

# Michael Moore's Sicko Healthcare Perspective

June 29, 2007 marked the official opening of Michael Moore's newest mockumentary, *Sicko*. And in true Moore form, it is controversial and in-your-face. The subject this time is a critique on the American Healthcare system, and as before, Moore takes a liberal stance on a pet cause: healthcare reform. Here is a summary of his proposal:[{1}](#)

- 1. Every American must have full, uninterrupted healthcare coverage for life.*
- 2. Private, for-profit health insurance companies must be abolished.*
- 3. Profits of pharmaceutical companies must be strictly regulated like a public utility.*

After researching several movie reviews from every part of the political spectrum, I am concerned about Moore's use and misuse of statistics and convolution of facts that are taken out of context. However, I think this provides an excellent opportunity to open the discussion on the Christian perspective on healthcare. I will mainly address the idea of universal healthcare coverage (Moore's point 1) and offer a slightly different perspective on private health insurance companies (Point 2). I'll save pharmaceutical company regulation for another article.

## The Biblical Perspective

Before we can apply biblical truth to today's cultural issues, let's make sure we know what is biblically clear about healthcare. Several places in the Bible, God admonishes his people to care for the orphans and widows.[{2}](#) Orphans and widows are the vulnerable in society. In today's society, that

status falls mainly to the elderly, the chronically ill, the poor, etc. The Bible is quite clear about the need to care for these people as well as an individual's responsibility in the matter:

*When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.*[{3}](#)

This principle is exemplified when Boaz allows Ruth to glean from his field, drink from his water vessels and eat at his table.[{4}](#)

The biblical model seems to be that those with plenty are to take responsibility for those that are vulnerable. While government intervention is not explicitly mentioned, the mention of orphan- and widow-care in the Law implies a universal understanding of a duty to care for the least of these. It also seems to indicate that those who are healthy (i.e. who can work in the field, harvest their own crops, etc.) are to be held accountable and responsible for themselves. In practical terms, how do we apply this to our own culture and healthcare systems?

## Modern-Day Applications

In Kerby Anderson's [article on National Healthcare](#),[{5}](#) he suggests three needs in today's healthcare structure, each related in such a way that one would perpetuate the others:

## **The Need for Personal Responsibility**

He brings to light an important point about human nature: when someone else pays, we are less likely to consider the quality and cost before buying. When the government subsidizes healthcare or health insurance, people tend to be less thoughtful on cost, and the result is the high prices of healthcare. If there were more personal accountability, people would comparison shop and bring market pressures to bear on some of the healthcare costs.

I find it fascinating that health insurance requires so little personal responsibility, while car insurance demands so much. When I buy car insurance, it is only used in the event of an accident, either caused by nature or another driver. I have my own account that I use for my basic car care needs (gas, oil change, registration, tires, cleaning, brakes, etc.). I shop for the cheapest gas prices, the best bang for my buck on oil changes, and will go out of my way for a cheaper car wash. Why? Because it is coming out of my pocket. When I was in an accident, the insurance company was paying, so my car went to the body shop they specified and the company paid the price the shop requested. Honestly, I was less concerned about how much the insurance company paid than whether I got my car back in one piece.

Why is it that most people want insurance to pay for their basic check-ups that occur annually or biannually? If individuals paid for their regular maintenance, this would not only decrease the cost of health insurance, but it would also free up some resources for the orphans and widows of our society so that they, too, might have regular, preventative healthcare.

## **The Need for Portability**

Anderson continues:

*Americans usually cannot take their health insurance with*

*them if they change jobs. A fair tax system would offer no tax subsidy to the employer unless the policy was personal and portable. If it belongs to the employee, then it would be able to go with the employee when he or she changed jobs. Health insurance should be personal and portable. After all, employers don't own their employees' auto insurance or homeowners insurance. Health insurance should be no different.*[{6}](#)

This is a critique on the requirement of employers to provide health insurance, and also argues for private companies to be made available to individuals. My husband and I are young, healthy individuals, and were paying \$450 per month on his prior health insurance, until he changed jobs. The problem is that \$450 counted as part of his earnings, and when he left his job, we lost the amount paid into the insurance. Our car insurance and renters insurance was unaffected by his job change, but our health insurance ceased. We now see that it would have been more valuable to have a portable insurance option, such as a private company or a tax-deductible health account into which we would deposit money directly. This would also tie into the idea of individual responsibility for one's health finances, and, again, applies to those that can afford it while the vulnerable are provided for.

