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BULLETIN OF  
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Essays on Work, Wealth and Economics

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**Essays on Work, Wealth  
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## EDITORIAL

From the opening chapters of Genesis, the issues of work, economics, and vocation are of clear practical importance to what it means to be a godly human being, loving and serving God in the world he has created. This issue of the *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* tackles these topics from a variety of perspectives, but always oriented to the preaching of God's Word, and the life and faith of God's people.

As with last year's BET, the content arises from the *Center for Pastor Theologians'* two Fellowship Symposia. This year, the symposia were generously sponsored by the Acton Institute, with Dr. Stephen Grabill, Acton's Director of Programs and Research Scholar in Theology, acting as guest consultant. The fellows were invited to reflect on and respond to the collection of essays found in, *Christian Theology and Market Economics*,<sup>1</sup> as well as three primers produced by Acton on the relationship between faith and vocation. These primers addressed our central issue from the perspectives of the Pentecostal, Baptist, and Wesleyan traditions.

The articles that follow all belong within the orbit of evangelical theology, but certainly do not present a unified perspective. Rather, they allow different evangelical voices to be heard, and so present contributions to an ongoing conversation about how to interpret and apply God's Word in these areas.

First, in a carefully argued piece of biblical theology, Scott Hafemann (Theological Mentor, First CPT Fellowship), challenges the idea that work is part of the original creation mandate. He argues instead that work—defined by Hafemann as the need to provide for one's own sustenance—is a result of the fall, and that Christ's redemptive work secures rest for us. This redemptive rest ultimately brings about the end of human work. Then Joel Lawrence (CPT First Fellowship) offers a corrective to the current popularity of "radical" Christianity that calls on Christians to abandon attachments to the world. These "radical" voices often cite Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous call to costly discipleship. Lawrence, himself a Bonhoeffer scholar, situates Bonhoeffer's call within the wider context of Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology. Lawrence

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1 Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg, eds, *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008).

shows how Bonhoeffer affirms the material constitution of humanity and the goodness of creation, and so the consequent goodness of “having stuff.” Thirdly, Michael LeFebvre (CPT Second Fellowship) offers a rich exploration of the biblical Year of Jubilee, in the hope of encouraging and contributing to deeper reflection on how the Mosaic Law might be used to inform contemporary economic theory. LeFebvre persuasively argues that Moses has much to say here, and pushes back against the near exclusive Greco-Roman focus of contemporary economic theorists and historians. Then, Gary Schultz (CPT Second Fellowship) exegetes Philippians 4:10-13 and 1 Timothy 6:6-10, finding in Paul’s call to contentment a powerful theological antidote to the contemporary malaise of “affluenza.” Finally, writing from the perspective of historical theology, Matthew Ward (CPT Second Fellowship) considers how historical Anabaptist texts could inform (one type of) consistent Free Church economics.

None of these articles would claim to offer the final word on these subjects, simply the next word, and hopefully a helpful word, in the ongoing theological discussion of these topics. Let the conversation continue!

Rev. Matthew Mason  
*Salisbury, England*  
*Article Editor*

## WORK AS THE DIVINE CURSE: TOIL AND GRACE EAST OF EDEN

SCOTT HAFEMANN\*

There is the bad work of pride. There is also the bad work of despair—done poorly out of the failure of hope or vision. Despair is the too-little of responsibility, as pride is the too-much. The shoddy work of despair, the pointless work of pride, equally betray Creation. They are wastes of life...Good work finds the way between pride and despair.  
Wendell Berry<sup>1</sup>

Men and women were created to eat and drink. Once breathing occurs, nothing else happens unless these things take place. The basic needs for food and water align humanity with every other “living creature” on the earth, with whom in the biblical account it shares the “sixth day” of creation (Gen 1:24-31). Mankind exists only because the Creator gives it breath; it continues to exist only because the Creator gives it food and water. This gift-giving at the penultimate climax of creation is “very good” (Gen 1:31) because it demonstrates, to the glory of the gift-Giver, that no matter how strong we may become we always live as dependent creatures on the one who made and sustains us.<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of the Bible, this foundational relationship of dependence between God as Giver and Humanity as Recipient, although seldom recognized in the world, is true both pre- and post-Fall, though in radically different ways.

### I. CREATION: GOD'S KINGDOM, NOT HUMANITY'S WORKPLACE

In line with the biblical dictum of utter human dependency, men and women were created to eat and drink, but not to work.<sup>3</sup> I am aware that such an assertion goes against the common theological notion that “work,” albeit unimpeded by the consequences of sin, forms part of God's original, creation mandate regarding humanity's distinctive purpose.<sup>4</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup> “Healing,” *What are People For?* Essays (Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 1990/2010): 9-13, at 10.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

<sup>3</sup> I am using the verb “to work” in its commonly agreed sense of “to do, perform, practice (a deed, course of action, labor, task, business, occupation, process, etc)” (*OED*), whose goal it is to obtain what is needed to sustain one's life, from, e.g., subsistence farming to hedge-fund trading. This would include living from the “work” of others via inheritance or any form of welfare/alms-giving/charity/family support.

<sup>4</sup> To give just two examples, from widely divergent traditions, see M. Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1* (trans J. N. Lenker; Minneapolis, Minn.: Lutherans in All

note carefully the sequence of events as the narrative of the creation of humanity unfolds in Genesis 1:27-31. God does not say to newly created Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and have dominion, and then I will give you every plant for food" (Gen 1:28-29), as if God is granting humanity the raw materials and means of production by which they can then build their workforce. Instead he declares, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..." (Gen 1:28), because I have already given you everything you need (Gen 1:29, referring back to the days of creation in 1:1-25, 29-31). At creation Adam and Eve "wake up," look around, and see that everything they need has already been given to them.<sup>5</sup>

This sequence is the first reason why the common attempt to derive a divinely granted "vocation" of work from the command in Gen 1:28 is not compelling. God does not give Adam and Eve a potentially food-producing garden to be the platform and product of their labors, but a paradise to meet their needs. The commands to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28 are framed by God's prior provisions in days one to five on the one hand and by the sixth-day declaration of God's all-sufficient provision for all living creatures on the other:

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. (Gen 1:29-30; RSV)

The second reason why working to feed oneself is not part of the original creation decree is reflected in the divinely determined function of humanity, which is explicitly declared within the created order and where once again the sequence of the narrative is significant. Within the biblical account of creation, the command in Gen 1:28 to be fruitful, multiply, and exercise dominion is the expression of the fact that according to Gen 1:26-27 God created humanity as male and female in his image for this expressed purpose. If we want to talk about a divinely instituted "vocation" for humanity, this is it. Here too, as with the gift of food,

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Lands, 1904), 109 on Gen 1:26: "Had he not fallen by sin therefore, he would have eaten and drunk, worked and generated in all innocence, sinlessness and happiness"; and John Paul II's encyclical letter, *Laborem Exercens (On Human Work)* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), 4.1: above all the Scriptures (faith), beginning with Genesis 1:26-27, and then reason ("anthropology, palaeontology, history, sociology, psychology and so on") teach that "The Church finds in the very first pages of the Book of Genesis the source of her conviction that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth."

<sup>5</sup> This interpretation, based on the sequence in the narrative, has a long and venerable history; see already Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 – c. 395), *Making of Man 2* (PG 44:133b; 132c), who stresses that God as "maker" first prepared the earth as a royal dwelling place for the "king" and stored up the whole creation as the king's wealth before bringing the king into the world, like a host preparing a feast for his guests before welcoming them. "In like manner God first prepared a 'habitation' adorned with 'beauties of every kind,' then 'brought in man' and allowed him to 'enjoy what was there'" (taken and quoted from Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003], 148-149).

mankind's vocation is a gift of divine grace. God grants Adam and Eve dominion as those created to function as his "image" or "likeness" in verses 26-27 before he calls them to exercise it in verse 28. Being created in the image of God precedes acting like God. Adam and Eve do not earn or produce or manage the garden in order to be God's image in the world; their "vocation" to be those created in God's image is given to them prior to anything they do. In Genesis 1:26-27, God creates male and female equally in his "likeness" and then, as a result, commands them in 1:28 to exercise "dominion" over the rest of creation.

What it means for Adam and Eve to be created in God's image is still a matter of much debate. The decisive clue contextually, however, is that granting dominion to humanity over the rest of the created order in 1:26b is the delineation of what it means to be created in God's image or likeness in 1:26a. As the commentary on Gen 1:26 in Ps 8:3-9 makes clear, "the image" or "likeness of God" to be reflected by humanity is therefore best understood primarily as a functional reference to God's all-sufficient, self-sufficient, sovereign rule over the cosmos as his creation.<sup>6</sup> In short, God's "image" is that of the King, with the subdued world as his kingdom. Humanity is created to "image-forth" God's kingship by exercising dominion in his name. That is, humanity reflects God's glory as the divine King by ruling as his vice-regents or "royal son" over the rest of the created order (cf. Gen 5:1-3; cf. Exod 4:22-23; 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; Hos 11:1). Humanity, as the image of God, does what God does by being, so to speak, "God in person." As Dempster puts it, "humans are referential creatures; their being automatically signifies God," so that, by definition, to be "human" is "to bring the world under the dominion of the image of God...Another way of describing this emphasis on human dominion and dynasty would be by the simple expression 'the kingdom of God.'"<sup>7</sup>

Thus, by virtue of God's sovereign mandate and as a manifestation of his glory, God is to humanity what humanity is to the world (see Ps 24:1-2; 100:3; Isa 45:18; Neh 9:6). Humanity does not "have" the image of God; humanity "is" the image of God. This is why, in a move that is unprecedented in the ancient world, there is no statue of God either in the garden in Eden or in its subsequent replica in Israel's tabernacle-temple, since mankind displays God's image! If you want to "see" what God is like, look at humanity—humanity is the "iconic" reality of God's presence.

Given the nature of God's command to go out and subdue the world in the days to come as a reflection of God's character, God's activity of provision in the past must bring with it a continuing commitment to provide for Adam and Eve in the future, a commitment signified by God's Sabbath rest (see below). In this sense, the command to exercise dominion in the world entails simultaneously a call to trust God to provide what is needed to carry it out, which includes the gift of an abundance of food to

<sup>6</sup> The best study of the biblical meaning and significance of the "image of God" is still that of Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), which works out the way in which the structural elements of humanity serve humanity's function to mirror and represent God (pp. 13, 16, 67, 73).

<sup>7</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58, 62.



sustain life. The keeping of God's command in Genesis 1:28 is nothing more than an expression of depending upon God's provision in 1:1-25, as restated in Genesis 1:28b, 1:29, and 1:30.

Humanity's ongoing life is therefore to be an expression of the dominion of dependence. From the beginning, humanity is created to trust God for what they are to eat in order that they might multiply in accordance with God's command. Just as earthly kings and their vice-regents do not work, but are served by their subjects, so too the glory of God as "King" is manifest through mankind's dominion over the rest of creation as an expression of their dependence on the sufficiency of God's provision. This is why, as an interpretation of Gen 1:26-28, Ps 8:1, 9 frames the glory and honor of mankind's dominion, who has been "crowned" to rule over the earth, with declarations of God's majesty, since the former reveals the latter.

For our purposes, it is crucial to keep in view that the majesty of the divine "King," like his human counterparts, is manifested not by his having to work to meet his own needs, but by virtue of his ability to provide freely for those dependent upon him. "Kings," by definition, do not work—they provide out of the abundance of their possessions (secured, of course, by the power of their military might and the loyalty of their subjects). For this reason, YHWH creates not by working in the sense we know it in this fallen world, but by miraculously speaking his world and its provisions into existence. In turn, humanity was not created to manage God's creation as "junior-executives" partnering with God's "work," as if its job was to develop God's raw materials into finished products by adding their efforts to his. Once again, the "image of God" in Gen 1:26 is not an agrarian work-metaphor but an imperial one. For as Meredith Kline summarizes the point of Genesis 9:6, "As image of God, man is a royal son with the judicial function appertaining to kingly office."<sup>8</sup> As the royal crown of creation, humanity's vocation is not to work in the world to meet its needs, but to be supported by the created order as its rulers. To exercise dominion over the rest of the created world does not mean working as agriculturally-based entrepreneurs in order to secure for themselves something they do not already have, but to rule over God's creation in a state of continual dependence upon what the Creator gives to them.

## II. HUMANITY'S ACTIVITY IN THE GARDEN IN EDEN

What then, as God's "image" placed in the garden, was Adam (and later, Eve, as his partner) doing in the garden before the Fall if they were not working to feed themselves? The answer is given in Gen 2:15, which reads:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work (or to till) it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden...."

<sup>8</sup> *Images of the Spirit* (S. Hamilton, Mass.: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1986 [1980]), 28.

In contrast to what we have seen in Gen 1:24-31, this text certainly gives the impression that Adam was working in the garden and that what God gave him was the fruit of his labors. This seems even more clear when this text is matched with its context in Gen 2:5-9, which declares:

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, (6) and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—(7) then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature. (8) And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (9) And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

It appears as if God made the man to work in the garden and, indeed, did not plant anything in it until the man was ready to go to work. Read in this way, both the existence of the raw materials and their transformation into a life-sustaining yield, though finding their creative origin in God, are dependent on the availability of a productive work-force who will farm it as an essential aspect of their “vocation.”

