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COURIER

Stewardship Is God's Way of Raising People

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As our culture has advanced in recent generations, the subject of stewardship has claimed less and less attention. Most preachers avoid the topic, and many church-goers choose not to attend on Sundays when stewardship is the theme of discussion. As a result, the term stewardship has become blurred and undefined. Often it is used synonymously with philanthropy or development, and some feel in our "progressive era" that it is an antiquated term.

"Steward" is a strong biblical word that implies "servanthood" and is referred to 26 times in the Bible.

During the 30th anniversary year of CSA it is appropriate to ask the questions "Is stewardship relevant today?" and "How does an understanding of stewardship affect our giving and asking of funds?" and to examine how stewardship is God's way of raising people. The answers can be found by exploring the full and correct definition of stewardship and distinguishing it from philanthropy and development. Peter Dobkin Hall's book, *Inventing the Nonprofit Sector*, (1992) gives us helpful insight about our historical roots, which were elaborated on in David McKenna's 1992 CSA keynote address.

"Steward" is a strong biblical word that implies "servanthood" and is referred to 26 times in the Bible. The concept of stewardship is woven like a thread of a tapestry throughout the Old Testament. The broad concept of stewardship is Jesus' primary subject in 17 of his 38 parables, and it occupies one verse out of every six in the gospels. This often avoided topic is actually one of the loftiest themes of scripture.

A steward is a highly-trusted manager of an owner's properties. The steward is expected to enhance the properties' value, be accountable to the owner for the managed properties, and participate in the owner's management plans. Christian stewardship was revitalized at the time of the Reformation. The biblical insistence on the responsibility of people—even of monarchs—to God's law turned the political tide in those countries where the Reformation's emphasis on the Bible as the final authority took hold. The Pilgrims brought the values of Christian stewardship with them. The laws of our land have clearly reflected these values.

The vision of stewardship in I Peter 4:10-11 assumes a "good steward of many graces" is someone who is grateful, merciful, and faithful and called to a life in a covenant responsibility for all of creation. This makes personal redemption and social responsibility inseparable. Giving is a personal matter, a reflection of one's character: how one acts toward a neighbor. Biblical stewardship assumes we look with accountability to God for the blessings of wealth.

When we talk about stewardship, we are not referring to just a definition of terms in the dictionary. *Stewardship is a way of looking at life and, more importantly, a way of living as a Christian in a non-Christian world. Christian stewardship is God's order for humanity's relationship to God, not humanity's relationship to an organization.* This understanding of stewardship both informs the motivation of donors and the manner in which funds are raised.

In modern history, the first significant shift away from stewardship started in the mid-1800s when America became urbanized, industrialized, and capitalized. The wealthy Carnegies and Rockefellers embraced the concept of philanthropy, which is a humanistic word meaning "friend of humankind" as distinct from the "servant of God" stewardship concept. Social Darwinism took the place of the biblical vision, emphasizing a moral community giving credit to good fortune and natural

selection rather than to God's blessing. "Scientific philanthropy" became the model of the elitist who gave for the selective good to those worthy of help, rather than the common good. Giving was placed on a business basis in which the motive was cost benefit for continuous economic growth with the redistribution of wealth to sustain free enterprise. Just as culture has redefined itself without God, culture also has redefined giving without God and his values of Christian stewardship.

Today charity has been replaced in large measure by professional philanthropy that has less to do with individual redemption than with social reconstruction. The goal is not so much to help people succeed within society as to remake society so that no one is a failure and to act as a powerful catalyst for political, economic, and social change. Helping others has evolved from a personal exercise of individual virtue to an impersonal expression of public concern.

We have shifted radically from a people and culture dominated by biblically-driven stewardship values to one motivated by the values of philanthropy.

Marvin Olasky's book, *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, recounts how the emphasis on spiritual material improvement has shifted to support the concept that individuals can live any way they choose, without consequence. Common practice used to be that recipients of charity were expected to attend church or perform chores in return for assistance they received. Now, more often than not, they are told their plight is not their fault, but they need help (continued on page 8)

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because they are victims of circumstances beyond their control. In 100 years we have shifted radically from a people and culture dominated by biblically-driven stewardship values to one motivated by the values of philanthropy—love of humankind.

The current era started in approximately 1950 as fundraising became big business and the term development became prevalent with its emphasis on management, cost-effective fundraising, and benefits to individuals. Tax law changes saw the number of foundations increase from 12,500 to more than one million. The dream of the Great Society was in full swing, and organizational theory with its emphasis on management by objectives led to our current period of giving. Large professional fundraising staffs and increased use of motivational techniques now influence how and why people give. Greater interest is given to the research into the causes of human suffering than for relief of that suffering. In our current materialistic, "me" generation, development and giving are motivated largely by self interest.

Language in this Age of Self is filled with phrases that glorify personal choice above all other values. The most appropriate analogy for modern mores is the hamburger chain's glib slogan: "Have it your way!" Donor premiums and bene-

fits have become dominant values. More emphasis is given to developing the list than to educating and encouraging the individual. Fundraising gurus stress benefits—give for what is in it for you—and fundraising conferences and literature emphasize "how to" techniques.

If you examine Christian giving and asking practices today, you will find little difference from those of our culture at large. The highest value of fundraisers is how to get people to give more to our organizations—not to educate and encourage Christian stewardship principles.

On the occasion of CSA's 30th anniversary, the CSA board of directors voted unanimously to affirm the association's mission as an advocate for biblically-based Christian stewardship, and as board chair, I used this occasion to deliver the keynote address, "Revitalizing Our Christian Stewardship Roots." *An important aspect of these actions is that stewardship is distinct from philanthropy and development, and a clear understanding of these differences is essential to how we view the world, relate to people, and conduct our business.*

Stewardship is a vertical relationship and accountability to God. A steward is a servant, a caretaker of God's resources. Stewardship is asked of us by God and a responsibility we have to God. It is a way of viewing the world through God's eyes,

rather than our own.

Philanthropy, on the other hand, is a humanistic term meaning "love of humankind"—humans loving and caring for other humans. If we love God, we are to "love our neighbor as ourselves" and this can be an outgrowth of stewardship. This is a horizontal relationship of person to person or person to an organization.

While philanthropy is an appropriate outgrowth of stewardship, stewardship does not result from philanthropy. Stewardship is a vertical relationship to God, and philanthropy is a horizontal relationship to humans—hardly interchangeable. Development encompasses those activities that encourage giving, and in our current culture the trend among fundraisers is to emphasize the benefits to the donor, thus stressing self rather than philanthropy (loving your neighbor) or stewardship (serving God).

We need to ask ourselves what kind of motivation for giving we are encouraging in our asking. Are we urging giving that benefits self and impresses neighbors, or does our giving and asking grow out of a thankful human response to God for His creation? Stewardship is God's way of raising people—not humanity's way of raising money.

May our lives and work reflect this attitude.