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Spring Lecture Series

John Visser

Dordt College, john.visser@dordt.edu

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and Present" delivered Tuesday evening, Bernbaum chronicled the history of U.S.-Soviet relations from the U.S. atomic monopoly in 1945 to current discussion of a winnable nuclear exchange. As the warning time of a pending nuclear attack has been reduced by sophisticated technology and will shortly be limited to about five minutes, nuclear war will hang on a "hair trigger," says Bernbaum, driven by a "use them or lose them" mentality. The opportunity to check for error is narrowed to a few moments for fear of losing our entire defensive capabilities to a first strike.

The frightening implications of our current military strategies are exceeded only by a consideration of the potential effects of a nuclear assault. Those effects were discussed Wednesday evening in Bernbaum's final lecture, "The Nuclear Crisis: The Challenge to the Christian Community." His descriptions of the destructive impact of a nuclear explosion—the initial blast, the immense fireball, the intense radiation, and the prolonged secondary effects—were sobering and unimaginable. He shared his deeply personal convictions about the responsibilities of the followers of Christ and discussed why he felt compelled to adopt a stand of nuclear pacifism. "Evangelical Christians have always been the vanguard in the struggle to

bring justice to society," he argued, citing the abolition of slavery, the early days of the labor movement, and the more recent pro-life efforts, "and this vision of justice was never more needed."

The reduction and control of nuclear arms is part of the broader pro-life view, noted Bernbaum, and once again the major impetus is coming from the Christian Church, as many Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and Charismatics are advocating a nuclear freeze. As indicative of this common effort, Bernbaum cited the conference on peace and nuclear arms in Pasadena, California, this spring where many of these groups will come together for the first time to engage in meaningful dialogue.

Bernbaum closed this penetrating and challenging series by calling upon all those who love Christ to become informed, to institute discussions in their homes, schools, and churches, and to assert with confidence the Lordship of Christ over the nation's public policy. The question is not whether we can be successful in influencing governments, said Bernbaum, but whether we are responding obediently to the Word of God by seeking peace, justice, and righteousness.

Donald E. King, Jr.

Spring Lecture Series

The Spring Lecture Series, which was sponsored this year by the Department of Business Administration and Economics, was held on April 4 and 5. The series focused on the subject "Economic Justice and Christian Responsibility: Biblical Directives and Current Alternatives." The series began on Monday afternoon with a lecture by Mr. Tom Rose, Associate Professor of Economics at Grove City College (Grove City, Pennsylvania), entitled "Biblical Directives on Economic Wealth, Poverty, Freedom, Responsibility, and Justice." On

Monday evening the second lecture in the series was presented by Dr. Wendell Primus, a Senior Staff Economist for the (U.S.) House Ways and Means Committee. The title of this lecture was "Who Are the Poor and to What Extent Are They Assisted by Current Government Programs and Policy?" Dr. Primus lectured again on Tuesday afternoon on "Meeting the Needs of the Poor: Opportunities and Options Involving Government." Dr. Rose concluded the series on Tuesday evening with a lecture entitled "Meeting the Needs of the Poor: Oppor-

tunities and Options Through the Private Sector."

The two guest speakers agreed that Christians are mandated by God to meet the needs of the poor and that God's Word has much to say about that responsibility. However, with respect to the most appropriate methods for accomplishing this task, the two speakers differed substantially. Mr. Rose, who has written one book entitled *Economics: Principles and Policy from a Christian Perspective* and is currently working on another, tailored his remarks around the general theme that government assistance programs (on balance) have hurt the poor more than they have helped them. He argued that the Bible does not call for the equalization of wealth, but rather recognizes that God has ordained that some have more wealth than others. In defense of this position he explained his interpretation of Luke 12:13-15 where Christ refused to divide an inheritance between two brothers. Citing a number of passages from the Bible, primarily from the Old Testament, he stated that, from his perspective, there are only two biblically encouraged methods for defending the poor. First of all, he said, the poor must be set free from those who oppress them. Secondly, he notes that Christians are repeatedly called, as members of Christ's church, to works of charity to enable the poor to help themselves. Both of these methods, he was careful to point out, have their roots in freedom rather than in force in contrast to the government sponsored assistance programs in effect today. These programs, according to Mr. Rose, are humanistically oriented and could better be described as the plundering of some for the benefit of others, in violation of the eighth commandment. He cited a number of government programs which coercively redistribute income from one segment of society to another. Many of these programs, he insisted, actually redistribute money from the poor to the rich. (e.g. certain taxes, subsidies, guarantees, inflation and other interferences with the free market pricing

system.) Such government action he concluded, which is outside of the sphere of legitimate government authority, inevitably leads to massive macro-economic problems like those we are experiencing today. Professor Rose also cautioned his audience to be deeply concerned that a large number of people are being blinded by government activity that pacifies, noting that those "Whom the gods seek to destroy they first strike blind."

Dr. Primus, on the other hand, who has written a number of articles on income maintenance programs during the past decade, presented his ideas based on the premise that government has a legitimate role to play in caring for the poor. The government, he noted, is a large enough unit to deal effectively with the problem of poverty, particularly because it has been given the authority to enforce income-sharing decisions. Throughout his lectures Dr. Primus stressed the point that the term "the poor" does not refer to a homogeneous group of people. By citing numerous facts and figures from his research, he gave the audience insight into the plethora of problems faced by people who fall below the poverty line. This group, he explained, is composed mainly of the elderly, disabled and children, who, in many cases, cannot be held primarily responsible for their situation. Without income maintenance programs, he went on to explain, the poverty rate would be much higher than it currently is. As an example, he noted that only 15 percent of the elderly now live below the poverty line as opposed to the 64 percent who would if the government's income maintenance programs were discontinued.

Dr. Primus also stressed that some very difficult decisions must be made about how much and what types of assistance should be given to those in need. He noted that although these decisions did not have to be made by the government, they did have to be made by someone. He went on to say that the government in no way intended to have its programs replace private voluntary aid to

the poor, and in fact welcomes and needs private charitable acts to "fill in the cracks" by providing spiritual and emotional guidance to those in need and financial aid to those not adequately covered by public assistance. Dr. Primus concluded his lectures by reminding the audience that decisions concerning income maintenance programs necessarily involve both value judgments and politics, and therefore Christians should make it a point not only to stay informed,

but to encourage their elected representatives to work for any changes which would better serve those in need.

The lectures generated a great deal of interest among both students and faculty and challenged the entire Dordt community to continue to study and work toward the advancement of Christ's Kingdom in this critical area of economics.

John Visser