Every translation, however, is a commentary in disguise. Here the commentary may be misleading. The issue is how we are to translate the two infinitives *le'obdah ulesomrah* which are usually translated “to work it” or “to till it” (*le'obdah*) and “to keep it” (*lesomrah*).<sup>9</sup> The problem with this predominant translation is twofold:

- 1) the narrative as a whole seems to indicate that the first “work” done in the garden takes place after the Fall as part of the curse (Genesis 3:23);
- 2) if translated this way, the final  $\eta$ ·(*h*) is taken to be a *feminine* pronominal suffix (“it”), referring to the garden (*gan*). But the word for garden (*gan*) is probably *masculine*, so there is a mismatch between the pronoun and its antecedent; in Hebrew, pronouns should agree with their antecedent in gender and number.<sup>10</sup> The attempt to take this suffix to refer to the feminine word for “ground” used in 2:9 (*adamah*), does not solve the problem, since this word is too far removed from the verse and it jumps over the very natural reference to the garden in verse 15. The LXX translators saw this problem and rendered this phrase ἐργάζεσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ φυλάσσειν (*ergazesthai auton kai fulassein*), which takes the verbs to mean “to work” and “to guard” respectively, and exercises the liberty of changing the feminine pronoun to the masculine in order to solve the grammatical problem.

<sup>9</sup> What follows is an expansion of my previous treatment of the translation of Gen 2:15 in my *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith: Understanding the Heart of the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2001), 228n.1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *BDB*, 171; *HALOT*, 198, which questions the gender here given its apparent mismatch in its context.

Seeing this problem in the text, some scholars, ancient and modern, have offered another possible translation, as recently argued by U. Cassuto and supported by J. Sailhammer<sup>11</sup>

- a) The issue is whether or not the final ה (*h*) in the two verb forms contains the *mappiq*, i.e. whether it should be read as ה or simply as ה. The *mappiq* (the dot in the middle of the letter) gives this final letter the status of a consonant and changes its significance, so that *with* the *mappiq* it is the feminine suffix of a direct object (“it”), while *without* the “dot” it becomes part of the verb itself. It would then be the *h* that is sometimes added to infinitives. In fact, Cassuto points out that there are several Hebrew MSS which do not have the *mappiq*. So the issue is whether or not the *same* two verbs are to be read as having the suffix (with *mappiq*) or as infinitives without suffixes (without the *mappiq*), i.e. without direct objects at all.
- b) If taken without the *mappiq*, the verbs would mean, “to serve [God] and to keep/obey/guard (either “guarding [the garden]” or “obeying/keeping [the commandments]”). Both of these meanings are also well attested.<sup>12</sup>
- c) Moreover, Cassuto points out that later rabbinic teaching read the text in this way, arguing that the command in Gen 2:15 referred to the offering of sacrifices in the garden (!) because it said that man was “to serve God,” which parallels Exod 3:12, while the command, “to keep,” in Gen 2:15 parallels Num 28:2, both of which are seen to refer to worshipping God, the latter with sacrifice (cf. *Genesis Rabbah* 16:5). These parallels aside, this shows that the rabbis read the text as referring to worshipping God and keeping his commands.<sup>13</sup>

However, inasmuch as the translation issue cannot be determined decisively based on its morphology, John H. Walton has sought to solve the problem by looking at the lexicography of Gen 2:15 against its ANE background.<sup>14</sup> He too argues that in accordance with their most common usage the meaning of the two verbs in view, regardless of how we translate them, are best taken here not to refer to agricultural tasks, but to “human service to God” (cf. Exod 3:12; 4:23; 23:33; Num 3:7-10). “Working the Garden” could be in either category, “depending on whether it is understood as a place where things grow [cf. Deut 28:39:

<sup>11</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Vol. 1* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 122-123, and supported by J. Sailhammer, *Genesis* (EBC, 2; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 44-45, 47-48.

<sup>12</sup> See *BDB*, 713, 1036-7.

<sup>13</sup> See too Cassuto's references, *Genesis*, 122-123, to other Ancient Near East traditions in which the purpose of man's creation in paradise is to serve God, while lesser deities were given the task of guarding heaven and Sheol; in the biblical narrative this corresponding guarding function *on earth* is entrusted to humanity, whereas after the Fall it too is given in Gen 3:24 to the cherubim (cf. Ezek 28:14, 16).

<sup>14</sup> *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 166-174, esp. 172-173.

working a vineyard] or a place where God dwells” [cf. Num 8:15: working in relationship to the Tent of Meeting].<sup>15</sup>

In line with this reading, scholars have shown how the depictions of creation in Gen 1-2, against their ancient near-eastern backdrop, combine to portray the garden in Eden as a reflection of the throne-room in the heavenly temple-palace of God’s presence. This same garden imagery is consequently also found in the descriptions both of the promised land and of Israel’s tabernacle/temple as the places of God’s subsequent presence outside Eden.<sup>16</sup> So the decisive factor in Gen 2:15 is the contextual meaning of “keeping” or “guarding” (*smr*), which is often used of the Levitical responsibility of guarding sacred space, whereas it is used in agricultural contexts only when crops are being guarded from people, enemies, or animals, which is not the case here. Moreover, when these two verbs and their corresponding nouns are used together in the same context, as they are in Gen 2:15, they always refer either to the Israelites “serving” God and “guarding/keeping” God’s word (10xs) or to priests who are keeping their charge in the tabernacle/temple (for the two verbs used together for Levitical service, see Num 3:7-9; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14).<sup>17</sup> So, like the later priests who served God in his presence, at creation mankind too is given the task of serving and keeping/guarding God’s rule as expressed in his promises and commands by exercising dominion in his name through obedience to his word (note how the command of God in 2:16-17 is based upon the provision of God in 2:15, just as it was in 1:26-30). Mankind’s task is not to till the garden, but to keep the command of 2:16-17, which centers on God’s provisions in 2:6-9. Indeed, if Adam’s functional identity in 2:15 “should always best be referred to as a ‘priest-king’...”,<sup>18</sup> then it becomes significant that neither priests nor kings “work” to feed themselves, especially not as gardeners or farmers.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 172.

<sup>16</sup> For just one example of the many parallels between the garden in Eden, the tabernacle/temple and the promised land, cf. the parallel descriptions of the creation account and the construction of the tabernacle (cf. Gen 1:31; 2:1; 2:2; 2:3 with Exod 39:43; 39:32; 40:33; 39:43), the respective references to the seven speech-acts involved (Gen 1:3-26 and Exod 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12) and the pattern of sevens attending to the building and dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 6:38; 8:31-55). For these parallels and an extensive development of many more, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission, A Biblical Theology of The Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT, 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 29-80 (texts above from pp. 60-61, following Levenson, Weinfeld, Walton, Sailhamer, Fishbane and Blenkinsopp).

<sup>17</sup> Beale, *Temple*, 67, following Wenham, Kline and Walton; also of interest is the fact that Barn. 4:11; 6 reads Gen 1:28 and 2:15 in this way, thus showing the existence of this interpretation in early Christianity (pp. 67-68n.91). Though Beale stresses Adam’s role as “the archetypal priest who served in and guarded (or ‘took care of’) God’s first temple” (p. 68), he maintains the traditional reading of the two verbs, arguing that Adam’s “gardening” was a priestly activity since the garden was a sanctuary (p. 68); nevertheless, Beale emphasizes that “the task of Adam in Genesis 2:15 involved more than mere spadework in the dirt of a garden,” including “guarding” the sanctuary from Satan (p. 69)—though I find this latter interpretation hard to derive from the traditional reading.

<sup>18</sup> Beale, *Temple*, 70, who points to the separation of these two functions after the Fall and their reuniting in the eschatological expectation of a messianic priest-king (Zech 6:12-13).

<sup>19</sup> Like Adam in his service to God prior to the Fall, the Levitical priests who

Once Gen 2:15 is understood in this way, an appropriate contrast between mankind's task in the world pre- and post-Fall is maintained. Prior to the Fall mankind is to worship and obey God by exercising dependence upon his provision and by rendering obedience to the commandments to eat of all the trees God has given except one. "Work" comes into the picture only after the Fall, in which mankind is cursed with the consequence of what it wanted, namely, the burden of having to provide for itself on its own in accordance with its own decisions regarding what is good and evil. Prior to the Fall, mankind was to trust in the promise of God's provisions, on the basis of which he/she was to exercise dominion over God's creation as those made in his image. The consequence of the Fall is a reversal of this original, ideal situation. Hence, in Sailhammer's words,

The importance of these two infinitives can be seen in the fact that the narrative returns to precisely them in its summary conclusion of the state of mankind after the Fall. The man and the woman were created 'for worship' (*le'obdab*, 2:15), but after the Fall they were thrown out of the garden 'to work the ground' (*la'abod 'et ha adamah*, 3:23). In the same way they were created 'for obedience' (*lesomrah*, 2:15), but after the Fall they were 'kept' (*lismor*, 3:24) from the tree of life."<sup>20</sup>

This play on words is not just poetic, it is crucial for our understanding of humanity's identity as a "worker."

In view of this reading of Gen 2:15, the description in Gen 2:5 pertains to the period *after* the Fall, when God supplied water from above and man worked the "bushes" and "small plants" on the ground below. In contrast, 2:6-9 describes the period *before* the Fall, when the LORD God watered the earth from below, the LORD God planted the garden in Eden, and the LORD God caused "to spring up every tree" (note the emphasis on the threefold repetition of the subject in 2:7-9). If anyone in the narrative is the "gardener," it is God! Whatever we want to call humanity's activity in the garden before the Fall (I prefer, "the significant and meaningful ordering and protection of God's creation as the Lord continued to lead and provide for his people"), it was not a labor designed to provide food for itself, but the "obedience of faith" in service to God which was designed to reflect and reveal his honor as the Provider of all things. The way in which this "worship" took place was to acknowledge God's glory as the Giver by enjoying everything that God had supplied as sufficient (Gen 1:26-30; 2:6-9, 15). Hence, in exercising dominion over the world there was no "need" to eat of that which the LORD God had prohibited as unnecessary for one's ongoing life (Gen 2:16-17).

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serve in God's sanctuary are not given their own land as one of the twelve tribes to farm or work in other ways. Rather, they are to live by depending on the gifts, sacrifices, and offerings brought into the temple and on the cities and lands given them by the other tribes; that is to say, they live from what God provides (cf. Num 18:8-32; 35:1-8).

<sup>20</sup> Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 48.

### III. BREAKING THE SABBATH: GOD'S REST AND MAN'S WORK

The mandate to exercise dominion over God's creation by obeying God's commands, which is made possible by God's provisions, constitutes the kingdom of God. As such, it fulfills God's mission of manifesting his glory as Creator-Provider. To that end, the God-centered nature of humanity's activity in the garden cannot be clearer. Briefly put, the "kingdom of God" is the rule of God (the exercise of his sovereignty), which creates the reign of God (the sphere of his sovereignty) in God's realm (the space of his sovereignty), all of which is reflected in the obedience of his people who are commanded to enjoy what God has provided. To this end, humanity was not put in the midst of the garden to work God's creation; God puts the garden in the midst of creation to feed humanity.

The establishment of the kingdom of God at creation reaches its climax when God "rests" on the seventh day, thereby declaring the splendor of his sovereign rule as demonstrated in the sufficiency of his provisions—God "rests" not because he is exhausted, but as the sign that there is nothing more to provide. When read against its own historical-cultural backdrop, for God to sit serenely on his throne in his own garden, rather than having to go out to do battle against the enemies that threaten his "image," is the welcomed posture of a king at "rest" (cf. God's corresponding promise to David in 2 Sam 7:1-11 and God's taking up his "resting place" in the temple in Ps 132:7-8, 13-14<sup>21</sup>). The King's rest on the "Sabbath" day of creation declares the good news that under his reign everything in his realm is as it should be.<sup>22</sup> In Eden, God keeps the Sabbath as a result of providing for his people; in response, Adam and Eve are to eat only from God's explicitly provided produce (Gen 2:16; 3:2) as the expression of their trust in the sufficiency of his provisions (Gen 1:31). Obedience to this command will glorify God as the one who gives all good gifts and prohibits all evil (cf. the creation imagery in James 1:16-18).

This Sabbath-relationship between God and humanity in the pre-Fall garden is reflected in the description of Adam's activity in Gen 2:15 as well. For as Sailhamer again points out, there is an important change in vocabulary for the Hebrew word often translated "put" in 2:15 over against the word used for "put" in 2:8. As he explains,

Unlike verse 8, where the author uses a common term for "put," in verse 15 he uses a term that he elsewhere has reserved for two special uses: God's "rest" or "safety" which he gives to human beings in the

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted for this latter reference to Beale, *Temple*, 61-62, following Walton. Beale points as well to 1 Kgs 5:4-5; 8:56; 1 Chron 6:31; 22:9-10, 18-19; 23:25-26; 28:2; 2 Chron 6:41; Ps 95:11; Isa 57:15; 66:1; Judith 9:8. For the development of this theme in the ANE and within the biblical narrative, see Beale, *Temple*, 60-66.

