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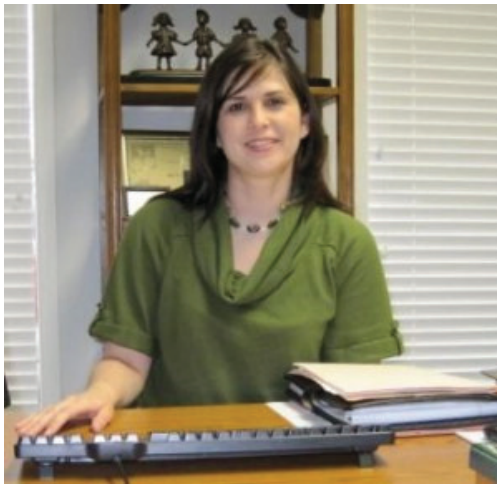
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Warning: "Social Justice" Found in Decatur

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Beth Vann of Decatur Cooperative Ministry



Dan Browning

Posted: Sunday, March 21, 2010 7:17 am | Updated: 7:24 am, Sun Mar 21, 2010.

By Dan Browning | 3 comments

Dan's Spiritual Leanings: Commentary from Dan Browning

On a recent broadcast, Fox News commentator Glenn Beck asserted that when churches use the term "social justice", these are "code words" for communism and Nazism. His rant went like this:

I beg you, look for the words 'social justice' or 'economic justice' on your church Web site. If you find it, run as fast as you can. Social justice and economic justice, they are code words. Now, am I advising people to leave their church? Yes!...If you have a priest that is pushing social justice, go find another parish. Go alert your bishop and tell them, "Excuse me, are you down with this whole social justice thing?" I don't care what the church is. If it's my church, I'm alerting the church authorities: "Excuse me, what's this social justice thing?" And if they say, "Yeah, we're all in that social justice thing," I'm in the wrong place.

Now, I can't speak with any authority about the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (yes, Glenn Beck is a Mormon), but having read and studied the teachings of the guy they named their church after, I can say that Jesus spent a lot of time talking about feeding the hungry and providing for the poor. There are far too many examples for me to cite herein, but you could check out [this passage from the Gospel of Matthew](#), Chapter 25 as a rather stark teaching on what happens to those who do (or don't) feed the hungry, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, or visit those in prison (hint: you want to be with the sheep and not the goats).

In light of the brouhaha surrounding Mr. Beck's tirade, I sought out a couple of practitioners of "social justice" ministries right here in Decatur at [Decatur Cooperative Ministry](#), a faith-based nonprofit organization that for 40 years has worked to prevent and alleviate homelessness in the area. I interviewed Beth Vann, DCM's Executive Director, and Cliff Richards, Director of DCM's Project Take Charge. According to them, too often people (like Mr. Beck) do see social justice or economic justice as concerns of political and religious liberals alone. That, however, is clearly not DCM's approach.

DCM has about 38 member congregations spanning the theological spectrum, including (but not limited to) Baptists, Methodists, AME, Episcopal, Lutherans, Catholics, Presbyterians, UCC, MCC, and Quakers. Were you to bring representatives from each of these congregations together to debate theology, many of them would not see eye to eye. But according to Ms. Vann, "The one thing for 40 years that all these congregations and community members can agree on is the need for social justice." DCM's Board of Directors includes both Democrats and Republicans; most are members of a faith community (including at least one Muslim), although not all are.

Ms. Vann described DCM's "social justice" mission as filling the gap, being "the sector that's not government and not private business". She explained that "social justice deals with trying to eliminate systemic barriers" to those working for their own economic security and stability. Citing her own upbringing in a faith community, she said, "I grew up with some sense that you owe something to the world." Likewise, Mr. Richards noted, "I'm here because of my faith...my faith journey has brought me to this job."

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