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Abstract

Ambassador Andrew Young talks about the major policy issues of the day and how nonprofits can be more effective in the policy process and in addressing social needs.

KEYWORDS: interview, public policy, religion, international

Andrew J. Young is Chairman of GoodWorks International, a former chairman of the Southern Africa Enterprise Development Fund, an ordained minister, international businessman, human rights activist, author and former U.S. representative, Ambassador to the United Nations and Mayor of the City of Atlanta. He also served as president of the National Council of Churches and was a supporter and friend of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Among his numerous achievements he was instrumental in bringing the Olympic Games to Atlanta in 1996. He was interviewed in his office on June 14, 2010 on the subject of nonprofits and public policy by Prof. Dennis R. Young (no relation), Chief Editor of *Nonprofit Policy Forum* and Director of the Nonprofit Studies Program in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University.

DY: You have had a distinguished career in government, business and the nonprofit sector. In your view, how effective are nonprofits in helping to shape good public policy? Where do they fall short? How can they be more effective?

AY: I sometimes quote Dr. Benjamin Mays, President of Morehouse College in one of his commencement addresses in the '40s who said that we find ourselves 346 years behind and the challenge is to develop the vision, the courage and the discipline to catch up in the next twenty-five years... That is my challenge to the nonprofit world. Everybody is thinking in terms of quarterly results. Contrast that with a Native American proverb referred to me when I was at the UN by the chiefs of the Mohawk Nation, that we must make decisions for seven generations yet unborn. You've got to make decisions for the long, long haul – seven generations yet unborn. I'm not concerned for me anymore. It's the world that I'm leaving for my grandchildren and great grandchildren. Right now it's a mess because we did not have that long range thinking, nor did we have the discipline and the commitment and the courage to take on the tough problems. If it wasn't immediately successful, nonprofits tended to lose their funding. They were trapped by the quarterly bottom line mentality of the private sector. We have to resist that.

For example, when I was with Martin Luther King I worked with the Marshall Field Foundation and I had a \$55,000 per year grant to train teachers to teach their neighbors to read and write and register to vote. And over a ten year period of time, we trained most of the civil rights leadership. We did it under the guise of literacy training but we were looking for people with ph.d minds in local communities, the natural leaders who had never had any formal training. The Marshall Field Foundation funded that until they deliberately gave away all the money of their foundation to see that these kinds of projects kept going. They were willing to spend themselves out of business because they believed in this. It laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement.

But we just didn't have enough money, staff and evaluation. We had records of six thousand people we trained, from East Tidewater, Virginia to East Texas but somehow they got lost. What we needed to do was an analysis of those 6000 plus people and see what their children and grandchildren are doing now. If we had done that we could have documented a development strategy that no longer exists.

We believed in nonprofit foundations and would not have been able to survive without them, but we would never let them control our mission. For example, Martin Luther King was offered \$10 million of foundation money to run the voter education project and he turned it down because he said it was too much money and too big an influence. It was distracting us from our own vision. He believed in it but he wanted all of the civil rights organizations to participate in it and he didn't want to be bound by it. So we created the Voter Education Project which Vernon Jordan and John Lewis ended up heading and Wiley Branton before them.

And that's my resentment, that there ought to be a requirement that anyone on a foundation board work in some God-forsaken area for a year or two before they start deciding what happens to the money. A degree from Georgia State or Harvard should not qualify you to make judgments about charitable giving. Unfortunately we even have less than that. We have corporations that fund their flavor of the month and do it as a means of image building for their corporation without a sound development strategy.

My approach has been to evolve nonprofits into sustainable enterprises. For example, we were doing community organizing and training ministers in American cities with the 20 largest black populations and we were to train 10 ministers in each of those cities, to help them understand what's going on with human rights, with the government, how they can be more active public servants in their preaching ministries. We did such a good job that the ministers in Cleveland got together and helped elect a black mayor, as they did in Gary and Newark. But when it began to translate into political power, the foundation was intimidated by the government and had to withdraw its support. And it wasn't a little foundation, it was the Ford Foundation.