<sup>22</sup> So too Beale, *Temple*, 62: "God's rest both at the conclusion of creation in Genesis 1-2 and later in Israel's temple indicates not mere inactivity but that he had demonstrated his sovereignty over the forces of chaos (e.g., the enemies of Israel) and now has assumed a position of *kingly* rest further revealing his *sovereign* power" (emphasis mine). Cf. too Exod 15:17; Ps 47:8: "God's *sitting* in the temple is an expression of his sovereign rest or reign" (p. 63, emphasis his).



land (e.g., Gen 19:16; Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), and the “dedication” of something before the presence of the Lord (Exod 16:33-34; Lev 16:23; Num 17:4; Deut 26:4, 10). Both senses of the term appear to lie behind the author’s use of the word in verse 15. The man was “put” into the Garden where he could “rest” and be “safe,” and the man was “put” into the Garden “in God’s presence” where he could have fellowship with God ([Gen] 3:8).<sup>23</sup>

God’s Sabbath “rest” of provision creates the context in which man “rests” in safety in order to fellowship with God, not in order to work hard to meet his own needs (if “tilling” the garden took no real effort, would it be “work”?). The two states of “rest” correspond to one another, the character of the former is reflected in the image of the latter.

Nonetheless, in a tragedy beyond description, Eve and Adam, driven by their own desires for independence on which the cunning of the serpent capitalized, broke the Sabbath-rest by disobeying God’s commandments (Gen 3:6-7). As a result of their “fall” into “the disobedience of disbelief,” God’s intention to establish his kingdom throughout the world remained unfulfilled. In its place came death, mediated through a threefold “curse” on the serpent, the woman, and the man—each of which entailed a corresponding consequence for the rest of the created order.

For our purposes it is important to realize that in these curses the great “pain” for the woman that now accompanies childbirth from a cursed womb (Gen 3:16) matches the “pain” for the man that accompanies eating from a cursed ground (Gen 3:17). Both sources of life are now working against those they were created to sustain. In the latter case, as a consequence of the Fall, mankind can no longer “eat freely” or “surely” from the land (Gen 2:16). It is *not* that man’s work is now cursed, as if his pre-Fall labors merely get harder as a result of the curse. Rather, the curse is that he must now work to eat and do so in a fallen world that is in rebellion against those created and called to rule over it (cf. Isa 65:17; Rom 8:22-24; Rev 21:1). Instead of ruling over creation forever in dependence on God’s provisions, Adam and Eve are now cast out of the garden to be on their own in the independent self-reliance they craved, cursed to live and to give life in pain until they die. In sum, “working the ground” is said to be a result of the Fall, and the narrative suggests that the author has intended such a punishment to be seen as an ironic reversal of humanity’s original purpose....<sup>24</sup>

Life east of Eden will no longer be a God-directed activity designed to mirror his sovereign munificence, but a self-centered labor consumed by its own need to survive. To use economic language, eating in a fallen world has now become an exchange function brought about by maximizing the utilities of mankind’s sweat-soaked, hard work, until that

<sup>23</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 100. On Adam’s “rest” in Gen 2:15, cf. the “putting” of Adam in the garden in Gen 2:15, with its connotation of rest, with the placing of furniture, images and God’s ‘resting place’ in the heavenly temple in 2 Chron 4:8; 2 Kgs 17:29; Zech 5:5-11; Ps 132:7-8, 14; Isa 66:1, and with the “rest” to be found in the promised land in Exod 33:14; Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:9; 2 Sam 7:1-6; Ps 95:11 (Beale, *Temple*, 70).

<sup>24</sup> Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 101.

which was designed to support life becomes a grave (Gen 3:18-19). For under the curse, we must find ways to manage “the disposal of scarce means to achieve competing ends.”<sup>25</sup>

#### IV. GRACE OUTSIDE THE GARDEN

Yet, despite humanity’s sin, God is merciful. The woman’s pain-filled birth will still bring forth life (note that we are not told Eve’s name as “the mother of all living” until after the curse, cf. Gen 3:20!), leading to the messianic seed that will redeem the world (Gen 3:15). So too, the man’s pain-filled work will still bring forth plants to eat, leading under the rule of the Messiah to a prayer for God’s provision of “daily bread” (Matt 6:11). Along the path of this redemption from mankind’s slavery to sin and its consequences, Israel is delivered from her toil as slaves in Egypt (Exod 1:8-14; 5:4-18). At the exodus Israel becomes the “new creation” people of God, redeemed to reveal God’s glory as King through her faith-filled obedience to his commands, which are made possible by God’s provisions (Isa 43:1-2).

To signify this redemption from slavery (forced working for others is the final expression of the curse), keeping the “Sabbath” first established in the garden in Eden becomes the sign of the Sinai covenant at the heart of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8-11), with the death penalty once again levied against those who break it (Exod 31:13, 17; 35:1-3; Num 15:32-36; Ezek 20:12, 20). The Sabbath consequently frames the Exodus narrative. On the one hand, even before Israel arrives at Mt Sinai the practice of the Sabbath is already established in the wilderness with the provision of manna and quail (Exod 16:1-36). Thus, in Exod 16:28-29 keeping the Sabbath is equated with God’s commandments and laws even before the Law is given. On the other hand, before Moses comes down from Mt Sinai for the last time the last thing the LORD says is a reiteration of the command to keep the Sabbath (Exod 31:12-17). As it was at creation, so too at Sinai: the Sabbath is God’s declaration of his ongoing commitment to meet the needs of this people (Exod. 31:16; cf. the parallel between God’s rest at creation and Israel’s rest after the Exodus in Exod 20:8-11). Conversely, keeping the Sabbath was for Israel a symbolic, public demonstration of her dependence on God to lead, guide, and provide for his people.

We must not forget how unusual it was in the ancient world to take a day “off.” In the ancient world, people worked seven days a week. Before the Fall, since God was the “worker” (a condescending act of grace on the part of the divine King!), God was the one who kept the Sabbath by ceasing from his labors due to the perfection of his provision. After the Fall, mankind as the “worker” could never cease from its labors due to the curse of self-support. Yet, already before the Flood, God had promised to redeem the faithful remnant of Noah’s lineage from their work:

<sup>25</sup> Gordon Menzies, “Economics as identity,” in *Christian Theology and Market Economics*, ed. Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008): 94-109, at 98, who offers this as the subject matter of the discipline of economic science, following the definition of Robbins.



When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen 5:28-29).

After the flood, God takes the first step in keeping this promise by restating to Noah, almost verbatim, the same mandate given to Adam and Eve at creation; the differences now reflect the continuing impact of sin in the world (cf. Gen 9:1-7 with Gen 1:26-30).

In a continuing fulfillment of this promise, those subsequently redeemed from slavery at the Exodus therefore cease from their labors on the Sabbath as a sign of God's renewed commitment in the midst of the fallen world to be their God and as an expression of their identity as his people. There is no evidence biblically that the Sabbath was ever intended to be a time of physical and psychological rest after a hard week at work in order to be refreshed for the work to come in the week ahead. The purpose of the Sabbath is not to help Israel work harder, as if the goal of worship is to make work more effective. Rather, the Sabbath was a weekly "holy-day" or "holiday" from work itself—a symbolic statement that the week's work, though a ground for gratitude in an upside down world, is not humanity's rightful or ultimate calling. On the Sabbath, the faithful who trust God to provide symbolically give the universe back to God, its rightful and sovereign owner. Just as God kept the Sabbath by ceasing from his "work" at the climax of the creation-provision, so too Israel is to stop working on the seventh day as a sign that, as a result of her rescue from the toil of slavery, she is once again trusting God to meet her daily needs, albeit now in and through a fallen world as attested by the need to work the other six (Deut 5:12-15; cf. Deut 4:7). The Sabbath is a perpetual response of faith (Ezek 20:11-12).

The repeated failure of the majority of Israel to keep the Sabbath by not trusting in the LORD, even though she ceased her labors on the last day of the week, thus revealed her persistent, hardened heart of unbelief. Israel was different from the nations around her symbolically (she "kept" the Sabbath by not working), but not in reality (she did not trust in YHWH, which the Sabbath was intended to symbolize). Indeed, Ezekiel declares that Israel broke the covenant by profaning the Sabbath before reaching Sinai (Ezek. 20:13; cf. Exod. 16:27-30), after Sinai (Ezek. 20:16, 20-21) and during Israel's history in the land (Ezek. 22:8, 26; 23:38; cf. Neh 13:15-18; Jer 17:14-23; Amos 8:4-6; Hos 2:11). Eventually, Israel's breaking of the Sabbath led to God's judgment in the exile (Ezek. 20:23-24; 24:1-14). So in looking forward, Ezekiel sees that Israel's future restoration by God's grace will encompass a return to a proper keeping of the Sabbath (Ezek. 44:24; 45:17; 46:3-4).

#### V. GOD'S GRACE IN HUMANITY'S WORK-WEEK: THREE PERSPECTIVES

**PERSPECTIVE ONE:** The consummation of salvation history at the Messiah's "second coming" will entail not a redemption *of* work, but a final rescue *from* work. In the age to come, though filled with the renewed

activities of ruling as God's vice-regents in a new heavens and earth, God's people will not "work"; God will once again feed his people. Now, as the proleptic inauguration of this final redemption, the first coming of the Messiah calls for a life of *dependence on the lordship of Jesus Christ* during the "in between time."

Jesus' declaration that the Son of Man is "lord *even* of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28) is to be understood in this light. In Mark's Gospel Jesus uses his favorite title for himself, "the Son of Man," on only two significant occasions during his early Galilean ministry, in which he is preaching and acting to establish his claim that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:14-15): first in regard to his authority to forgive sins (2:10) and then in regard to his authority over the Sabbath (2:28). These are astonishing claims of divine authority and identity. With the pronouncement in Mark 2:28, the Son of Man is equated with God's divine identity both at creation and under the Sinai covenant! His healings, exorcisms and miraculous feedings of those who follow him, like the LORD's actions for Israel in the wilderness, support the validity of these claims, which together constitute the significance of his rule and reign among his people. Jesus forgives his people's sins in order to make entrance into the kingdom possible, which is God's prerogative alone. He then commits himself, as the LORD did to Adam and Eve in the garden and to Israel in the wilderness, to provide whatever his people need (not want!) to carry out their calling as members of the kingdom. There is no promise of prosperity in this gospel, however; in a sin-soaked world, divine providence,<sup>26</sup> and Jesus' lordship, can both lead one into situations of intense suffering and deprivation. Yet, in both forgiveness and provision, Jesus, as "LORD of the Sabbath," is now doing what God the Father did under the old covenant—even when that provision may consist only of God's presence to sustain us!

Thus, according to Mark 2:23-3:6, for Jesus to be "LORD of the Sabbath" means engaging his power as the messianic Son of Man from Daniel 7 to meet his disciples' needs as the One who works on the Sabbath, even as David in his royal role met the needs of his men when they were hungry (Mark 2:25-26; cf. 1 Sam 21:1-6). In so doing, Jesus demonstrated the meaning of the Sabbath itself. He also made clear that as the long-awaited Davidic Messiah he was the one who was reestablishing a Sabbath rest between God and his people, now and into the age to come. The inauguration of this renewed 'Sabbath relationship' between God and his people through the Messiah will one day be consummated in the full Sabbath rest of the eschaton for those who keep the new covenant through their dependence on God (Heb 4:1-13).

In response to Jesus' authority as "King," God's people now "keep the Sabbath" *everyday* by trusting God to meet their needs *in the midst of the fallen world*. Such confidence expresses itself in a lack of worry over one's own welfare, which keeps one from worshipping the identity, status and security provided by a job, and in a corresponding concern to meet the needs of others, which the Bible calls "love." For when the new covenant reality arrives to which the old covenant symbols like the

<sup>26</sup> Where and when one is born makes a huge difference in this life!

"Sabbath" pointed, the symbols themselves become a matter of preference or spiritual discipline and are no longer obligatory (Rom 14:5-6; cf. this principle in relation to circumcision in 1 Cor. 7:19 and to 'kosher' constraints in Rom 14:2-6). What counts is the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) to which they pointed.

Within the context of a redeemed trust in Jesus' love as the "LORD of the Sabbath," embodied in loving others, there can be a "moral" dimension to work in all its variety. But this dimension is not to be found in a natural theology in which work becomes an intrinsic and universal training tool for humanity, or in a view of human nature that sees work to be an extension of the self-actualization of human freedom.<sup>27</sup> Its morality is found only in the way in which one's work becomes part of the obedience of faith that expresses itself in gratitude to God for making such work possible and in mercy toward others as the extension of God's merciful provision for us.

**PERSPECTIVE TWO:** Given Jesus' lordship over the "Sabbath," work must not be glorified or set forth as the source of humanity's sense of fulfillment or identity, thereby falling prey to what Wendell Berry calls "the bad work," the "too much responsibility" of pride. As Gordon Menzies observes over against a positivistic science of economics that ignores all human attitudes as merely non-factual "values," "The personal or social goal of increasing command over resources is potentially idolatrous, according to Scripture. It follows from this 'fact' that those 'in Adam' will easily find themselves worshipping it."<sup>28</sup>

Given this "fact," work must be kept in its place outside of the garden. For most people in the world most of the time, work is a *judgment* which, more often than not, is drudgery (when thinking of "work," don't think of Bill Gates, think of nameless peasants stamping rice patties in Cambodia, growing millet in Chad, making clothing in Bangladesh, cleaning the streets and sewers in India, etc.). Nevertheless, as a *mercy-filled* judgment, work is still to be received with humility and gratitude for its life-sustaining productivity, despite its origin in idolatry. By an act of universal grace, God's providence brings continued productivity to a world that deserves only wrath in every generation (Gen 8:20-9:17). It is grace upon grace that many jobs also provide personal fulfillment, challenge, venues for creativity and opportunity to serve others. It is both a curse and a gift to have a job. And insofar as all "social arrangements that organize

<sup>27</sup> For a contrary position, see Michael J. Miller, "Business as a Moral Enterprise," in *Christian Theology and Market Economics*, ed. Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008): 113-128, at, e.g., 120: "In the Christian tradition, business has unique moral and spiritual value because it is a type of human work and an element of vocation of the human person," following John Paul II. Miller is arguing against the view taken here, seeing it instead as existing in the garden in Eden and thus as "a constitutive element of man's personhood; a means by which he lives out his humanity" (p. 121). Hence, "Business is a moral good because persons engage in it" (p. 126). Though he takes the idea that work is a result of the Fall to be "commonly believed" (p. 121), my experience of late has been that work is more often seen to be part of the so-called "cultural mandate" given to humanity at creation—a view common to both Roman Catholic and Reformation perspectives.