## **The Need for Price Fairness**

Anderson writes:

*Price fairness is another issue. Proponents of socialized medicine would force people with healthy lifestyles into a one-tier system with people who smoke, drink too much, use drugs, drive irresponsibly, and are sexually promiscuous. A better system would be one that rewards responsibility and penalizes irresponsibility. Obviously we should provide for the very young, the very old, the chronically ill, etc., but we shouldn't be forced into a universal risk pool and*

*effectively subsidize the destructive behavior of those who voluntarily choose sin over righteousness.* [\[7\]](#)

Going back to our car insurance/health insurance comparison, my husband and I have been with our car insurance company with a clean record for so long that our rates went down. Also, our rates decreased when he turned twenty-five because he was no longer a high-risk driver. This encourages cautious driving and places the responsibility on the driver. The universal healthcare model does just the opposite, because no matter your lifestyle, the government will take care of it. I think if we're honest with ourselves about human nature, a monetary compensation or savings for maintaining proper health would be one effective way to combat behavioral diseases such as obesity and type II diabetes.

## **Problems with Universal Healthcare, or Why Michael Moore May Not Know What is Best for the Country**

### **Business Costs**

I am no economist or a business analyst, so I will defer to Anderson's example of Herman Cain, president and CEO of Godfathers Pizza. Mr. Cain confronted President Clinton about many of the hidden costs of healthcare reform that affect businesses. He came with spreadsheets that pointed out just how much it would cost his business if employer mandates were put in place, and it also pointed out how President Clinton had vastly underestimated the cost on businesses.

Or what about Michael Moore's suggestion of having totally socialized healthcare? He gives several countries as an example, including France, but never mentions that all of these countries pay significantly higher tax rates than we do. This would place a burdensome cost on individuals and companies.

As Kerby warns in his article, Healthcare reform may cost much more than we think it will. The direct costs may not seem like much, but don't forget to count the indirect costs to you and to American business.

## Moral Costs

There are several issues to consider here, but let us focus on the one that is already taking place in many other countries with socialized healthcare: rationing. Universal coverage of healthcare increases overall demand, which means that you will have to decrease the supply of health care benefits provided to each individual citizen, especially since there is less profit and hence less reason to increase overall supply. This is inevitable in a universal healthcare system, and, as recently reported in the *Scotsman*, is already happening in countries with socialized healthcare:

*It is no longer possible to provide all the latest [medical technology] to absolutely everybody without notable detriment to others. Rationing is reduction in choice. Rationing has become a necessary evil. We need to formulize rationing to prevent an unregulated, widening, post code lottery of care. Government no longer has a choice. When it comes to the list of conditions, it's all about quality of life. It would be about the prioritization of clinical need.*[\[8\]](#)

A utilitarian approach to a person's quality of life is definitely not within the Christian worldview,[\[9\]](#) but that is precisely and inevitably the direction of a socialized healthcare system.

Our current healthcare system does have some flaws, but I do not think throwing government money at the problem is the best solution. Looking at the biblical model of individual responsibility, we can glean from the text how God's timeless truths can be effective when applied to our culture today.

## Notes

1. [www.michaelmoore.com](http://www.michaelmoore.com)
2. Exodus 22:22, Jeremiah 7:6,7, Isaiah 1:17, 1 Timothy 5:3, James 1:27, English Standard Version (ESV).
3. Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (ESV).
4. Ruth 2:8,9,14-16 (ESV).
5. Kerby Anderson, "National Health Care," Probe, 1994, [www.probe.org/national-health-care/](http://www.probe.org/national-health-care/).
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Moss, Lyndsay "NHS rationing is 'necessary evil,' say doctors" *Scotsman*, June 26, 2007, [news.scotsman.com](http://news.scotsman.com).
9. See Kerby Anderson, "Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number," 2004, [www.probe.org/utilitarianism-the-greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number/](http://www.probe.org/utilitarianism-the-greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number/)

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## Fahrenheit 9/11

### Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*

Fahrenheit 9/11, Michael Moore's new documentary, has been raising much concern since its mid-summer release from a number of groups. These groups represent a large demographic, and no one appears to be lukewarm to the film; people either love it or hate it. Rated "R" for scenes from the Iraq war, and a split second clip showing the execution of a prisoner by the government of Saudi Arabia, *Fahrenheit* is an exercise in

cut-and-paste film making that poses as a traditional documentary, but is really a thinly veiled and vehement anti-Bush propaganda piece.

The film won the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival, the first documentary film to ever capture the prize. A quick survey of some of the films in the past that have received the award, (among them Orson Welles' *Othello*, Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* to name just a few) raises the question of what makes this particular work worthy of one of the most coveted honors in cinema. I have been professionally involved in film criticism for almost ten years, and this is one of the worst documentaries I have ever seen. Moore's film is undeserving of a place among these heavyweights, but we appear to be in a time when anything that bashes America, its perceived imperialism, or the Bush administration, is not only good, but is something to be revered.

