

CONCENTRATED WEALTH THREATENS DEMOCRACY

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By Jim
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Woe to you who put far off the
day of doom,

Who cause the seat of violence to
come near;

Who lie on beds of ivory,

Stretch out on your couches,

Eat lambs from the flock and calves
from the midst of the stall;

Who sing idly to the sound of
stringed instruments,

And invent for musical instruments
like David;

Who drink wine from bowls,

And anoint yourselves with the best ointments,

But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Amos 6:3-6
NKJV

You probably know all about it now--- how massive concentration of wealth in the hands of a few is an accomplished fact. What remains unanswered is how far this massive transfer of wealth can continue without destroying the basic democratic institutions upon which this nation was founded. And if the institutions of a free democratic republic wither or are subverted, then how far behind can our personal freedoms be?

No, it's not a surreal dream; this threat is real and immediate. The depth of the problem seems to be misunderstood by most voters, who vote mainly for personalities or broad general promises rather than clearly thought-out issues. If we dig into this question a bit, I think we'll find the situation far worse than generally admitted.

The prophet Amos was upset about the situation in his country, with the upper classes living indolent lives centered on personal comfort, fine dining, musical entertainment, heady wines, and body ointments of the best sort. Their lives of luxury allowed them to ignore the suffering of their people, as explained by Amos's pointed comment: "But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

Today we in America face the same problem as a small but powerful class of the ultra-rich enjoys life to the fullest but ignores the suffering of Joseph, or the bulk of the populace. The connection between their largesse and the desperation of the people is seldom made, especially not by those whose moral duty is to do so---the churches and religious establishments of the land.

This is not a diatribe against wealth. After all, the patriarch Abraham was very wealthy, as was his son Isaac. God sees wealth as a deserved reward for integrity and upright values, as it should be. It's not wrong to be wealthy, but only to gain it through oppression and manipulation, or to spend it in ways that further enslave

and persecute the poor. It isn't that some people are wealthy; it's that some gain their largesse through manipulation and oppression of others, or spend it in extra-legal scratching and clawing to retain their prominent positions atop the economic ladder.

Massive

concentrations of wealth threaten democracy because holders of great wealth have power to distort public values through pervasive control of the media and influence on the legislative process. Because of lax campaign financing controls many legislators lacking access to the financial trough must spend inordinate time making calls to smaller givers, thus harming their ability to research issues before them.

Another

effect on democracy is that wealth increases the access to education, housing, medical care, but denies those same opportunities to the poor. Since it is common knowledge that democracies depend upon an educated, diligent citizenry, the lack of access to these blessings threatens political democracy.

But I fear

that the greatest threat to democracy arises in the fact that due to our many moral and financial failures we are rapidly creating another nation mired in generational poverty, hopelessness, and, increasingly, with pent-up anger. Perhaps Travon Martin's father, Tracy, said it best in a recent interview with Time magazine: "This country will never move forward if you decide to leave a nation of people behind."