<sup>28</sup> Menzies, "Economics," 107.

consumption and production ... (have) an identity-molding function,” the recognition of the dual nature of the fallen work-week should keep us from “being pressed into the mold of ‘economic man.’”<sup>29</sup> In its place, work is to be carried out not in the hope of its own rewards from this world, but in the *hope of redemption* in the next. The faithful work and industry commended in Proverbs 30 must therefore be salted with the attitude manifest in Eccl 2:22-26 (RSV):

What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

**PERSPECTIVE THREE:** Working faithfully under the Sabbath-lordship of Christ reveals God’s redemption in the midst of this evil age when, as *the embodiment of love*, God’s people go beyond working for themselves to working for others: “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Eph 4:28). This work of love is the antidote to Wendell Berry’s “bad work of despair,” which is “done poorly out of the failure of hope or vision,” the kind of despair that is “the too-little of responsibility.” Though Paul contemplated how much better it would be to gain Christ through death, he nevertheless concluded in his desire to live like Christ that remaining in the fallen world would be more necessary, since it would mean “fruitful labor” for the sake of others (cf. Phil 1:21-26). As its corollary, Paul commands the Thessalonians that those unwilling to work should not eat (2 Thess 3:10). Paul again offered himself as the counter-example, since “with toil and labor...(he) worked night and day” in order to pay for his bread rather than burden the Thessalonians (2 Thess 3:8). He consequently exhorted the idle “in the LORD Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (2 Thess 3:12). To quote Berry one last time, “Good work finds the way between pride and despair.”

<sup>29</sup> Menzies, “Economics,” 94. By “economic man” Menzies means the identity invented by John Stuart Mill (1836, 1844), in which one’s self-understanding is shaped by the acquisition of wealth as the main and acknowledged goal of behavior (p. 97).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ἀκνηρός* (*akneros*; “lazy”) in the LXX of Proverbs, where it is used in the context of work and industry as part of the opposite of godly, prudent conduct. It describes the slothful person who lacks resolution to go to work (6:6, 9), who allows difficulties to stop him (20:4), or does not move from will to deed (21:25). The wife of Prov 31 is the opposite of this, due in part to her pleasure in work (31:27). See too Prov 14:23. For these points, see BDAG, 702; F. Hauck, *TDNT* 5 (1967):166-167, and Peter T. O’Brien, *Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 352n.34.

The reason Paul must lay down this rule is not economical, but eschatological, or better put, it is due to an *over-realized* eschatology that believed that the “day of the LORD has come” (2 Thess 2:2). The Thessalonians had the right theology, but the wrong timing. Believers in the Thessalonian church were ceasing to work because they assumed that the redeemed world, in which there would be no work, was right around the corner. But if work were our vocation, first granted in the perfection of the pre-Fall garden and then perfected again in the new creation, the imminent end of the fallen world would have energized them to work double shifts, not to quit working. For Paul, however, not working in this age was not the result of an under-appreciated understanding of work as our true vocation, but the consequence of trying to live beyond the curse prematurely. Instead, as Calvin put it, the believer’s confidence and true sense of “calling” as he or she faces life between creation and new creation is quite different:

Again, it will be no slight relief from cares, labors, troubles, and other burdens for a man to know that God is his guide in all these things. The magistrate will discharge his functions more willingly; the head of the household will confine himself to his duty; each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God. From this will arise also a singular consolation: that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned ever precious in God’s sight.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1960), III.X.6 (p. 725).

## IN DEFENSE OF HAVING STUFF: BONHOEFFER, ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE GOODNESS OF HUMAN MATERIALITY

DR. JOEL D. LAWRENCE\*

### 1. INTRODUCTION: THE RADICAL MOMENT IN AMERICA

Christian bookstores today are filled with the call to be “radical.” Books like *The Irresistible Revolution* by Shane Claiborne and *Radical* by David Platt have challenged a comfortable and affluent American evangelicalism to take seriously Jesus’ demanding call to follow him.<sup>1</sup> These books have raised questions concerning the relationship between the church in America and the material goods of our world, and have laid down a challenge for American Christians to take seriously the call of Jesus to sell our possessions and to give to the poor in order to follow Him. They have called into question the readiness of American evangelicals who claim to be followers of Jesus to *really* follow Jesus, to *really* take seriously His call to a costly discipleship.<sup>2</sup> These books have been read by millions, and have had significant impact on the way many in the American evangelical church are evaluating not only our personal relationship to possessions, but also our approaches to church structure and staffing, multi-million dollar church buildings, expensive technologies for running our church services, and the way in which the American church conceives of her relationship to the poor.

I wish to begin this essay by affirming that the New Radicals<sup>3</sup> have raised very important questions regarding the wealth of American Christianity and how that has impacted our vision of what it means to follow Jesus. I believe that this is an important conversation, and one that must be entered into with seriousness. The object of their assault, the wealth and consumerism of America and its impact on the American

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<sup>1</sup> David Platt, *Radical* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2010); Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> In his article entitled “Here Come the Radicals!” in *Christianity Today*, Matthew Lee Anderson points out the ubiquity of the word “really” in the writers he dubs “The New Radicals.” Anderson states that the emphasis on what it “really” means to follow Jesus is the way by which these authors are attempting to call American evangelicals to fully embrace the demanding call of following Christ, but more than anything he believes that “the reliance on intensifiers demonstrates the emptiness of American Christianity’s language...The inflated rhetoric is a sign of how divorced our churches’ vocabulary is from the simple language of Scripture.” See Anderson, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (March 2013): 23.

<sup>3</sup> In his article, Anderson cites the following as the leaders of “The New Radicals”: David Platt, Shane Claiborne, Francis Chan, Kyle Idleman and Steven Furtick.



Church, is one that must be challenged. As such, I affirm the impulse behind the conversations and believe that this is an important moment for American evangelicalism.

However, it is my contention that, while the New Radicals have challenged the American church to think about our relationship to money and possessions, they have not based this call on a proper theological foundation. What is missing is a thoroughgoing theological anthropology that stresses and celebrates the essentially *material* nature of humanity. In light of the absence of a developed theological anthropology, the works that speak into the Radical Moment all too often reflect a subtle Docetism that runs the risk of demeaning the goodness of God's material world and the goodness of the relationship between humans and the goods of the material world. The lack of such a theological anthropology tends to a vision of the human being that, to borrow a line from Wendell Berry, "is...drastically reductive; it does not permit us to live and work as human beings, as the best of our inheritance defines us."<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I wish to counter this trend by inserting into the Radical Moment a theological anthropology that joyfully and unapologetically affirms materiality and possessions. I believe that this time in American evangelical life provides us with an opportunity to reflect more deeply on our essential being as humans created out of the dust of the earth, and so to reflect more deeply on our relationship to the things of the earth. It is my conviction that the evangelical church is in great need of a theological anthropology that can become the foundation for our conversations about the relationship between humanity and the stuff of the earth. Absent such a foundation, our theology will continue to run the danger of the reductionism and Docetism that is too often found in the works that mark the Radical Moment in America.

To build this anthropological foundation, I will engage the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In many of the works of the New Radicals, the reader will come across at least one reference to or quotation by Bonhoeffer, usually to Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship*. For instance, in *Radical*, Platt cites this work and its call to "abandon the attachments of this world." He goes on to say, "The theme of the book is summarized in one potent sentence: 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.' Bonhoeffer aptly entitled his book *The Cost of Discipleship*."<sup>5</sup> However, this emphasis on Bonhoeffer's vision of discipleship is lacking due to

<sup>4</sup> Wendell Berry, "Economics and Pleasure," in *What Are Humans For?* (New York: North Star Press, 1990): 135. In his context, Berry is talking about the reduction of the human to an economic unit of competition. While his view of reductionism of the human in his essay isn't the exact same as the one I am proposing here, this quote connects with my basic assumption that the vision of humanity in the works of the radical movement is inadequate.

<sup>5</sup> It must be pointed out, *contra* Platt's assertion here, that Bonhoeffer did not entitle his work *The Cost of Discipleship*. It is simply entitled *Nachfolge*, which is most literally to be translated "to follow after." While, of course, the cost of discipleship is a key theme in this text, the title of this work, which has been amended in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works edition and is simply called *Discipleship*, is a gloss by the first English publishers of the book, and not Bonhoeffer's title. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

the failure to contextualize Bonhoeffer's teaching on discipleship in a theological anthropology that he developed from the beginning of his theological career and carried through to the end. As I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, there is much more going on in Bonhoeffer's theology than a call to abandon our attachments to the world. In fact, Bonhoeffer has a strong emphasis on the goodness of our attachments to the things of this world that arise from the fact that God created us as earthly, material beings, who cannot properly be human without the things of the world; this is what is missed when one doesn't grasp the anthropological content of Bonhoeffer's theology. Adopting Bonhoeffer's teaching on 'costly discipleship' without engaging his teaching on what it means to be human leaves one with a false vision of Bonhoeffer's call to follow Jesus, as well as a reduced anthropology.

In what follows, then, I offer "a defense of having stuff." This defense must not be heard as a call for conspicuous consumption or an endorsement of the continued impoverishment of the majority of humanity; this essay is not an apology for owning 5,000 square foot mansions while being unconcerned about the poor among us. Clearly, to follow Jesus is to be engaged with and concerned for the poor. Rampant consumerism is having devastating effects on our society and in our churches; the gap between rich and poor is growing at alarming rates; humans are being locked into prisons of poverty. We must not duck the effects of these forces in our world. But I propose that what evangelicalism most needs in this moment is not simply a call to *dispossess*, but a clear vision of what it means to *possess* in a way that honors God and our constitution as created beings, and to see the very act of possessing as a protest against the consumerism of our age. In what follows, I will suggest that a theological anthropology of materiality provides us resources to see possessing as an essential part of our rejection of the demeaning of the material in American society. By possessing in a way that depicts a right relationship to the stuff of the earth, the Church can provide a vision of humanity that demonstrates a relationship to the material world that rejects the demeaning of materiality inherent in our consumerist passions, and instead presents a vision of a joyful engagement with the stuff of the earth that is consistent with our material being and that offers God praise for the beauty and goodness of His creation. What I offer here, following Bonhoeffer, is an unapologetic affirmation of the material world and the goods of that world that can provide us with a firm foundation for the conversations about wealth and possessions.

## 2. BONHOEFFER'S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

One of the most critical themes in Bonhoeffer's *corpus* is his stress on *being human* as a theological theme and as central to the call to follow Christ. From his earliest works, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, in which he reflects on the nature of humanity in our created, fallen, and redeemed condition, to the prison correspondence, in which we find his earthy and gritty reflections on humanity "come of age" and on the "this-worldly" nature of discipleship, Bonhoeffer never shies away from the



material constitution of humanity. Bonhoeffer's theological vision of "the human being of heaven and earth" is steadfast in its attention to the fact that humans are created out of the dust of the earth. Bonhoeffer's insistence on and attention to the earthly, material createdness of humanity is often lost on his casual commentators, who fail to grasp how important theological anthropology is to Bonhoeffer's vision of what it means to follow Jesus. As I have suggested above, the adoption of Bonhoeffer in this Radical Moment is incomplete if we don't have a thorough knowledge of his anthropological vision. I suggest that Bonhoeffer's vision of the human, which we will now turn to explore through analyzing three of his key theological writings, is an important dialogue partner for the evangelical church as we approach the question of the relationship of humanity to the material world in which we have been placed by God. We begin our exploration of Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology with his lesser-known but critically important book, *Creation and Fall*.

### A. *Creation and Fall*

In the winter semester of 1932-33, Bonhoeffer gave a series of lectures on Genesis 1-3 at the University of Berlin, that was later published as *Creation and Fall*.<sup>6</sup> In this work, Bonhoeffer is writing in the tradition of Barth's *Römerbrief*, doing "theological exegesis", a method that set itself apart from the traditional German historical-critical exegetical approach common at the time. In this book, Bonhoeffer is reading the text of Genesis 1-3 under the influence of Barth's Christological emphasis as the method for all proper Christian exegesis. As such, *Creation and Fall* is an attempt to read the foundational chapters of Scripture through the cross and to understand the foundations of the Scripture narrative from the perspective of the completion of the story, rather than reading it as if the reader was unaware of the unfolding story to be told.

In approaching Genesis 1-3 in this way, Bonhoeffer focuses, not primarily on historical-critical issues (which are present, though minimally), but on theological issues. One of the most significant theological movements in this text is his treatment of the creation of humanity. For Bonhoeffer, the human cannot be understood apart from an affirmation of the essentially *earthiness* of humanity. Following from Bonhoeffer's description of the human taken from the earth is the need to unapologetically affirm the relation of the human to the things of the earth: to food, to possessions, to homes, to the "stuff" of the earth.

