above it.'"

Wow!! After reading what Seu quotes from this article, I too felt almost guilty that I am a human being. Perhaps C.S. Lewis provides an antidote to our perceived guilt: He observes that the problem is not that we love animals too much but that we love God and other human beings too little. In *The Four Loves* he wrote: "It is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the many that constitutes the inordinacy." There is a clear creation-order distinction in the Bible. Humans are created in God's image, not cats. Jesus declared that humans are worth more than birds, even though God cares for both. Further, humans are the ones whom God declares are "a little lower than the angels," not dogs.

How then do we think biblically about such a subject? Francis Schaeffer once argued that the church needs to be a "pilot plant" where the proper relationships between human beings and the physical world is modeled. The church, he states, must be a place "where men can see in our congregations and missions a substantial healing of all divisions, the alienations, man's rebellion

has produced.” This macro-plan for reconciliation must begin with the church. It involves five dimensions:

- **Humans properly related to God.** For any type of reconciliation to occur, humans must trust Jesus Christ for salvation. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he referred to his ministry as one of “reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18) – reconciling God and humanity through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Humans will never exercise proper God-honoring stewardship without first being reconciled to Him through Christ.
- **The human properly related to self.** Humans must see themselves as God sees them – of infinite value as creatures and, in Christ, as redeemed. Because we have God’s view of self, there is proper respect for the body as eternally significant. A mark of the redeemed Christian is a commitment to care for and respect one’s body. It belongs to God and to allow it to be an instrument of sin or to treat it with disrespect is to say something about God, for He created and redeemed it. The Christian is no longer independent but forever dependent on the Lord who purchased him (see Romans 12:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- **Humans properly related to other humans.** Because we now have Christ’s mind, Christians view other humans through God’s eyes. Christians treat all humans with respect, realizing shared creatureliness and shared value as image-bearers of God. This is at the heart of Jesus’ command to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves. The Good Samaritan story powerfully illustrates **how** one loves one’s neighbor (Luke 10:30-37). All humans, redeemed and unredeemed, are of value and worth to God.
- **Humans properly related to nature.** Humans are to treat all aspects of God’s physical creation with respect and honor. If all of God’s creation is “good,” then His disciples must have the same regard He has. It is ethically wrong to destroy wantonly what God has created. The non-human creation serves humans, that is the point of having dominion status. But humans serve God’s creation with respect and honor; we are God’s stewards representing Him. Stewardship also implies accountability—to Him.
- **Nature properly related to nature.** Romans 8:20-23 makes clear the present “groaning” of creation; it awaits the return of Jesus when it will be restored. Then nature will be properly related to nature and the horrific consequences of human sin that so wreak havoc on the physical creation (see Genesis 3) will end. In 1988, Mother Teresa and James Lovelock, advocate of the Gaia hypothesis, got into an argument at Oxford University’s Global Forum for Survival. Mother Teresa argued that if we take care of people on the planet, the Earth will survive. Lovelock countered that if we take care of the Earth, humanity’s problems will be solved. In light of God’s Word, both are needed. God makes it clear that if there is repentance and cleansing, He will cleanse the earth as well (see 2 Chronicles 7:14 for example). There is the crying need for balance focusing on humans and focusing on animals and the earth. Both are important to God. But only humans have dominion status; only humans experience redemption; and it is only for humans that Jesus died.

See Andree Seu in *World* (28 January 2012), p. 71 and James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 89-97.

## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

*Mitt Romney’s Wealth and the State of the Republican Party*

The rather shocking outcome of the South Carolina primary is a metaphor for the state of the Republican Party. During the campaign in South Carolina and especially during the major debate right before the primary, the wealth and taxes of Mitt Romney seemed to be the primary issue. It was amazing to watch Newt Gingrich and to some extent Rick Santorum portray Romney in a way that raised issues about his character and the entire issue of fairness. In one way, the candidates attacking Romney sounded like Democrats utilizing their populist, class warfare line. It was almost unbelievable to watch. As the columnist David Brooks has written, “Mitt Romney is a rich man, but is Mitt Romney’s character formed by his wealth? Is Romney a spoiled, cosseted character? Has he been corrupted by ease and luxury?” Such a notion is preposterous! In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Romney has worked very hard all of his life. He earned two degrees at Harvard simultaneously (in law and business). He built a very successful business and there has never been any evidence of corruption or unethical behavior during his days at Bain. As a Mormon, he has given significant amounts of his wealth to the Mormon Church, far more proportionately and in real dollars than his opponents. Brooks writes that “his salient quality is not wealth. It is, for better or worse, his tenacious drive—the sort of relentlessness that we associate with striving immigrants, not rich scions. . . . He may have character flaws, but he does not have the character flaws normally associated with great wealth.”