The film begins with the 2000 presidential election and the efforts to decide if Bush or Gore won. Moore claims in his film that several investigations uncovered the fact that Gore actually won. However, he fails to give us the sources of those "investigations." He does not acknowledge that newspapers as credible as the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* declared that Bush won the electoral vote, even if he did not win the popular vote (it should be kept in mind that the final count on the popular vote may never actually be known). The film plays to all of those who believe that Bush "stole" the election, and ignores the fact that the Supreme Court awarded Bush the election after law suits from both parties were settled.

Moore then directs the viewer's attention to the House of Saud. In this segment, Moore concentrates his energies on the connection between the Bush administration and the Royal Saudi family. He equates being involved with the Royal Family as being involved with terrorists. Moore groups all of the



people from a certain ethnic group into one neat category, and maintains that association with that group is wrong. This is just an introduction to Moore's casual handling of facts that will follow in the rest of the film.

## **President Bush on September 11**

The continuing enthusiasm for Moore's "documentary" needs to be examined in the light of the misinformation, poor research, and disregard for the facts that constitute the main body of the film. Dave Kopel has written an excellent review of the film titled "Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*" that can be found at [www.davekopel.com](http://www.davekopel.com). It is a forty-page exposition with detailed information concerning the specific factual errors found throughout Moore's film, and is the basis of much of the information summarized in the four or five points we will consider.

In one of the early scenes in the film, President Bush is shown reading from the book *My Pet Goat* to an assembly of elementary school children after he had already received the news that the September 11 attacks were occurring (actually it was a chapter from *Reading Mastery 2* that Bush was reading to the children). Moore's voice-over, a technique that is uniformly suspicious with film makers as an indication of a poor film that needs rescuing or explaining to its audience, suggests that Bush sits quietly in a state of bewilderment wondering what he should do. The insinuation is that Bush is an incompetent and unprepared leader who has been dumfounded by the surprise attack. Moore goes on to say that Bush clearly did the wrong thing, and that he should have been prompted into action immediately.

Moore does not suggest what the president should have done; he merely derides his hesitation after hearing the news. Moore also leaves out the fact that the principle of the school,

Gwendolyn Tose-Rigell, gave Bush high praise for his calm handling of the situation saying, "I do not think anyone could have handled the situation better." This praise came from someone who understands that children are easily alarmed and in this instance needed a calming voice from someone in charge.

Moore belittles the president for being dumbstruck by the attack. The insinuation is that a better leader would have taken control of the situation and rushed into action to address the emergency. One could easily view the same clip and come to the conclusion that here was a man who was extremely disturbed by what he knew, and realized that all of the forces of American intelligence from the FBI, the CIA, and certainly the Pentagon were being called into immediate action, and that there was little that could be accomplished by rushing out of the room. What this segment of the film does is merely make fun of the president's facial expressions, and, in effect, for not stirring the young children, their parents, and the nation into a state of panic.

## **The Saudi Connection**

Let's turn next to the relationship between President Bush and Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia. Moore attempts to make a case that the Bush family is in a cozy and financially beneficial relationship with prince Bandar, and that this relationship could not help but interfere with United States' interest, especially during a crisis on the scale of the 9/11 attacks.

This claim or insinuation fails to point out that Prince Bandar has participated in a bipartisan relationship with both parties in Washington for decades. Elsa Walsh, in an article in *The New Yorker* magazine from March 24, 2003, gives a detailed account of former president Bill Clinton frequently turning to Prince Bandar for advice on Middle East agendas.

She goes on to show how Bandar has become an “indispensable operator” for both parties.

Moore is either unaware or willfully omitting the relationship concerning Clinton’s former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Wyche Fowler, whose present job is chairman of The Middle East Institute. This institute is heavily supported by the Saudis, who have secretly donated over \$1 million to the Clinton Library. The point in citing the Clinton administration’s involvement with the Bandar family is not to absolve the Bush family of any wrongdoing, if in fact there is anything wrong. The issue is that if one administration is wrong in cooperating with the Prince, then both administrations are wrong. What is far more likely is that Prince Bandar is a necessary ally and advisor to the United States regardless of which party is in power. Moore is hypocritical to ignore such connections, and this is a prime example of what one finds throughout the film.

By mentioning Prince Bandar repeatedly in association with oil money, Moore takes the viewers so far down a path of conjecture that many will draw the conclusion that the Bush administration’s foreign policy does not have the United States’ interest as a top priority. However, there may be some good that can come out of this if the viewer comes away with a concern about our nation’s dependence on foreign oil. At present it is very difficult for candidates at almost any level to get elected if they run on a platform that appears to threaten American’s supply of cheap oil and petroleum products. Therefore, Moore is correct in making the connection that American foreign policy may be overly dependent on Saudi interests. However, it is misleading at best to suggest that Saudi influence only occurs when Republicans are in office, and ignores the fact that both parties are influenced by Bandar and Saudi Arabia.