In the chapter entitled "The Human Being of Heaven and Earth," Bonhoeffer turns his attention to the creation of the human as described in Genesis 2:7: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." For Bonhoeffer, this is a pivotal text for understanding the

<sup>6</sup> Bonhoeffer changed the title of the book from "Creation and Sin," which was the title of the lecture series, because of the fate that all too often afflicts academic writers: someone else published a work using his original title before he could. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (Vol. 3, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Stephen Bax; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

nature of humanity and the essential earthiness of the life that we were created to live. Bonhoeffer states that in this verse “we are directed to the earth in a distinct and exclusive way that is quite different from before,”<sup>7</sup> i.e., quite different from the creation account recorded in Genesis 1. Here, the attention of the reader is directed to the fact that humanity is created out of the earth, with a very real and essential connection to the earth. He continues: “The human being whom God has created in God’s image... is the human being who is taken from earth. Even Darwin and Feuerbach could not use stronger language than is used here. Humankind is derived from a piece of earth. Its bond with the earth belongs to its essential being.”<sup>8</sup> To emphasize this point, Bonhoeffer writes, “The ‘earth is its mother’; it comes out of her womb.”<sup>9</sup> This statement is striking: while God is our Father, the earth is our mother; humanity arises out of the union of the Father and mother, and so, if you will, we look like *both*. Yes, we are created in the image of God, and so look like Him, but we also look like our mother: earthy and material, created to live among and in relationship to the stuff of the earth.

For Bonhoeffer, the human being who is created in God’s image has an essential bond to the earth in our embodied life, which means that this embodied status must in no way be despised. To do so is to despise our very nature. As Bonhoeffer writes, “The body belongs to the person’s essence. The body is not the prison, the shell, the exterior, of a human being; instead a human being is a human body. A human being does not ‘have’ a body—or ‘have’ a soul; instead a human being ‘is’ body and soul.”<sup>10</sup> To despise the fact that we are products of the union of the breath of God *and* the dust of the earth is to be fallen, and so separated from God and self. “People who reject their bodies reject their existence before God the Creator. What is to be taken seriously about human existence is its bond with mother earth, its being as body. Human beings have their existence as existence on earth....Flight from the body is as much flight from being human as is flight from the spirit.”<sup>11</sup> In these words, we see the thorough rejection by Bonhoeffer of any reductionism or Docetism. The human cannot be reduced to a “spiritual being.” Our earthly life is not an accident, nor is it a cause for repentance or remorse. To be human is to be earthbound, to be a piece of clay merged with the breath of God, created to live in God’s presence as a material human being. We read, “(Humans) have not by some cruel fate been driven into the earthly world and enslaved in it. Instead, the word of God the almighty one summoned humankind out of the earth in which it was sleeping, in which it was dead and indeed a mere piece of earth, but a piece of earth called by God to have human existence.”<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer illustrates this point through Michelangelo’s depiction of the creation of Adam from the Sistine Chapel. In this image, Bonhoeffer

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<sup>7</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 76–77.

<sup>11</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 77, 78.

<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 77.

points to a prime example of a theological anthropology that takes seriously the earthiness of humanity created in God's image. He writes, "The Adam who rests on the newly created earth is so closely and intimately bound up with the ground on which Adam lies that Adam is, even in this still-dreaming state, a most singular and wonderful piece of earth—but even so still a piece of earth."<sup>13</sup> And it is this piece of earth whom God inspires with his life-giving breath, whom God places in the earthly garden, whom God commands to eat and to drink, to enjoy all that God has created, to enjoy the pleasures of the body in sexual union with the other, to live freely in the beauty of God's created world, to till the soil and so receive sustenance from the earth, his mother.

And it is this piece of earth whom God redeems, when narcissism has misdirected the passions of the body to consume rather than enjoy, to hold possessions as idols rather than as gifts. In order to redeem, God Himself becomes a piece of earth: "[W]here the original body in its created being has been destroyed, God enters it anew in Jesus Christ, and then, where that Body too is broken, enters the forms of the sacrament of the body and blood."<sup>14</sup> For Bonhoeffer, the Lord's Supper follows from our being earthbound human beings. "Because Adam is created as body, Adam is also redeemed as body in Jesus Christ and in the sacrament."<sup>15</sup> The physical partaking of bread and wine are signs, not merely by which we remember Christ, but by which we signify our life as embodied beings, who are being redeemed in our bodies through the broken Body of Jesus and who are sustained as a united body and soul through the Lord's Supper.

In *Creation and Fall*, we see Bonhoeffer's clear emphasis on the essential materiality of humanity. This stress opens us up to the theological need for a joyful affirmation of creation and the goodness of the things of the earth in our life as human beings. Bonhoeffer insists that we not shy away from the fact that we express our God-ordained life on earth *in relation to the things of the earth*. While there are dangers in this emphasis, the dangers must not distract us from the full expression of our earthiness and so the full expression of the goodness of our relationship to "stuff," to food, goods, homes, and possessions. To fail in this emphasis is to fail to glorify God, who created us, not as disembodied beings who would not need food, goods, homes, or possessions, but as embodied beings who thrive through the sustenance of our mother. Bonhoeffer here provides us with the foundation for "a defense of having stuff." But we must now move forward to Bonhoeffer's later work, to *Ethics* and to the prison correspondence, to see how he himself works out his theological anthropology of materiality and its expression of the goodness of our earthly life.

### B. Ethics and the Stuff of Life

Bonhoeffer never completed *Ethics*. His writing of this book was interrupted by his arrest, but the essays that were written and collected

<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 79.

to make up the published book *Ethics* reveal Bonhoeffer's continuing exploration of the goodness of human materiality and earthly living.

We begin our reflection on *Ethics* with some general observations of Bonhoeffer's ethical commitments. It is important to grasp that, for Bonhoeffer, ethics is not rooted in vague and aloof ethical theories, which are then applied by professional ethicists; Bonhoeffer has no need for casuistry. Rather, the very purpose of ethics is to free human beings to live genuinely human lives. One of Bonhoeffer's abiding concerns is that ethics all too often operate as a threat to living out of the vocation of being God's creatures in the full embrace of our earthiness. Ethical abstractions become the enemy of earthly living, removing us from our daily life by placing that life in the constant gaze of ethical theories and so producing in us an ethical inertia of self-reflection rather than the freedom "to live and work as human beings." Bonhoeffer insists that the Gospel of Jesus Christ sets us free from abstract principles, and calls us rather to the concrete realities of life in this world.

This theme of the concrete earthly life as the purpose of ethics runs throughout both *Ethics* and the prison letters. Bonhoeffer is calling for a discipleship that is deeply engaged with the world, a Christianity that resists the escapism of "spirituality" and that encourages Jesus' followers to be engaged in the here and now of earthly living. There has been a great deal of reflection on Bonhoeffer's call to an engaged life of discipleship in much of the "activist" adoption of Bonhoeffer. However, what we find in Bonhoeffer is broader than his call to activism, to fighting for peace and justice. Alongside this we also find a call to simply live material lives in the joy and goodness of God's blessing. This call, which has not received the attention that the call to activism has received, is critically important for our understanding of Bonhoeffer's vision of following Jesus in our daily, earthly, material life.

In order to expound on Bonhoeffer's call to earthly living in his later theology, I will focus my thoughts on an extended quote from the essay in *Ethics* entitled "Natural Life":

A human dwelling is not intended merely to be a protection against bad weather and the night, as well as a place to raise offspring. It is the space in which human beings may enjoy the pleasures of personal life in the security of their loved ones and their possessions. Eating and drinking serve not only the purpose of keeping the body healthy, but also the natural joy of bodily life. Clothing is not merely a necessary covering for the body, but is at the same time an adornment of the body.<sup>16</sup>

In this quote, we see Bonhoeffer building on the anthropological foundation that he established in *Creation and Fall*. We recall that in *Creation and Fall* Bonhoeffer describes the human being as one who is essentially earthbound. This relationship to the earth is not a fault, something that must be overcome, but is essential to our being human.

<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Vol. 6, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 187).

As such, we concluded that Bonhoeffer's anthropological teaching in *Creation and Fall* drives us to recognize the goodness, not just of our material nature, but also of our relation to the things of the earth. Had God created us to be disembodied beings, we would not need food, homes, clothing, or possessions; however, in creating us as clumps of earth, we have been created to need the stuff of earth in order to sustain our life as God's creatures.

But in the quote above, Bonhoeffer moves us beyond the issue of what we "need." Quite intentionally, he is rejecting a theological anthropology in which we think of our relationship to stuff as merely a necessity, as a Maslowian hierarchy of needs in which our relation to the stuff of the earth belongs to the category of mere sustenance. In speaking about a home, Bonhoeffer makes the point that the home should not be seen as "merely" a structure that keeps out the bad weather (i.e., a need). Rather, the home is the place where the life that God created us to live, the life of intimacy in relationship to those we love, is to thrive in relation to those loved ones as well as to the possessions that we have in our home. In speaking about food, he similarly resists the notion that food is merely a way to keep the body alive, but rather serves to enhance the joy of bodily life that we have been given by God. And, in speaking of clothing, Bonhoeffer states that clothes should be used, not merely to cover our bodies, but to adorn ourselves as God's created ones.

Bonhoeffer's thinking contained in this paragraph is very "un-radical." Rather than a call to dispossess, Bonhoeffer here offers a call to possess, and to enjoy those possessions as gifts from God intended for our good as a blessing to the earthy nature of being human. Rather than seeing the things of the material world around us as mere necessities, Bonhoeffer here paints a picture of a home, of food and drink, and of clothes as the appropriate expression of our being human. It is one thing to say that we are material beings and therefore we *need* protection against bad weather; it is quite another to celebrate the home as a place where we can enjoy personal life and the security of our loved ones and our possessions. This, rather than being a statement of need, is a statement of celebration, a robust affirmation of the goodness of human life in our relationship to goods and possessions. And in this, Bonhoeffer places firmly before us the anthropological category of joy.

Joy is a central tenet of Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology. His teaching on the embodied existence given by God leads him to express throughout his theology that we are called in Scripture to the joy of the Lord, the enjoyment of God. For Bonhoeffer, the enjoyment of God and the enjoyment of stuff are not two diametrically opposed options. On the contrary, we are created to have joy in being the "piece of earth" created by God for material existence and the goods that accompany and are intrinsic to the blessing of our material existence. And this joy means that our relationship to the stuff of earth is a relationship, not merely of physical sustenance, but of delight, appreciation, celebration and thanksgiving for the blessings of the earth that God has given to his earthly image. Bonhoeffer here demonstrates that a theological anthropology of materiality must also be an anthropology of joy. When we enjoy goods

and possessions, houses and food, and the celebrations we share with our loved ones, we live in thanks to the Creator who has given us material life, who has given us food to enjoy, homes to enjoy, possessions to enjoy, under His Fatherly care and for His glory.

### C. The Prison Correspondence: 'This-worldly' Living

I mentioned above that Bonhoeffer never finished *Ethics* due to his arrest. Rather than continue his work on his *magnum opus*, Bonhoeffer instead was locked away in a prison in Berlin, dispossessed of his relationship to the earthly goods and relationships that had made up his life to that point. Perhaps it is not surprising that a man in prison found himself longing for the simple pleasures of earthly life. The foundation for this thinking had been laid years earlier, but the full flowering of Bonhoeffer's vision of what it means to be human occurred in a most inhuman place, a Nazi prison, in the midst of the diabolical destruction of bomb raids and blackouts. In other words, his profound and moving reflections on living a fully engaged, "this-worldly" life that we read in the prison correspondence arise from the cell of one who has been forcibly removed from the joys of home that he speaks of in *Ethics*. His arrest has separated Bonhoeffer from his parents, his siblings, the security of his own room in his own home, the piano that he loved to play as the family gathered around and sang together, meals with his loved ones and, perhaps most painful of all, his anticipated future life with his fiancé. Bonhoeffer experienced dispossession, and it made him long for the goodness of possessing.

In a letter to his best friend Eberhard Bethge, written on July 27, 1944, Bonhoeffer comments on the contrast between the presentation of earthiness in the Old Testament and the "spirituality" of the New Testament. This contrast is not a contradiction; Bonhoeffer is not driving a wedge between the Old and New Testaments. However, he is offering a criticism of the church's overemphasis on the spirituality of the New Testament to the detriment of the earthiness of the Old Testament, and bemoaning the way this has effected the church's vision of what it means to be human.

In his letter of June 27, 1944, Bonhoeffer engages Bethge regarding what he calls "redemption myths" in order to raise the question of whether or not Christianity should properly be understood as a "religion of redemption."<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer asserts that Christianity has always been understood as such, but raises the question about whether this is so. By redemption, Bonhoeffer is referring to the notion that Christianity is primarily concerned with the afterlife. He argues that we should not understand Christianity as a religion of redemption, and that we do so only when we make the "cardinal error" of separating Christ from the Old Testament and so interpret him "in the sense of redemption myths."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Vol. 8, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, trans. Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 447).

<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 447.