DY: Are you arguing that foundations and nonprofits should be more assertive, self-sufficient and persevering to achieve policy change?

AY: They have to be prepared to demonstrate a social need and then hopefully help it evolve into a public policy or a private sector policy. When we started out registering voters by teaching people to read and write to pass literacy tests, we cited the Declaration of Independence which says that all men are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. It never said just property owners. It

never said just college graduates, and we, out of our experience with these people, who were brilliant but uneducated, wise far beyond anybody's imagination, said they should have the right to vote regardless of their level of education. We actually changed the voting laws of the country as a result of this.

I'm a proponent of big ideas. I'm a fan of Mohammed Yunus and Grameen Bank for that reason. He really believes that he can wipe out poverty in Bangladesh by 2030 by starting at the bottom and working up. Another fascinating idea that I've toyed with that I'd like to see us try in Haiti, is from Hernando DeSoto's *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. He reasons that capitalism works in America because people have title to land. Consider the \$32,000 house I bought in 1966 – every time I got in trouble I refinanced it to pay my children's tuition. So I've educated all my kids and I've probably gotten close to \$1 million worth of value out of that \$32,000 property investment, because I had title to it and I could use that title as a guarantee on the money I was borrowing. We were determined that our children not come out of school with a debt burden. But that's not the prevailing wisdom right now. I talked with some young Harvard-educated people recently who had \$350,000 worth of student debt and thought they couldn't afford to start a family. Well that is bad business, bad policy, bad government.

I would hope that one of the things we might do – why I like the integration of nonprofits, public policy and economics in the Andrew Young School - when we learn things in our nonprofit experience, we ought to be able to translate it into financially feasible public and private policies. Here's an example. A guy said to me that a friend of his had 200 gas stations he was trying to get rid of and he was wondering if I would take 25 of them. I said at this point in my life the last thing I want to do is learn how to run a gas station! And then a couple of weeks later it hit me, that we had few job opportunities for ex-offenders...Well, I knew a kid, he was a good kid, but he got caught in the 10 year mandatory sentence nonsense that we perpetuate here in Georgia and he was out, with no job, and no way to make a living. I said, now if I could only get the oil company to finance those 200 gas stations through a nonprofit corporation then what better place to put an ex-con!. Stations staying open all night are the most likely to get robbed. The kid could own a service station in his neighborhood and keep it open for 24 hours and really have it be a service station, not hide behind a window, but have people who would actually check your tires, wash your windshield and make it a community effort, like the truck stops where you can have a little McDonalds or a coffee shop in a twenty-four hour operation. There would no better crime preventer in a community than to have your service station open 24 hours run by a bunch of ex-convicts who were trained and who owned it. This is not a new idea. Elijah Muhammad did that with fish restaurants in the Muslim community. They not

only built their own mosques but they built their own Islamic schools and they have stable communities.

DY: So the long term strategy is to have nonprofits show the way with a new model?

AY: Exactly, and I think nonprofits have to challenge our society to live up to its values. I made a speech at the University of Georgia in a lecture series in honor of Mary Frances Early, the first black graduate of the University of Georgia. The title I gave to my speech is a phrase from the preamble to the Constitution: *to secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity*. That to me is a rationale for life and particularly for nonprofits – securing the blessings of liberty... before profits. I think the challenge for now is that we have moved to a monetarism or corporatism. The democracy that I adhere to and all of us grew up under was a humanitarian democratic capitalism. If you take the democratic and the humanitarian out of capitalism you really have a jungle which is what we seem to be creating around the world.

Another phrase also occurred to me in searching for a title for that speech – the slogan of Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference - *to redeem the soul of America from the triple evils of racism, war and poverty*. I think that those are still relevant as well.

