

Press Kit
OCTOBER 2010

Sacred Texts, Social Duty

An hour-long documentary
produced by EthicsDaily.com

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PRESS RELEASE

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With anti-taxers at a fever pitch and politicians locked in an angry stalemate over taxation, EthicsDaily.com announces the release of a documentary on faith and taxes that promises to bring calm, civil and deeply moral reflection to one of America's most divisive issues.

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty," an hour-long documentary produced by EthicsDaily.com in Nashville, focuses on four states and how people of faith think about taxation.

The program features interviews with nearly two dozen people of faith—congregational leaders, academicians and tax experts. Christians, Jews and Muslims speak candidly about what their sacred texts and religious traditions say about taxation and how their moral teachings apply to contemporary taxes.

Interviewees include:

- Wayne Flynt, Pulitzer-Prize nominee, Baptist minister and professor emeritus at Auburn University;
- Daniel Isaak, rabbi at Congregation Neveh Shalom in Portland, Ore.;
- Ammar Amonette, imam at the Islamic Center of Virginia in Richmond;
- Ralph Martire, executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability in Chicago;
- Mark Knutson, pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, Ore.; and
- Margaret M. Mitchell, dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School.

The filmmakers follow key leaders in four states -- Virginia, Alabama, Illinois and Oregon -- where the fiscal and moral implications of tax policy come into sharp focus.

Virginia has slashed education spending. Alabama has raised its threshold for taxing low-income citizens. Illinois has a deficit that's half of the entire state budget. And Oregon voters passed two measures in early 2010 raising taxes on individuals and corporations.

And all this is happening without much moral reflection on taxation from houses of faith.

"During my lifetime I've never heard a sermon from the pulpit that's advocated for a good tax policy," says Tami Sober, assistant director at the Virginia Education Association, in the documentary.

It's a recurring sentiment in communities of faith across the country: Moral teachings and taxation are seldom connected in pulpits.

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty" will challenge that dynamic and call viewers to think about the relationship between faith and taxes.

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty" was originally produced as an ABC-TV interfaith special. However, network gatekeepers refused to air the program without the removal of the 10-minute segment evaluating regressivity/progressivity, sales taxes on food, and the lottery as a predatory form of taxation.

EthicsDaily.com was unwilling to gut the program of its moral witness.

"Broadcasting an hour-long documentary on sacred texts without an application of moral teachings to the public square says that religion is irrelevant, that faith has nothing to say to social justice, that the current tax system is a good one from a faith perspective," says Robert Parham, executive director of EthicsDaily.com. "Watering down the moral witness for the sake of an ABC broadcast is too much of a compromise."

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty" is EthicsDaily.com's seventh production. Previous DVDs included examinations of racism, Baptist-Muslim relations, global poverty, faith and politics, and Baptist-Jewish relations.

EthicsDaily.com's most recent documentary was "Different Books, Common Word: Baptists and Muslims," which aired on ABC-TV stations in January and February 2010.

Prior to "Different Books, Common Word," EthicsDaily.com's "Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism" won the best documentary award at the International Black Film Festival of Nashville in October 2008 and a similar award at the Cine-Fest Motion Picture Expo in Louisville in December 2008. It was also used in countless churches and programs, including the American Baptist Churches USA biennial meeting in Pasadena, Calif., the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly in Houston, Texas, and various regional gatherings of the New Baptist Covenant.

For more information:

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Watch and embed clips at
YouTube.com/EthicsDaily



Download production stills at
SacredTextsSocialDuty.com



Read articles about faith and taxes at
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About EthicsDaily.com

EthicsDaily.com is an imprint of the Baptist Center for Ethics, which was founded in 1991 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that challenges people of faith to advance the common good. BCE early on held conferences and produced curriculum, and in 2002 it launched the flagship website EthicsDaily.com. The news and information site has become a go-to source for people in the pew as well as reporters at the nation's media outlets. EthicsDaily.com topped a half-million page views in August 2009. In 2006, BCE/EthicsDaily.com began producing videos, first delivering *Always ... Therefore: The Church's Challenge of Global Poverty*, and following that up with: *Golden Rule Politics: Reclaiming the Rightful Role of Faith in Politics*; *The Nazareth Manifesto*; *Good Will for the Common Good: Nurturing Baptists' Relationships with Jews*; the award-winning documentary *Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism*; and *Different Books, Common Word: Baptists and Muslims*, which aired on ABC-TV stations in early 2010. EthicsDaily.com continues to innovate and educate for positive social change.