Personally, I have been offended and outraged about what Gingrich and Santorum has said about Romney. And the snide remarks and subtle suggestions that his tax rate of 15% is somehow evidence of devious behavior or something that is illegal is despicable. If Gingrich wants to have a debate about Romney’s wealth or his tax rate, he should permit Romney to go after how he became so wealthy. There are serious ethical issues in Newt Gingrich’s life and to be honest there are serious and profound character issues that do reflect on his ability to serve as president. I have serious reservations about Mitt Romney but none of those reservations have anything to do with his wealth, his role at Bain or his tax rate. There is absolutely no shred of evidence that anything about Romney’s life, his business or his tax rate is illegal or unethical. Because of what is occurring, the Republican Party is almost on the verge of self-destructing. Several additional thoughts:

- First, both the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movements have raised questions about economic freedom and inequality. Their arguments, as Michael Gerson has commented, “have generally been vague, ideological and unhelpful. Elements on the right reject the whole idea of distributive justice—opposing most taxation as theft and embracing a utopian project involving abolition of the modern state. Elements on the left seek a substitute for capitalism—a utopian project that has been tried and found frightening. The political debates on free markets or the privileges of the 1 percent seldom touch on the actual struggles of citizens—say, living in the shadow of foreclosure, or attending a failing school, or serving in a gang-occupied neighborhood. Ideology is abstract. Hardship is lived concretely.” What is occurring in our nation right now is rather astonishing! We have had three years of almost reckless spending that has dangerously increased the national debt all the while leaving unemployment high and the economy stagnant. In addition, President Obama has vastly increased the entitlement obligation of future generations through his health care law and has instituted a whole new array of regulations that stifle economic creativity and growth. But the Democratic Party and now the Republican presidential candidates are changing the issue of this campaign from President Obama and his record to issues of fairness and inequality.

The image is one of Romney being greedy, with the illusion that all wealthy people are greedy and have pillaged the remaining 99% and have thereby robbed the middle class of all hope. Newt Gingrich, Rick Perry and now Rick Santorum are making the case that private equity as practiced by Romney's Bain Capital is nothing more than "vulture capitalism." As columnist Charles Krauthammer has observed, "The assault on Bain/Romney instantly turns Obama's class-war campaign from partisan attack into universal complaint. Suddenly Romney's wealth, practices and taxes take center stage. . . This is no mainstream media conspiracy. This is the GOP maneuvering itself right onto Obama terrain." It is quite frankly mind-boggling.

- Second, as I suggested above, what we are perhaps viewing is self-destructive. Dan Balz, reporter for the *Washington Post*, observes correctly that "In some respects, the contest between Romney and Gingrich falls into a familiar construct of Establishment vs. Insurgents, and yet neither candidate is the ideal to play his assigned role, or, more important, to bridge the divides within the party that characterized many primary contests in 2010." Romney is not a very good establishment candidate because he does not fit the Republican mold. Is he a moderate or a conservative? He was never a fervent supporter of Ronald Reagan and his tenure as governor of Massachusetts does not fit into the conservative mold. The health care law passed while he was governor is not a good credential for a conservative. As many have observed, it is closer to Obama's health care law than most are willing to admit. Gingrich is hardly an outside-the-beltway insurgent! He has operated within the corridors of power in Washington, D.C. for twenty years. Therefore, the Republican Party is in the middle of a very serious identity crisis. What is it? What does it stand for? Can it govern? Romney and Gingrich represent the contradictory forces within the Party. Many in the grass roots of the Party yearn for a fighter who is prepared to take on Obama in a strident and confrontational manner (i.e., Gingrich). But many who served with Gingrich in the House when he was Speaker are not supporting him because he is a man of ideas and a worthy debater, but he cannot govern, they argue. As Dan Balz suggests, "But many in the party also know they need the steady competence of a leader who is capable of restraining the worst excesses of the hard-right activists and translating the conservative rhetoric and ideas that unite the party into a governing strategy that can bring the Republicans a White House victory in November and success beyond." Quite frankly, no one believes that this is Newt Gingrich. It is the observation of many right now that neither Gingrich nor Romney reflects the character or personality of the Republican Party today. Unless and until that is settled, there is little hope that, at the end of the day, a Republican candidate for president can defeat President Obama. This identity crisis within the Republican Party could prove fatal! Balz writes, perhaps prophetically, that "Although they have a real opportunity to win the White House in November, Republicans may be a presidential cycle away from fielding a group of candidates who are more in sync with the real identity of the party, who represent the party's future generation and who are more capable of bridging the cultural and stylistic gulfs that exist [within the party]." One could almost envision the party in a self-destruct mode right now. If the party does not soon move away from this mode, they will have no chance of victory come November.

See Dan Balz in the *Washington Post* (23 January 2012); Charles Krauthammer in *ibid.* (20 January 2012); Michael Gerson in *ibid.*; and David Brooks in the *New York Times* (20 January 2012).