DY: Are those long term goals left to nonprofits because government and business are moving the other way?

AY: Well, regarding racism - the military and the government really moved faster than educators, and everybody moved faster than the church.

DY: That was my next question. In general, how do you see the role of the church in shaping public policy? Has this changed since the era of civil rights advocacy in which you were so heavily involved in the 1950s and 1960s? What are the current policy issues with which religious institutions need to involve themselves now? And what are boundaries that churches need to observe in deliberation over policy issues?

AY: The church should be the focus of making the earth more reflective of the kingdom of God, however you want to define that. The New Testament says that the kingdom of God is in your midst. But in some societies, in some areas, it might be in the midst of us but it doesn't surface very often! I just read *Half the Sky* by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. It shocked me because it said that there was more slavery in the 21st century than there was of blacks in the 18th

century, that a greater percentage of the world is now enslaved than Africans were enslaved in the 18th century. And there's no abolitionist movement. The people who are enslaved are the women of the world. The book talked about female trafficking, genital mutilation, selling your children into marriage, child marriage, a series of things that are generally agreed to be inhuman that are affecting maybe 2 billion of the 6 billion people on the face of the earth.

DY: Does the church have a particular advantage in addressing this issue?

AY: They refuse to. They won't deal with it. We don't talk about things like that. Most religions will hide behind the question of culture and custom when it comes to dealing with something like women's rights and especially something like genital mutilation. One of the things that Kristof and WuDunn point out is that women themselves have fallen into this trap, and perpetuate these ideas.

When I first became mayor there was a famine in Ethiopia and we mobilized the city to respond. We had a local committee of several Ethiopian nationals, one of whom was working in City Hall and doing a very good job. The question of genital mutilation came up and I said "I don't know how in the world anyone can tolerate that". And she launched into a big defense. There's no way you can convince me, but it's a culture which degrades and enslaves the female. I'm preaching about that Sunday. It's Men's day and the proverb that they always read on Women's day is "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is above rubies" (31:10-31, King James Bible). And I'll say this is a bunch of garbage, this is slavery. And we as Christians celebrate this enslavement of women?

DY: Are there boundaries that should govern how churches get involved in the policy process?

AY: I do believe in a Jeffersonian notion of separation of church and state. I don't think the church or the government has any business making medical decisions about whether women should or should not have children. I don't like abortion, I don't believe in abortion, but it's not the government's decision nor is it the church's decision. The church is often so concerned about the unborn but doesn't give a damn about them once they're born. Well there's something wrong with that. If we don't care about children who are hungry and who have no immunization against disease, if we're not concerned about ten year olds who have no education, and twenty year olds who have no jobs, we've missed the gospel. I think we've got to be true to our faith. One of the things that Kristof and WuDunn point out is that Aisha who was the second wife of the prophet (Muhammad) wrote over two thousand hadiths or interpretations of the sayings of the prophet, from their personal relationship. One of them focused on a custom in

Islam—that the presence of a woman in the room while a man is praying prevents the prayers from going to heaven. Aisha said that that is absolute nonsense, that she and the prophet often prayed together. The problem with the church and religion and government is defining their borders and enhancing their vision so that they are not just perpetuating the cultural status quo, whatever it is.

The members of my church are seen to be very liberal by most social standards. But they're very elitist. They came from the New England tradition that believed in education for slaves and everybody else, but they would really get offended if the minister's subject and verb did not agree. It's the way by which class was defined in the South, whether you talked Negroid, Southern or New England. And that then becomes a definition of the faith of the church, which has nothing to do with heavenly requirements. That's basically a perpetuation of cultural arrogance. I'm very critical ... I'm a democrat with a little "d" and I've always believed that there is something in the hearts of each and every person that is reflective of the image of God. And so human rights cannot be defined or curtailed by government or religion. The problem is that it's so culturally volatile now.

DY: Are there things that you feel you can't say in the pulpit, things that cross the line?