SYNOPSIS

"In this world nothing can be said to be certain," wrote Benjamin Franklin, "except death and taxes." For centuries, the faithful have said much about death, little about taxes. Yet, taxes support our common life as a society. The Abrahamic faith traditions have much to say on this issue, and some of it will surprise you. See how Jewish, Christian and Muslim people of faith read their sacred texts and what they say morally about taxation.

STORYLINES

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty" features stories and interviewees from four states:

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| Virginia | The Abrahamic faiths have long valued public education as a tool for societal improvement, but the commonwealth has recently seen massive budget cuts to education spending. A rabbi and imam, friends in Richmond, discuss what their religious traditions say about the role of education in modern societies. |
| Alabama | Alabama restructured its income tax in 2006, raising the income tax minimum threshold from \$4,600 to \$12,600. Playing a part in the legislation was Alabama Arise, a nonpartisan coalition working to promote fairer state policies toward low-income people. Also on hand is a retired professor of history, who is an ordained Baptist minister and Pulitzer-Prize nominee. |
| Illinois | Illinois has a deficit roughly half of the state budget, and its dire financial straits are increasingly the subject of national discussions. Monitoring the state is the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, whose leader is a Catholic. Also interviewed are the University of Chicago Divinity School dean, who provides historical context for taxation in biblical times, and a Chicago Methodist pastor who works at the crossroads of government. |
| Oregon | Oregon voters approved two measures in early 2010 that raised taxes on individuals and corporations. The controversial measures gave members of faith communities the opportunity to articulate visions and values. Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists and Jews were some of the ones involved in the discussion - and now part of the documentary. |

INTERVIEWEES AND PARTICIPANTS

Ammar Amonette, imam of the Islamic Center of Virginia in Richmond

Philip Blackwell, senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Chicago

Alcena Boozer, rector of St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church in Portland, Oregon

Trudy Bradley, minister at the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Portland, Oregon

Stephen Copley, director of Justice for Our Neighbors in Little Rock, Arkansas

Imad Damaj, president of the Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs in Richmond

Ali Faruk, policy analyst at the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy in Richmond

Wayne Flynt, professor emeritus of history at Auburn University in Alabama

Kimble Forrister, state coordinator for Alabama Arise in Montgomery

Larry Greenfield, executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago

Wendell Griffen, pastor of New Millennium Church in Little Rock, Arkansas

Pres Harris, staff organizer for Alabama Arise in Montgomery

Daniel Isaak, rabbi at Congregation Neveh Shalom in Portland, Oregon

Mark Knutson, pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon

David Leslie, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon in Portland

Gene Levy, rabbi at B'nai Israel in Little Rock, Arkansas

Ralph Martire, executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability in Chicago

Margaret M. Mitchell, dean of the divinity school at the University of Chicago

Abdul Malik Mujahid, imam at the Downtown Islamic Center in Chicago

James Nowlan, research director for the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability in Chicago

Ben Romer, rabbi of Congregation Or Ami in Richmond, Virginia

Doug Smith, executive director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy in Richmond

Tami Sober, assistant director at the Virginia Education Association in Richmond

David Wheeler, pastor of First Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon

PRESS INTERVIEWS AND STARTER QUESTIONS

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1. Why should people of faith be interested in taxation?
2. What is your own professional background and involvement in matters of faith? Of taxation?
3. What is your assessment of how your own sacred texts speak to issues of taxation?
4. Why don't pulpits speak more often about the relationship between faith and taxes?

DVD INFORMATION

"Sacred Texts, Social Duty" is available for pre-order on DVD beginning Oct. 5, 2010. DVDs will begin shipping on or about Oct. 15, 2010.

Individual Copy: \$25 (plus shipping and handling)

Institutional/Library Copy: \$100 (plus shipping and handling)

Running Time: 57 minutes 30 seconds

Color, Stereo, Widescreen

Extras on the DVD include:

- Scene selection menus
- Documentary trailer
- Bonus segments:
 - "Social Justice"
 - "Rally in Birmingham"
 - "Tax Freedom"
 - "Injustice in Arkansas"
 - "Churches Will Not Do It"
 - "Trickle Down"
 - "Theistic Materialism"

A free discussion guide is available at SacredTextsSocialDuty.com