## A Cavalier President?

Moore charges President Bush for being on vacation forty-two percent of the time during his first eight months as president. The calculation used to arrive at the number forty-two would be interesting in and of itself, but the fact that Moore ignores the concept of the “working vacation,” or the fact that most presidencies could not fare well if they were subjected to such a calculation, is again very misleading.

In his article “Just the facts of *Fahrenheit 9/11*’,”<sup>{1}</sup> Tom McNamee exposes what may have been the source for Moore’s forty-two percent figure. McNamee points out that of the fifty-four days Moore cites when Bush was at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, weekends were also included; a fact that Moore fails to point out. Another interesting source is Mike Allen’s article in the *Washington Post*.<sup>{2}</sup> Allen notes that Camp David stays have traditionally been used for meetings with foreign dignitaries, ambassadors, and other heads of state, and are routinely reported on cable and network newscasts as work. This alone should be enough to raise a cautionary flag for viewers of the film. Moore is playing fast and loose with the facts, never giving Bush the benefit of the doubt or pointing out that many of Bush’s so-called sins are standard behavior for any administration regardless of the party in power.

Moore continues the slanted montage of images with shots showing Bush relaxing at Camp David, working on his Crawford ranch, and driving golf balls while lightheartedly responding to questions from reporters. The implication Moore wants the viewer to draw is that the leader of the free world is more concerned about his golf game than fighting terrorism and doing his job. The following Tuesday this clip was clarified by Brit Hume and Brian Wilson on the Fox News Channel. They reported that Bush was answering a question concerning an attack carried out by Israel in response to a Palestinian

suicide bomber.

Moore evidently does not see the hypocrisy of failing to mention president Clinton hitting golf balls on the White House lawn moments after learning that Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had been shot, and not knowing whether he would live or die.

Again, this is another example of how Moore is throwing together film clips, adding a voice over, and leading the audience astray. If this film were part of a graduate or doctoral research project of any form the candidate would be failed outright for false and misleading research and for failure to check his sources. Additionally, any reputable news organization making such a case would probably be sued for libel and slander.

### ***Fahrenheit 9/11* and the Current Crisis**

In this writer's opinion, it would be overly generous to just dismiss the film as composed of half-truths and misinformation. The film is not only a poor documentary undeserving of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival's highest honor, the Palm d'Or, but a potentially dangerous movie that may not be advantageous to our troops in Iraq.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is at best a propaganda piece that potentially played into the hands of al Qaeda, Saddam loyalists, and the coalition enemy operatives and terrorists who continue to back Saddam Hussein and are presently killing American soldiers and targeting United States interests around the world. In his own words found at MichaelMoore.com, April 14, 2004, he said: "The Iraqis who have risen up against the occupation are not insurgents' or terrorists' or The Enemy.' They are the REVOLUTION, the Minutemen, and their numbers will grow – and they will win."[\[3\]](#)

It is irresponsible to call Iraqis “freedom fighters” who have opposed themselves to a free democratic nation that is sacrificing its sons and daughters so that others might live without the threat of a totalitarian dictator who kills his own people. Moore maintains that he is deeply concerned about American troops, but also lauds the efforts of the enemy insurgents who are killing those troops. One cannot have it both ways and remain rationally consistent.

Several efforts are presently underway to begin distribution of *Fahrenheit 9/11* through Middle East distributors. Hezbollah, a known terrorist organization, is assisting *Front Row* distributors in the promotion of Moore’s film. Additionally, Nancy Tartaglione in *Screen Daily.com* (June 9th, 2004) and Salon.com both reported that *Fahrenheit* will be the first commercially released documentary in the Middle East, opening in both Lebanon and Syria soon (Syria is presently on the United States list of terrorist states). It could easily be argued that Moore is indirectly getting rich from the approval and support of known terrorist groups and enemies of the United States.

Our country is a stronger and better place because of the freedom of speech we enjoy, and Moore in some ways represents a long tradition of vocal and organized opposition to the wars and policies of our government. He does have a right to be heard, and one should not avoid the film just because he or she has a preconceived notion of its message. *Fahrenheit 9/11* may prove to be a very important piece of propaganda, both in this election year and in the future. It could also be very important that there are people out there who have seen the film and can offer reasoned critiques to those who might otherwise be lead astray by this controversial and misleading documentary.

## Notes

1. Tom McNamee, "Just the facts on 'Fahrenheit 9/11' *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 28, 2004.
2. Mike Allen, "White House On the Range. Bush Retreats to Ranch for 'Working Vacation'," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2001.
3. <http://www.michaelmoore.com/words/message/index.php?messageDate=2004-04-14>

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