AY: Because I came out of the old Puritan congregational church that founded Harvard and Yale as well as Atlanta University and Howard, our creed was simply that we are united in striving to know the will of God, made known or to be made known unto us. We shy away from absolutism. And I think human beings always have to do that. They can't claim absolute authority in the name of any religion. That's what I used to argue with Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe about all the time. He's a devout Jesuit and I said the problem with you Catholics is that your only model of authority is the Pope. And when you get elected president you think you can rule *ex cathedra*. Politics and democracy can't work that way. But his mind was made up. I wouldn't even be surprised if that was part of Castro's problem. It comes out of an authoritative Catholic upbringing, which translates pretty easily into Communism.

DY: What's different about churches is that they have all the privileges of a nonprofit but because we've got this separation of church and state presumably they can do a little more in the political process than a typical nonprofit without losing their tax exemption. Do you agree?

AY: Well, maybe not. You know Bill Clinton came to receive a Martin Luther King award at Riverside Church and in his speech he took a position challenging

Bush on the Iraq invasion. And Riverside Church was called in by the IRS and it cost them several hundred thousand dollars in legal fees to get that worked out. The next year when we tried to have the Martin Luther King celebration there they didn't want us to have it.

DY: So does that have a chilling effect on how you think about what you say in the pulpit?

AY: No, it doesn't. The chilling effect on what I say in the pulpit is the sensitivities of the people I'm talking to. I don't feel any government restraints. Now I did when I was in Congress. I thought of myself as a pastor in the Congress and almost every time I spoke on the floor I prayed to myself before I got up to speak. But I would never claim that this is God's will; I'd say this is my opinion. You cannot speak in the name of God about secular things, but you can make all kinds of appeals to reason and human values. I had a very conservative friend who was on the Appropriations Committee and he voted against milk for school children. And he was very devout. We were both members of the White House prayer group. And I didn't accuse him of anything, but I said you know my understanding of the gospel is that the hungry must be fed, the naked must be clothed and the sick must be healed. And that is not only an individual church responsibility but a responsibility that we have entrusted to our government in a society so big. He had never thought about milk to school children as a religious issue. And I simply witnessed that for me this was a religious issue.

Here's another example. When one of our churches wanted to put a bouquet on Martin Luther King's grave, with a message against homosexuality, I said, well I don't think Dr. King would approve of that. Not that he was for homosexuality. The only thing I ever heard him say about gay rights was that if we did not have gay people in the church, the music would suffer terribly. He was very open and tolerant of people as they were. He made no political or religious judgments.

DY: You mentioned your work in Congress. I'd like to ask your impressions about how the public policy process works at different levels – federal, local, international. Is the nature of the policy process different as it involves nonprofits at these various levels?

AY: Well, the principles ought to be similar. For example, with all the AIDS money that went into Africa, I could not find any black government official that had any access to it. We had an issue here in Atlanta when I was mayor where a family planning grant was given to the Southside Comprehensive Health Center but it was routed through Emory University and it wasn't working. They didn't

know anything about this community. I was in Congress then and I finally convinced them to give the grant to the community, to the Southside

Comprehensive Health Center and let them hire Grady Hospital. It made all the difference in the world. Instead of white physicians coming in telling black women what to do, neighborhood women did the door to door recruitment to bring people into the clinic. It just worked much better. The “golden rule” does not apply here – he that has the gold makes the rule! That should not apply in nonprofits or government. The rule should be made by the persons with the need. The persons with the need should be in the consulting process. This works at all levels.

DY: The is the basic issue for nonprofits in the policy arena that of development and control of resources?

AY: I’ve been running nonprofits all my life but I find myself discouraging my children. I say to them that somebody’s got to make some money to support our charitable inclinations. So my interest has been in making nonprofits self-sustaining. The best example was the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 where we had what I call public purpose capitalism. It was organized as a nonprofit - publicly defined, but privately funded and managed. We couldn’t have gotten a foundation grant to put on the Olympics. But we developed a public/private partnership that made the Olympics possible and also made them effective.

