

The Oak Ridge Affirmations and Denials— October 24, 1992

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The Oak Ridge Affirmations and Denials were issued at a conference, "The Church and Welfare: Providence, Responsibility, Justice, and Charity", sponsored by Covenant Presbyterian Church of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The goal of the conference was to produce a set of affirmations and denials to be discussed thoroughly by the participants. The panel, made up of Evangelical leaders in the area of theology and welfare policy, included Doug Bandow, Michael Bauman, E. Calvin Beisner, Joel Belz, Mark Buckner, Michael Cromatie, Robert Dotson, David Dunham, George Grant, David Hall, Randy Nabors, Ed Payne, and Hilton Terrell.

The Affirmations and Denials may be reproduced and may serve a need for study/discussion groups. See pages 23-27 for a [related essay](#).

Affirmations

1. We AFFIRM that there is a biblical relationship between faith and work, word and deed. Further, we confess Christ as Lord over all realms of life.
2. We AFFIRM that the evangelical and reformed churches have been slack in ministry to the poor in our time.
3. We AFFIRM that US government programs since 1960 have squandered many resources, lifting few out of poverty.
4. We AFFIRM that the present welfare system is counter-productive, ill-conceived, and substantially immoral.

Denials

- We DENY that piety or spirituality exempts Christians from concerns with physical needs. Further, we deny any gnosticism which isolates the physical from the spiritual.
- We DENY that our responsibility as Christians will be lessened in the coming days.
- We DENY that the current approach, which centralizes and expends approximately 75% on overhead, bears much promise for the future.
- We DENY that the present welfare system is the proper starting point for caring for the poor.

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| 5. | We AFFIRM that the church should call prophetically for the adoption of biblically valid systems of caring for the poor. | We DENY that any system of caring for the poor can be neutral either in religious principle or moral effect. |
| 6. | We AFFIRM that God has created man in his own image to be creative and productive, and that God has enabled him, under proper conditions, to produce sufficient goods for all people everywhere. | We DENY that there is inherent scarcity in the finite universe to thwart industry or necessitate poverty. |
| 7. | We AFFIRM that God expresses a concern for the poor in the scriptures. | We DENY that God has a concern for poverty as a consequence of sin beyond other categories of sinful consequence. |
| 8. | We AFFIRM that scripture teaches that God blesses those, especially the poor themselves, who help the poor. | We DENY that scripture approves a callous indifference to, or ignorance of, the oppression of the poor. |
| 9. | We AFFIRM that the Church is charged to be the major extra-family agency of welfare for its members and charged with the prophetic task of calling for, and modeling, justice and mercy in the world. | We DENY that the Church is the first agency responsible for amelioration of the poor. |
| 10. | We AFFIRM the biblical priority among helping agencies (as in I Timothy 5), viz.:
a. Personal responsibility
b. Family support
c. Local/area church
d. Other voluntary organizations | We DENY that the Church is the first agency responsible for amelioration of the poor. |
| 11. | We AFFIRM the Bible's emphasis on industriousness and honest responsibility. | We DENY that free hand-outs and assistance have remedied poverty in our culture. |
| 12. | We AFFIRM that the church or family shall assist only those who are willing to work or unable to work. | We DENY that the Church is not free to espouse its beliefs and biblical ethics while dispensing material aid; nor that it cannot advocate certain biblical-ethical behaviors as prerequisites for assistance. |
| 13. | We AFFIRM that Providence is a limiting factor for the total eradication of poverty. | We DENY that all problems can be cured by any agency prior to the eschaton (end time). |
| 14. | We AFFIRM that there are deserving poor. | We DENY that the undeserving poor should be given aid. |

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| <p>15. We AFFIRM that an active ministry of mercy is one of the marks of an obedient church.</p> | <p>We DENY that any churches are exempt from the mandate to institute and maintain ministries of mercy.</p> |
| <p>16. We AFFIRM that righteousness is a combination of justice and mercy and that all people and institutions fall short of both standards.</p> | <p>We DENY that justice is part of charity.</p> |
| <p>17. We AFFIRM justice to mean rendering impartially to everyone his due in accordance with God's moral law.</p> | <p>We DENY that justice entails any ideal distribution of wealth in society.</p> |
| <p>18. We AFFIRM that justice requires the remediation and vindication of those who are impoverished by the oppressive acts of others, and that this is the primary task of the state in helping the poor.</p> | <p>We DENY both that justice permits partiality to anyone in the enforcement of laws and that the poor can be expected to defend themselves adequately against oppression without help from mediating institutions and the state.</p> |
| <p>19. We AFFIRM that we should not only provide material aid for the genuine poor, but biblical counsel and accountability as well.</p> | <p>We DENY that real charity requires us to subsidize those who persist in moral rebellion.</p> |
| <p>20. We AFFIRM that principles of biblical economics must be included as a basis for welfare.</p> | <p>We DENY that non-biblical principles of economics (e.g., Marxism, or unprincipled greed) will help in remedying poverty.</p> |
| <p>21. We AFFIRM that a politico-economic system that promotes human liberty, justice and productivity is crucial to the prevention and reduction of poverty.</p> | <p>We DENY that any politico-economic system apart from the Christian ethic is an adequate solution to poverty.</p> |
| <p>22. We AFFIRM the Bible as the only infallible guide to proper care for the poor.</p> | <p>We DENY that approaches which contradict biblical wisdom can prove fruitful.</p> |
| <p>23. We AFFIRM that there are many causes of poverty.</p> | <p>We DENY that poverty or welfare can be reduced to any single variable, unless it is an explicitly scriptural dynamic (e.g. sin).</p> |
| <p>24. We AFFIRM voluntary charity as the best replacement for statist approaches.</p> | <p>We DENY that the civil government's power to tax justifies a general system of wealth redistribution.</p> |
| <p>25. We AFFIRM that health is a condition of both body and soul (spirit) and that medical care should be practiced with that understanding.</p> | <p>We DENY that government control or provision of health care is the best means of making health care available to the needy.</p> |

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| 26. We AFFIRM that the goal of charity is to enable its recipients to become self-supporting and able to help others. | We DENY that approaches which engender attitudes of dependency on the state for the long term are either helpful or moral. |
| 27. We AFFIRM that some cases of need are systemic or enduring and will require continuing mercy. | We DENY that recipients of long-term mercy are incapable of productivity or meaningful ministry. |