Rather than do this, the church must see the integral relationship between Christ and the Old Testament, and so pay attention to the way in which redemption occurs for the people of Israel in the Old Testament. On this, Bonhoeffer writes that Old Testament redemption “is redemption *within history*, that is, *this side* of the bounds of death, whereas everywhere else the aim of all the other myths or redemption is precisely to overcome death’s boundary.”<sup>19</sup> So, while there is certainly redemption in the Old Testament, it does not have the same emphasis as other redemption myths. “Israel is redeemed out of Egypt so that it may live before God, as God’s people *on earth*.”<sup>20</sup>

This last sentence should sound familiar to us by now, as Bonhoeffer directs our attention to the earthly nature of the Israelites. The faith of Israel is presented in the Scriptures in a very material way: the heart of the promise to Israel surrounds a geographically defined plot of land; the festivals of Israel are celebrations of God’s goodness and grace through sacrifices of blood, through gifts of grains, through eating and drinking. Bonhoeffer fears that an overemphasis on some supposed New Testament “spirituality” takes us away from the reality of our life on earth, and has a tendency toward the Docetism that Bonhoeffer rejects throughout his theological *corpus*.

This emphasis on the Old Testament raises an important question regarding the teaching of the New Testament: What of resurrection? Doesn’t the New Testament emphasis on resurrection lead us to emphasize “eternity outside of history beyond death”?<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer rejects this interpretation of the New Testament. Certainly, he is not denying that the New Testament teaches about eternal life and life after death. However, Bonhoeffer is fighting against the tendency to allow this teaching to overwhelm the Biblical teaching on the earthiness of human life. We read,

The Christian hope of resurrection is different from the mythological in that it refers people to their life on earth in a wholly new way, and more sharply than the OT. Unlike believers in the redemption myths, Christians do not have an ultimate escape route out of their earthly tasks...into eternity.<sup>22</sup>

This emphasis on resurrection sending people to their life on earth in a wholly new way is critical to seeing the consistency of Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology from *Creation and Fall*, through *Ethics*, and now in the prison correspondence. People are created to live on earth, and even resurrection must not distract us from this reality. As those who know Christ, and who participate in Him, we are called to live on earth in a different way, but we are called to live *on earth*, as earthly, material beings. This Bonhoeffer terms “this-worldly” Christianity, a theme that we will explore as our final stop on our tour of Bonhoeffer’s theological anthropology.

<sup>19</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 447.

<sup>20</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 447. Emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 447.

<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 447-448.

In the letter of July 27<sup>th</sup> just discussed, Bonhoeffer speaks about the importance of this-worldliness. In speaking of the way that resurrection sends us back into the world in a wholly new way, Bonhoeffer writes, "Like Christ...[Christians] have to drink the cup of earthly life to the last drop, and only when they do this is the Crucified and Resurrected One with them, and they are crucified and resurrected with Christ. This-worldliness must not be abolished ahead of its time; on this, NT and OT are united."<sup>23</sup> What is the time of this-worldliness? It is the time of our mortal life on earth, the time of our living in the reality of our earthiness.

In a letter written six days earlier, on July 21, 1944, Bonhoeffer offers his most detailed reflections on this-worldliness, as well as pens one of his most personal letters. The reason for the deeply reflective tone of this letter, which he doesn't share with Bethge, is that the day before, July 20<sup>th</sup>, the final assassination plot on Hitler's life failed. The result of this failure, Bonhoeffer surely knew, is that he would never walk as a free man out of Tegel prison, but would instead die at the hands of the Nazi regime. As a result, Bonhoeffer writes a letter in which he looks back over his life and, in a few words, focuses on the core themes of his life. The July 21 letter reads almost like a theological testament, a summing up of Bonhoeffer's theological legacy.

In this letter, Bonhoeffer's focus is on the theme of this-worldliness. He writes, "In the last few years I have come to know and understand more and more the profound this-worldliness of Christianity. The Christian is not a *homo religiosus* but simply a human being...."<sup>24</sup> Humanity is not created to be some kind of religious human, but simply a human. He goes on to reflect on an experience from his time at Union Theological Seminary in 1930-1931:

I remember a conversation I had thirteen years ago in America with a young French pastor.<sup>25</sup> We had simply asked ourselves what we really wanted to do with our lives. And he said, I want to become a saint (—and I think it's very possible that he did become one). This impressed me very much at the time. Nevertheless, I disagreed with him, saying something like: I want to learn to have faith. For a long time I did not understand the depth of this antithesis.<sup>26</sup>

In making the distinction between becoming a saint and learning to have faith, Bonhoeffer is making a distinction between an otherworldly faith and a this-worldly faith. He writes, "I thought I myself could learn to have faith by trying to live something of a saintly life. I suppose I wrote *Discipleship* at the end of this path."<sup>27</sup> But he has realized that the way to

<sup>23</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 448.

<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 485.

<sup>25</sup> The pastor Bonhoeffer is referring to is John Lasserre, a fellow student at Union.

<sup>26</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 486.

<sup>27</sup> This comment about *Discipleship* has been a point of debate among Bonhoeffer scholars for years. Is Bonhoeffer distancing himself from what he said in *Discipleship*? Is this the end of Bonhoeffer's more "conservative" phase, as he pivots toward a more liberal emphasis? He follows this sentence with a statement that adds confusion rather than clearing it up: "Today I see clearly the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it"



have faith, the way to truly follow Christ, is not to try to become a saint but to live a this-worldly life:

Later on I discovered, and am still discovering to this day, that one only learns to have faith by living in the full this-worldliness of life. If one has completely renounced making something of oneself—whether it be a saint or a converted sinner or a church leader (a so-called priestly figure!), a just or an unjust person, a sick or a healthy person—then one throws oneself completely into the arms of God, and this is what I call this-worldliness: living fully in the midst of life's tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities....<sup>28</sup>

In this autobiographical letter in which Bonhoeffer rehearses what he has learned about learning to have faith, he again points to the earthiness of his theological anthropology. The way to follow God is not to strive to become a saint; in fact, it is not to attempt to be a *homo religious* at all, striving to become just, unjust, sick, healthy (a New Radical?). Rather, it is to live fully in the realities of this world, its “tasks, questions, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities.” In other words, to live the earthy lives we were created to live, including the enjoyment of all God has created for us. This is a remarkable thing: in a time when his fate is sealed and he is facing almost certain death, one would expect Bonhoeffer to turn his mind toward the afterlife: what awaits him after his execution? What will it be like to step into the glory of God's presence? Instead, his thoughts focus on this-worldliness. The reason for this is clear. Through our exploration of Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology, a strong emphasis in his theology has emerged: a full-throated endorsement of human materiality that emphasizes the goodness of our earthly being. From the beginning to the end of his theology, Bonhoeffer consistently expresses that human beings are good creations of God, not in spite of, but because of our constitution as earthly beings. Part and parcel of our material being is the blessing of the material goods that are inherent in our life. These goods are not to be understood as distractions, temptations, or mere necessities. Rather, homes, food, clothes, and other material goods are to be seen as, well, goods. Goods because they are good gifts from God that are essential to the joyful life we were created to live, and in which we worship God by experiencing the joy He gives us through them.

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(Ibid.). What are the dangers that Bonhoeffer refers to in *Discipleship*? As we will see, he is referring to the attempt to make something of oneself through religious performance, or, in context, the attempt to make a saint of oneself. The book contains some of the most thoroughgoing “renunciation” emphases in Bonhoeffer's writings, and Bonhoeffer is here warning of the danger of that emphasis, while still standing by the book. Regardless, this is a warning to readers who focus solely on *Discipleship*: he himself has tipped us off that we must be aware that that book isn't the last word. This is particularly interesting in light of Platt's usage of *The Cost of Discipleship* cited above, and drives home one of the central arguments of this paper: we can't use Bonhoeffer as a supporter for “radical” Christianity without understanding the context of his holistic theological vision, especially his theological anthropology.

<sup>28</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers*, 486.

## 3. CONCLUSION: POSSESSING AS PROTEST

The goal of the Radical Moment in American Christianity is to challenge followers of Christ to resist the consumerism of our day through a call to simplicity that entails the dispossession of stuff, and to take Christ's commands to follow Him more radically. This is a reaction against the demeaning of materiality that we see so evidently around us, and find so deeply entrenched within us, today. In this essay, I have suggested that, while the New Radicals have rightly identified the need for a protest, their cure is lacking due to their failure to base their arguments on a theological anthropology. I have engaged with the theological anthropology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer with the purpose of suggesting a stronger foundation on which to build our ecclesial response to the demeaning of the material that is represented by the conspicuous consumerism of American society. I want to conclude this essay with some observations on the way that Bonhoeffer's theological anthropology provides another option for countering the materialism and conspicuous consumption of our age that threatens our ability to faithfully following Jesus, and in doing so assert my defense for having stuff.

Like Bonhoeffer in his prison cell, our world is longing for the goodness of the creation that has been given us by the Creator. What we find in the materialism of our age is not a true valuing of the created world, but a demeaning of the material world. Our consumerist passions don't express a love for our created nature or the created world, but rather are a deep attack on both the creation as well as our own status as material beings. In this moment, the church has an opportunity to present the world with a vision of the goodness of creation that protests against the demeaning of creation that is inherent in our materialism. But of what should this protest consist?

I propose that this protest consist of the creation of ecclesial communities who possess goods in a way that witnesses to the world the goodness of our earthly nature as well as the goodness of created things. It would require a discipline of the heart that seeks not to possess in order to create our identities through our possessions, but that possesses in order to worship and honor God by joyfully embracing the stuff of his creation that he created for our good: we can worship God through living our human lives in joyful celebration of homes, food, clothes and possessions, without these becoming gods to us. It would require a discipleship in which we are trained to be filled with joy in our material constitution. It would require a call to follow Christ that doesn't despise our being creatures made from the union of the breath of God and the dust of the earth. This "defense of having stuff" is a call to the American church to reject consumerism in order to accept the joy of being who we are: beings whose Father is God, and whose mother is the earth, who fully revel in our unique status of being human, and call others to honor the God who has created them out of the dust of the earth by living lives of joyful, material celebration, worshipping their Creator while enjoying His creation.



## THEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS IN THE BIBLICAL YEAR OF JUBILEE

MICHAEL LEFEBVRE \*

It is curious that a book on *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (CTME) begins with Aristotle and not with Moses.<sup>1</sup> Despite a discussion of Old Testament texts on usury (pp. 29-31), the entire historical section of this volume (chapters 1-4) lacks interaction with the economic patterns woven into the festivals and temple operations of ancient Israel.<sup>2</sup>

This is not, however, an oversight on the part of the editors of CTME. The book accurately reflects the unfortunate fact that western society has historically looked to Greece for models of civilized institutions to the neglect of ancient Near Eastern institutions. Thus, it is accurate for this book to trace the history of western economic thought as interacting with Greece. Nevertheless, this is a hole in western economic thought that a study on *Biblical* theology and economics should address.

For millennia, western scholarship has continued under the spell of Greek prejudices against the intellectual value of the “barbarian” societies they conquered. There were important innovations that fueled the narrative that Greece was “civilized” compared with their “barbarian” neighbors. The Greek invention of vowels gave rise to the first truly literate culture capable of conceptual discourse.<sup>3</sup> Related to that innovation, the development of democratic institutions and the first “rule of law” society sparked a revolution in Greece deserving historical wonder.<sup>4</sup> To some extent, Greece deserves accolades for “inventing civilization.” Add to such achievements the stunning success of Alexander’s armies, humbling the great empires of the east, and it is no wonder the charm of Hellenism has cast its spell so effectively over the world—and over history.

The scholars of the late antique and medieval west had little access to, and little interest in, the economic wisdom of the ancient world beyond Greece and Rome. These scholars did possess and reverence the library of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared as a response to the book, Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg, eds., *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Though barely scratching the surface: cf., Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Eric A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Martin Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law: Law, Society, and Politics in Fifth-Century Athens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

ancient Hebrew society: the Bible. As reported in *CTME*, early scholars did use biblical texts when addressing economic *topics* (like usury), but it seems there was never an attempt to draw upon the economic *institutions* of biblical Israel for western economic wisdom.

Consider, for example, the biblical Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55). Hebrew law encodes significant economic reforms into this quinquaginary festival, yet historical treatment of this text has tended to overlook its economic insight to draw primarily upon its spiritual typology. For instance, in the year 1300, Pope Boniface VIII declared the first documented Christian Jubilee year, extending freedom from sin's penalties to those fulfilling prescribed rites of repentance and renewal. This papal Jubilee continues to be proclaimed, currently every twenty-five years. The next papal Jubilee will take place in 2025. But such a "spiritualization" of the Jubilee Year oddly overlooks the intense concern for *economic* bondage in the original Jubilee.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I want to look at the economic reforms built into the Hebrew Jubilee Year. In the course of this paper, I will also draw upon other ancient Near Eastern economic institutions that are widely discussed among Hebrew Bible scholars and Assyriologists, but have not been taken seriously in the halls of economic thought. It is my hope to accomplish two goals in these pages: first, in a small way to point beyond Greece to other ancient sources for economic models worthy of attention; and, in particular, to uphold the biblical Jubilee Year as an important focus for rediscovering the relationship between theology and economics.

## I. THE ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF ISRAEL'S CULTIC CALENDAR

Ancient Israel's cultic calendar was structured around the year's natural seasons. Other ancient nations similarly integrated their cultic calendars around seasonal cycles. Regarding the powers of nature as expressions of the powers of heaven, ancient ritual calendars enabled a people to interact properly with their deities (or, in Israel's case, their Deity) who governed the natural seasons on which the people's agricultural produce (their economy) depended.

