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OCCUPY MOVEMENT A REMINDER OF WHAT WE VALUE

Faith & Values

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During the 1960s, a social movement challenged the values of our country seeking to end racial discrimination and end the war in Southeast Asia. Those protesters changed the course of our nation's history.



Today, the Occupy movement, which, among other things, seeks more jobs, attacks the ever-growing disparity between the rich and everyone else and pushes to reduce corporate influence on politics, is pushing for another change in our history.

The Occupiers challenge our values: Is the acquisition of property and material goods the highest and best use of money accumulated by the wealthy? When there are citizens without homes and with nothing to eat? Citizens who would work — if only there were jobs?

During our country's great history, many policies and laws were adopted to allow all citizens to benefit economically. The policies were largely successful and once

made us the envy of the entire world.

Past generations' values and business practices created plenty of working-class and middle-class jobs and put the American dream of economic stability and moderate material gains within reach for those willing to work.

Today, too many of us measure happiness in material goods. While those who can, spend lavishly, other Americans can't find work, face foreclosure on their homes and despair over paying college loans. Some even find themselves living with no homes at all.

This collapse of the American dream is in evidence at the Seattle homeless encampment called

Nickelsville. I drove past recently and was moved when I saw an American flag flying high above the exposed green tents.

I stopped in and was given a tour. The encampment is reminiscent of Seattle's "Hooverville," which during the Great Depression filled acres with grim, temporary structures built by the city's homeless. Residents had neither electricity nor running water. Food was scarce, and safety was a constant concern.

Today, greed and excess among the "haves" may be fueling the worst economic distress this nation has seen since the Depression. Moderation of appetites and striking a balance between the material and spiritual realms seems to have gone out of fashion. Too many folks choose greed over values.

In Islam and in the other Abrahamic traditions, greed is considered a vice. Our shared teachings encourage generosity and care for our neighbors and standing up for the poor.

Through our holy books, God provides examples of morals and values and reminds us how His prophets inspired God-conscious men and women to struggle against dishonesty, injustice and oppression.

Jesus exposed greedy money-changers in the temple; Moses confronted the oppression of the Pharaohs; and Muhammad ended usury, the practice of charging excessively high interest on money loaned, and established a wealth tax and justice in society.

The Prophet Muhammad said, "None of you is a believer if he eats his full while his neighbor hasn't anything" — and his neighbors at the time were Christians, Jews, pagans and others.

Followers of the Abrahamic faiths need to take a closer look at the Occupy protesters who peacefully stand against the status quo, and who cry out for a reassessment of our country's values — our values.

At a time when bank profits soar to their highest in years, the Occupy movement reminds us that corporate corruption, greed and unrelated power in our society cannot continue as they are today.

The Occupy movement is a reminder of our socioeconomic responsibilities as Americans.

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