The challenge for nonprofit institutions is - where do we get the money? The reason I said to my children, don’t go into politics, don’t go into nonprofit work ... is that I got tired of begging people for money. And the reason we set up our consulting business is that nobody would give me money to do what I wanted to do in Africa. So I had to figure out a way to make the money to do what needs to be done.

DY: So is there some kind of policy change that we ought to be thinking about that would fund nonprofits substantially without them having to go into business in some way?

AY: Well I think that a company like Coca Cola understands. I wouldn’t be surprised if Coca Coal gives away 5% of its bottom line. If every corporation felt a need to give away 5% for general humanitarian purposes we’d be in better shape.

I think that there’s got to be greater cooperation between the nonprofit sector and the private sector. Not just asking corporations for money but sharing a vision with them. When I first met Paul Austin of Coca Cola he was beginning to suffer from Parkinson’s and was acutely conscious of nutrition and had

developed a soft drink in Africa called Simba that would have put all of the necessary vitamins and minerals and protein in a twelve ounce bottle and made it available all over the African continent. Well if he'd done that we might not have had AIDS. People are trying to cure AIDS but AIDS is the result of an immune deficiency. Immune deficiency is a result of inadequate nutrition. A company like Coca Cola would probably do better fighting AIDS than the pharmaceutical companies do. But they lost that vision, and some SOB came in who was advocating putting more sugar in Coke. And it was a bad business decision that Coca Cola still has not recovered from.

Finally, we need to look at which nonprofits should be maintained. I don't believe in keeping institutions just for the sake of keeping institutions. That's why I'm having so much trouble with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference now. We did what we needed to do. I was on the board of the Field Foundation when we voted ourselves out of business and gave all the money away. I can still see the value of long term endowed trusts by the Rockefellers and Fords and Carnegies. They've played a very valuable role in our society, but they all have gone a long way from the vision of their founders.

DY: So they're not really accountable?

AY: What I'm thinking I perhaps shouldn't say - that the staffs become both elitist and niggardly and the people who get the most money from the foundations, as they say in the developing world about the World Bank, are the people with the suits and the briefcases. And that's not what I think is intended for the nonprofit sector.

DY: Do you think we ought to have policies or laws that require sun-setting of foundations over some period of time?

AY: I don't know. There are foundations like MacArthur and Rockefeller which have done some very significant things.

DY: Speaking of significant things, what do you see as the major human rights issues of our time? And how should the nonprofit sector be involved in them?

AY: I've three daughters and three granddaughters. I devoted myself to making the world safe for people of African descent. But I don't know if the world is safe. The world is safe for my daughters and granddaughters only because they are very well educated and they represent an American power elite (they would deny that) but if my grandbaby had been born elsewhere - and that's what always drives me - there but for the grace of God go I. I had nothing to do

with being born American, black or white, and the more I read about the plight of people in the Congo and Sudan or China, I realize how much work we have to do. I really think that the key issue for the 21st century, for the economy, for health, for education, for warfare, is going to boil down to the rights of women. When my daughters and granddaughters remind me what a chauvinist pig I am, I laugh at it, but it really is true.

One of the significant things that Kristof and WuDunn write in their book is that societies that devalue the rights of women, experience female infanticide and fail to protect women's health, have more women than men and this is a cause of war. On the other hand, I would cite China as an example of the liberation of women as a way to end poverty. Almost every problem we face including the problems of the environment boils down to whether women are going to have to chop down trees for firewood or whether are they going to plant trees for the fruit and the leaves. That's not a bad place to start for nonprofits, government and the private sector working together.

DY: Thank you very much!

For more on the views of Ambassador Young on social problems and policy issues, please see his new book written with his god son Kabir Sehgal as referenced below.

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