Ancient Ugarit, for example, recognized a death and resurrection pattern in nature's seasonal cycle. This pattern became the core of their ritual calendar whereby worshipers identified annually with the defeat of Baal by Mot (prior to the dry season) and then his restoration as the Storm God (at the start of the rainy season) bringing rains and life again to the land.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Notably, one recent Papal Jubilee did serve as the impetus for a major debt-release campaign. The Jubilee Debt Campaign ([jubileedebt.ork.uk](http://jubileedebt.ork.uk)) was founded in 1996 as Jubilee 2000 to use the Papal Jubilee announced for the year 2000 as a focal point for lobbying western governments to forgive debts of the world's most impoverished nations. While the policies of the Jubilee Debt Campaign are not derived from Leviticus, the unique model of grace extended in that biblical paradigm provided the inspiration (and the name) for this remarkable campaign.

<sup>6</sup> G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 111; Johannes C. de Moor, *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba'lu: According to*

Israel's calendar was similar to those of other nations with one major distinction: Israel's calendar was rooted in religious history not religious myth. By definition, a mythical calendar is one that relates events in the realm of humanity (such as seasonal changes) to contests and occurrences in the realm of deity (e.g., battles between the gods). Israel's religious calendar lacked this mythical character. Instead, Israel's calendar relates two layers of this-worldly events: the annual seasonal changes and the memory of God's intervention in human history in the events of the exodus. Despite this notable distinction, the Hebrew calendar shared in the same project as its neighbors: relating a nation's theology (its beliefs about the divine) to its economy (its participation in the bounty of the land).

In addition to the annual festivals mapped over annual seasons, Israel also had multi-year cycles incorporated into its calendar: a septennial Sabbath Year and the seventh, seventh year Jubilee. While the significance of the septennial Sabbath Year is debated, it is likely tied to the need of the land for a periodic fallow. Modern fertilizers have enabled today's farmers to plant and harvest fields continually, artificially restoring nutrients to the ground. Without such technologies, ancient societies would have discovered by experience that planting a field continually eventually leads to its declining production. The ancient farmer likely had little awareness of the natural processes behind soil nutrition and how the soil is sapped from over-farming. Nevertheless, through generations of experience there would have emerged an awareness that an occasional fallow year increases the fruitfulness of fields. This is what was likely normalized in the septennial fallow year.

The Ugaritic calendar reflects a similar conviction: "the ending of one [seven-year] cycle without a harvest was believed to bring on a seven-year cycle of plenty."<sup>7</sup> The similarity of timing—both Hebrew and Ugaritic calendars observing a seven-year cycle—should not be over-pressed. Nevertheless, Israel was not alone in its observance of such fallow-year convictions. Ritual fallow years provided "a year of solemn rest for the land" (Lev. 25:5).<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to popular notions about the practice, a fallow year most likely did not require an absolute cessation of planting. It was a year to cease income production from the land and to limit planting to what supports a subsistence diet. The relevant passage instructs: "You shall not sow (*zāra*) your field or prune (*zāmar*) your vineyard. You shall not reap (*qāṣar*) what grows of itself in your harvest... The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you, and for

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*the Version of Ilmilku* (AOAT 16; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1949), 5. Cf., Cyrus H. Gordon, "Sabbatical Cycle or Seasonal Pattern? Reflections on a New Book," *Or* 22 (1953): 79–81; Edward Neufeld, "Socio-Economic Background of Yōbēl and Šemittā," *RSO* 33 (1958): 53–124; Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 42–3.

<sup>8</sup> Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food" (vv4-7). The key point here is that the land is not to be *sown*, *pruned*, and *harvested* (terms of agricultural production); it is to be given a rest from labor. Nevertheless, the land is still a source of sustenance: "all its yield shall be for food." There is permission here to produce food on the land, but only what is needed for food.<sup>9</sup> The people were not constrained to foraging nuts and berries for the year. They were to live off food stores from previous years and to garden what was necessary for subsistence. This allowed the land to recover its nutritional potential and increased the land's overall fruitfulness. The septennial land sabbath was an economic practice embodied within a theological institution. The same can be said about the quinquaginary Jubilee Year.

As we take up the Jubilee Year, we first have to resolve the question of its frequency. Readers are often confused by the switch from the number "forty-nine" to "fifty" in the way the Jubilee Year is numbered: "You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you *forty-nine years*. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet... And you shall consecrate the *fiftieth year*, and proclaim liberty throughout the land..." (vv8-10). Is the proclamation of liberty marking the forty-ninth year as the Jubilee, or introducing the subsequent fiftieth year as the Jubilee?

The confusion is quickly resolved when one recalls that Hebrew counting was inclusive. Thus, for example, Jesus' burial on Friday evening and his resurrection on Sunday morning constitutes three days in the tomb (inclusively counting Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). By western conventions, we would count that as two days spent in the tomb: Friday to Saturday being one day, and Saturday to Sunday being a second day. We generally count exclusively on the North American continent, meaning that we do not count the starting day (i.e., the Friday when Jesus was buried) when measuring time from a beginning point to an ending point; but Hebrew counting was inclusive.

One of the implications of inclusive counting is evident in the way the weekly sabbath is counted in Scripture. When Scripture speaks of the sabbath day on its own, it is called "the seventh day" because it is the seventh day of a given week. When, however, the sabbath is counted *with respect to the previous sabbath*, it is called "the eighth day" (e.g., Lev. 23:39; John 20:26). The second sabbath is the eighth day from the previous sabbath when counted inclusively. It is in this manner that Leviticus calls the Jubilee Year the forty-ninth year (i.e., within the given sequence of seven groups of seven) *and also* the fiftieth year (i.e., with respect to the previous Jubilee Year).<sup>10</sup>

Some commentators believe the Jubilee Year was an additional "leap year" (a fiftieth year) added after the forty-ninth year, resulting in two years of land fallow in a row!<sup>11</sup> This is unlikely, however. The Jubilee Year

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (ABD 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2160.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 141; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 318–21.

<sup>11</sup> John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word Books, 192), 434–6. Contra, the traditional Talmudic view (*b. Ned.* 61a, b; *Ros Haš.* 9a, *Sifra Behar* 6); Gordon Wenham,



is simply the seventh Sabbath Year in a series, with special economic liberations attached to this “high sabbath year” that was observed, essentially, once a generation.

It is that “once a generation” character of the Jubilee that seems to be the natural, economic cycle which this festival governed. Annual festivals track the yearly seasons of agricultural production. The septennial festival tracks the fallow cycles of soil fertility. The Jubilee provides a theological overlay for the social, economic reforms typically required with every generation for the sake of proper land management.

Every individual landowner in Israel managed his estate in trust as a family heritage. In every generation, there would be business leaders and farmers who—through greed, incompetence, unavoidable circumstances, or oppression—might lose their family heritage, its properties and perhaps its persons. The once-a-generation “proclamation of liberty” (v10) was to preserve the family heritage across the losses of “weak link” generations. It also held in check the economic disparity and oppression that otherwise tends to develop in society over time, as wealth is concentrated into certain families and clans while other families and clans become trapped in a heritage of poverty. Although the Jubilee cycle has more to do with social forces than the forces of nature, it nevertheless shares in the same concern for protecting the balance of land management and production. Note that the Sabbath Year cycle actually contained both a land fallow requirement and a debt-slave release, thus already combining social and natural forces in its purview (Deut. 15:1-23). In an oral society, social forces and natural forces and divine forces would not be so distinctly separated. The ritual calendar of Israel provided a system for regulating the nation’s economic balance with respect to all the relevant forces.

Once again, Israel’s Jubilee Year finds parallel practices in neighboring societies of the ancient world. The topics of the Hebrew Jubilee—and even one of its titles (“proclaim liberty [*derôr*],” v10; cf., Akk., *andurârum*)—are matched by the economic reforms proclaimed generationally in Mesopotamia. However, the Old Babylonian proclamation of liberty was timed for each generation by the inauguration of a new king rather than a specified number of years.

When a new king arose to the throne in Mesopotamian lands, he would review the economic condition of the nation and issue an edict with a specific, targeted cancellations of debts and manumission of slaves. The purpose of this edict was to solidify the new king’s position as the defender of the poor and oppressed and to correct economic imbalances from his predecessor’s reign. Too much wealth tended to concentrate in too few hands, especially through the course of a lengthy reign. A proclamation of liberty restored economic balance to the land.

For example, the second millennium ruler of Isin, Lipit-Ishtar, recorded the following description of his ascent to the throne: “At that

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*The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 319. Benedict Zuckerman identifies six major ways that the Sabbatical and Jubilee Year cycles have been related through history: Benedict Zuckerman, *A Treatise of the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Chronology of the Time Anterior and Subsequent to the Captivity; Accompanied by a Table of Sabbatical Years* (A. Löwy, trans.; New York: Hermon Press, 1974 reprint), 10-17.



time the gods An and Enlil called Lipit-Ishtar to the principship of the land ... in order to establish justice in the land, to eliminate cries for justice, to eradicate enmity and armed violence, to bring well-being to the lands of Sumer and Akkad. At that time, I, Lipit-Ishtar ... established justice in the lands of Sumer and Akkad. At that time, I liberated the sons and daughters ... of Sumer and Akkad, who were subjugated [by the yoke(?)], and I restored order.<sup>12</sup>

Realistically, such an inaugural edict gave opportunity for a new king to undermine the threat of the powerful elite of the previous regime who might desire to dominate a young monarch. It also allowed the new king to strengthen those he deemed loyal to himself for his own reign. Such edicts certainly could be used sincerely to redress the oppressed, or they could be abused to manipulate the balance of power in the new king's personal favor. Nevertheless, the stated purpose of these proclamations was to restore order (Akk., *mīšarum*) and liberty (Akk., *andurārum*) to the land at the start of generation.

The customary timing for such edicts was at the start a new king's reign (i.e., once a generation),<sup>13</sup> but the king also had the authority to proclaim occasional "surprise" edicts of liberty (always with carefully defined parameters) at any time he saw it was needed.<sup>14</sup> Several scholars have provided insightful comparisons between these Mesopotamian edicts and the Hebrew "proclamation of liberty."<sup>15</sup> There are significant differences, but there are also striking parallels. In particular, Israel's Jubilee shares the same basic expectation that economic reforms are necessary once a generation to protect the prosperity of the land from the oppression of a concentrated circle of elite.

The most distinctive feature of the Hebrew liberation contrasted with its Mesopotamian counterparts was its fixation to a regular calendar (every forty-nine years).<sup>16</sup> Under Moses, Israel had no human king and thus no generational change marked by a transfer of the throne. God

<sup>12</sup> LL, i.20–ii.15. Translation from Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (SBLWAW 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 24–5.

<sup>13</sup> Note that ancient societies restarted their counting of years at the ascent of each new king, thus identifying generation change with the reign of each king.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. the detailed discussion of Ammišaduqa's Edict by J. J. Finkelstein, "The Edict of Ammišaduqa: A New Text," *RA* 63 (1969), 45–64.

<sup>15</sup> J. J. Finkelstein, "Some New MISHARUM Material and Its Implications," *Assyriological Studies* 16 (1965), 233–46; "The Edict of Ammišaduqa: A New Text," *RA* 63 (1969), 45–64; Moshe Weinfeld, "Justice and Righteousness in Ancient Israel Against the Background of 'Social Reforms' in the Ancient Near East," in H.-J. Nissen and J. Renger, eds., *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn* (Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale 25; Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 491–519; *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); D. J. Wiseman, "Law and Order in Old Testament Times," *VE* 8 (1973), 5–21; N.-P. Lemche, "*Andurārum* and *mīšarum*: Comments on the Problem of Social Edicts and their Application in the Ancient Near East," *JNES* 38 (1979), 11–22. For a critique of such comparisons, cf., J. P. J. Olivier, "The Old Babylonian *Mēšarum*-Edict and the Old Testament" (D. Litt. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Westbrook, "Jubilee Laws," *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971) 209–26. Reprinted in Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 36–57.

himself was to be Israel's perpetual king. It is politically significant that Moses took a traditionally kingly declaration and affixed it to the festivals of the Temple. The forty-nine-year cycle envisions the same once-a-generation economic reset, but Moses attached it to the perpetual reign of God within the theo-economic calendar of the Temple. (Later in this paper, we will look at how Israel's release proclamations were observed once Israel did appoint a human monarch.)

With this broader context, I want to focus next on the specific economic reforms of the Hebrew Jubilee Year. By the foregoing, I have endeavored to show that entire ritual calendar of Israel—and, indeed, the calendars of the wider ancient world—offer a wealth of insight into the economic institutions of sophisticated societies beyond the scope of our Greco-Roman heritage. In what follows, we will focus on the Jubilee Year, specifically.

## II. THE NATURE OF THE JUBILEE YEAR LAW

As we take up this section of Hebrew law, we first need to appreciate what we kind of law it is that we have before us. It is not legislation of the type familiar in western societies. One of the ways Greek ideals about “civilization” have shaped western thought has been the influence of Greco-Roman attitudes of law on modern society.<sup>17</sup> The Athenians were the first to give written-law a position of regulatory power over courts and thrones (i.e., the “rule of law”); outside the orb of classical Greece, laws were written to capture the essence of justice without attempting to provide comprehensive regulation.<sup>18</sup> Bernard Jackson has coined the term “wisdom laws” to capture this distinct function for law-writings in the ancient Near East, placing them in the same general category with proverbs rather than classifying them with modern legislation.<sup>19</sup> The expectation that a legal provision would present a comprehensive set of verbal formulas, hermetically tight and secure from loopholes, is an assumption completely foreign to ancient Near Eastern law collections like the books of Moses.

We should not read the Jubilee Law in Leviticus 25:8-55 as a set of regulations ready for rote implementation, in the modern sense of legislation. It is, instead, an outline of Israel's Jubilee patterns which succinctly captures the vision of Israel's generational liberations; but there is no intention to provide comprehensive regulation, here. It would still fall to the leaders of Israel in each Jubilee Year to honor the moral force of the Jubilee Law in how they implement it, precisely.<sup>20</sup> Disabusing ourselves

<sup>17</sup> Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-characterization of Israel's Written Law* (LHBOTS 451; New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Joshua Berman, “The History of Legal Theory and the Study of Biblical Law,” *CBQ* 76.1 (2014), 19–39.

<sup>18</sup> Thus Aristotle's critique of barbarian laws that “enunciate only general principles but do not give directions for dealing with circumstances as they arise” (*Pol.* 3.10.4).

<sup>19</sup> Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 314; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 70–92; *Wisdom Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21:1–22:16* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3–39.

<sup>20</sup> Ancient Near Eastern law-writings belong to the broader genre of “scientific list,” along with medical and divination texts, which employ the same “if the circumstances are

of the modern expectation of legal regulations, we are able to admire the legal wisdom about generational, economic reform in the Hebrew Jubilee Law.

After introducing the timing for its observance (vv8-12), the passage states the primary concern of the Jubilee Law: "If you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, *you shall not wrong one another*. You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee... *You shall not wrong one another*, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God" (vv14-17). The Jubilee Year occurred only once a generation, but it would spread its shadow over all forty-eight years leading up to it. Like any system with built-in points of accountability, the whole nation's economy had this generational point of accountability primarily for the purpose of promoting honesty and charity in all economic dealings during the generation leading up to the Jubilee. The way the rest of the chapter is written makes it evident that the primary benefit of the Jubilee Year was the way its anticipation shaped economic interactions every year.

Most of the chapter is spent discussing the opportunities for redeeming property prior to a Jubilee, or the nature of property sales and debt-slavery at all times knowing that the year of release was coming. The sale of family properties were never permanent (vv15-16, 23), debt-slavery was never chattel slavery (vv34-3), and the deeply indebted poor always labored in hope (v35). One of the most important features of the Jubilee Year reforms was the accountability and hope they infused into the entire economy every year. It is when Israel governs its economic activity according to these "wisdom laws" that God promises the community as a whole will flourish (vv18-22).

### III. THE ECONOMIC REFORMS OF THE JUBILEE

Leviticus 25 outlines a series of scenarios that the Jubilee Year would address, each resulting from indebtedness. The focus of the entire passage is on the impact of debt, leading to the loss of property (vv23-34) or the loss of personal freedom (vv35-55). In the latter section (dealing with the release of slaves), it is important to bear in mind the slavery in view is *debt-slavery*. Ancient Israel did not practice chattel slavery (i.e., the ownership of persons as "living tools," to quote Aristotle).<sup>21</sup> Israel had been redeemed out of chattel slavery in Egypt and was never to engage in the same practice (Exod. 21:16; Lev. 19:32; 25:42; Deut. 15:15; 23:15-16; cf., Job 31:13-15). In fact, Mesopotamian societies had distinct terms to designate *chattel slaves* from *debt-slaves*, but Hebrew simply has the single term *ʿēbēd* ("servant") to describe all forms of obliged service. Milgrom explains the existence of this sole term for "servant" as reflecting a social reality: "For Israelites, both kinds of slavery, chattel and debt, are

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X, the diagnosis/treatment is Y" form. (Raymond Westbrook, "Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes," *RB* 92.2 (1985), 247-64; *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (CahRB 26; Paris: Gabalda, 1988); Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop, trans.; London: University of Chicago, 1992), 76-7.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.4 (1253b23).

prohibited: chattel-slavery is abolished, and debt-slavery is transformed into work for hire.<sup>22</sup>

The slavery here in view is that slavery undertaken due to unresolved debt. There was no debtor's prison in Israel and no bankruptcy provision. When a debtor defaulted on a loan, he would fulfill the debt by working without pay for the creditor or (more often) by being "sold" to liquidate the loan and work in the buyer's estate for the time required to satisfy the debt (e.g., Exod. 21:1-6; Deut. 15:7-15; Neh. 5:4-5). Such debt-slavery was supposed to be temporary, but often exorbitant interest on loans effectively rendered the indebtedness (and the resulting slavery) perpetual.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the entire focus of the Jubilee, whether dealing with the restoration of lost properties or lost persons, is on the impact of indebtedness. The topics of the release are discussed in verses 23-55, as follow:

1. Redemption of property (vv23-24)
  - a. Scenario: Loss of agricultural property (vv25-28)
  - b. Scenario: Loss of urban house (vv29-30)
  - c. Scenario: Loss of village house (v31)
  - d. Scenario: Loss of Levite's house (vv32-34)
2. Redemption of persons
  - a. Scenario: Neighbor impoverished (vv35-38)
  - b. Scenario: Neighbor impoverished and enslaved (vv39-43)
  - c. Scenario: Hebrew master with non-Hebrew slave (vv44-46)
  - d. Scenario: Non-Hebrew master with Hebrew slave vv47-55)

The first half of the passage deals with the topic of *property loss*. The basic principle behind all property exchanges is introduced (vv23-24), followed by four scenarios that exercise our understanding of that principle (vv25-34). The fundamental principle is that God is the one who owns the land. Even though the people will receive tracts of the land by lot, assigned by families, they are always to regard themselves as "strangers and sojourners with me" (v23). God would be the true owner of the land—the "feudal lord" who allots portions to each tribe, clan, and family as his "vassals." Every resident is to respect the family allotments made by God (Num. 33:50-56; Josh. 14-19).

It is helpful to recall that Israel was preparing to enter a land which was already populated by the Canaanites, but was largely undeveloped. The tribes would receive plots of territory with the duty to farm and develop the land. As families grew, they could increase their property by developing portions of their allotments that were still wilderness. The Jubilee Law is prepared with the settlement and development of Canaan specifically in view; the divine appointment of each tribe's largely

<sup>22</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2213. Cf., the heavily qualified ascription of chattel-slavery to Israel in, Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 145-85.

<sup>23</sup> Milgrom cites the modern example of India, where the close to 15 million "untouchables" are actually the offspring of those originally enslaved for unpaid debts and whose posterity continue in bondage for perpetuity because interest rates mount faster than labor can pay them off. (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2215.)

undeveloped lot, and the expectation each tribe will multiply to fill and develop their allotment, stands behind these instructions. Four scenarios of property loss and restoration follow.

#### A. RECOVERING AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY

In the first (vv25-28), a man is said to have lost his family property through impoverishment. If, through financial losses, a man is compelled to sell his family property, he is free to do so. And another is free to purchase that property in order to increase his own production. This is actually a remarkable freedom introduced into Israel's economic exchange. Even though the original owner is a steward of his inherited estate and he is responsible to maintain it for his descendants, he is free to sell the property when he needs income. Of course, it is not strictly the land that is changing hands, but the years of its production until the next Jubilee (v16: "for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you"). This law grants the poor landowner the freedom to seek income from his family holdings, while also granting another landowner the freedom to increase his own production by purchasing those extra fields. However, the cross-generational heritage of that land is protected by the a series of provisions for redemption.

The first line of redemption is that a member of the landowner's own clan (a kinsman redeemer) ought to be the buyer of the land (cf., Jer. 32:7), or to buy the land back into the family as soon as possible. At that point, the kinsman redeemer takes over production of the land. The redeemer does not buy it back for his impoverished brother; he buys it back into the family, and he takes over its production as an addition to his own business holdings until the next Jubilee. The income of the land becomes his own, but at least it is back within the broader kinship group. The only conditions under which the original owner "return[s] to his property" (v27, v28) are when he comes into adequate funds to redeem it himself, or when the Jubilee arrives and all lands are released by the trumpet blast on the Day of Atonement.

#### B. RECOVERING URBAN OR VILLAGE HOUSES

The second and third scenarios address the loss of houses, contrasting the loss of an urban house (vv29-30) and a village house (v31). Houses in walled cities may be sold permanently: "it shall not be released in the jubilee" (v31). Meanwhile, houses in unwallled villages "shall be classified with the fields of the land" and thus "shall be released in the jubilee" (v31). Read through the lenses of modern legislation, one would conclude that the determining factor is whether the house is in a community with a wall around it. However, recognizing that ancient law-writing often uses stereotypes,<sup>24</sup> the distinction is one of the *stereotypical* city house versus the *stereotypical* village house. It is not strictly the presence of a wall that determines the different ways of handling these sales. Rather,

<sup>24</sup> On "narrative" versus "literal" readings of law, see Bernard S. Jackson, *Wisdom-Laws*, 24-9.

the distinction is between a house of mercantile exchange and a house associated with the family's agricultural inheritance.

As indicated in the text, the stereotypical village house is an agricultural outpost. It is associated with the fields outside the village that the inhabitant farms. An example of this is Boaz of Bethlehem, who lived in the town of Bethlehem and then went out to his portion of the surrounding fields for the workday (Ruth 2:3-4). In many areas of Israel, fields were marked out according to their owners, but the owners did not live on the farmland; the owners lived together in a nearby village. It is that stereotype that is captured in the image of the "houses of the villages that have no wall around them" (v31).

The stereotype of the house in a walled city is, in contrast, a house of trade or other production.<sup>25</sup> There is no field or family heritage (stereotypically) associated with such a house. The urban centers in Israel were places where grain was brought, stored, and redistributed. Crafts and trades—like the manufacture of sickle blades or pottery production—as well as service professions were associated with the walled cities. These cities were typically located along major trade routes in order to conduct trade and to collect tolls. That is why they needed walls, because of their strategic business and military locations. But residents of the walled cities did not (stereotypically) live off the land. These were not the family holdings and were not the "bread and butter" of the predominantly agricultural economy of Israel. Thus, non-agricultural businesses and their properties could be sold, permanently. Such "a dwelling house in a walled city" could be redeemed within a year of its loss due to economic trouble, but after that its sale was final—even through the Year of Jubilee. Such industries were not regarded as a family heritage.<sup>26</sup>

### C. RECOVERING A LEVITE'S HOUSE

The final property scenario addresses the unique situation of the Levite and his house (vv32-34). Here is the one exception to the previous statement about houses in walled cities. The Levites did not own fields to farm; their houses, whether in villages or walled cities, *were* their allotments given to them by God. Thus the houses of the Levites were always redeemable and would be restored in the Jubilee. Furthermore, the pastureland of the Levitical cities could never be sold (v34). Pastures outside the cities were not privately owned; they were communal pastures belonging to the city as a whole. Thus, no individual's financial decline could lead to restrictions on the community's pastures.

These scenarios about property are by no means exhaustive; they are not adequate to regulate the topics they address in every detail. They are, nonetheless, a rich exercise in the way the theology of God's ownership of the land and his atonement guarantee economic balance in Israel.

The final half in the chapter addresses the redemption of *persons* (vv35-55). The care for impoverished persons in this section amounts to a biblical outline for social welfare.

<sup>25</sup> Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary* (JPS; New York, Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 176.

<sup>26</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23-27, 2198.



## D. SUPPORTING AN IMPOVERISHED NEIGHBOR

The first case introduces a member of the local community who can no longer support himself (vv35-38). In other words, this is a person whose family property (and thus source of income) was sold under one of the earlier discussed property scenarios. He no longer controls the land that formerly fed him and his family. Now that he has lost his property, he requires opportunities to work for someone else to win his food (and possibly to earn enough to purchase back his heritage; v27). The emphatic concern in this scenario is that this poor man be able to remain "with you" (twice in v35). The goal is to ensure that he, having already lost his property, does not fall further to the point of having to sell himself into slavery. Debt-slavery typically involved relocation away from one's own clan. The first line of provision is for the surrounding community to do all that is possible to provide day-labor jobs that keeps this brother "with you."

The command given is twofold. First, the community is (if at all possible) to provide work for him. Like any "stranger and sojourner" in the land (v35), he should be provided with hired labor opportunities. Secondly, the community is to allow the poor man to buy food at cost without making any profit from his purchases of basic needs. Likewise, when loans are needed (i.e., for basic necessities), no interest is to be charged. Interest-bearing loans were legitimate in business transactions, but no interest was to be charged when making loans to the poor for their basic needs (Deut. 15:7-11).

Notice how this first scenario says nothing about gifts for the poor. That silence should not be interpreted as a discouragement of generosity to the poor, a virtue commended frequently in Scripture (e.g., Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 15:7-11; Psa. 112:9; Prov. 19:17; 22:9). However, the focus of the Jubilee Year provisions is on restoring the poor to income-producing labor. There is no Jubilee release from poverty, but the Jubilee (and the stipulations assigned for the forty-eight years leading up to Jubilee) will restore the individual to an ability to produce income for himself and his family.

## E. RECOVERING AN ENSLAVED NEIGHBOR

The second scenario (vv39-43) treats the situation when, despite the aforementioned efforts or for lack of adequate day-labor opportunities, a poor neighbor must sell himself into debt-slavery. The Torah's slave-release laws ensured that no Hebrew would ever become so hopelessly indebted that he would spend his entire life in debt-slavery. There is, however, a seeming contradiction between the debt-slavery release assigned to the Sabbath Year and that assigned to the Jubilee Year. Elsewhere in the Pentateuch, it is stated that Hebrew debt-slaves may serve a maximum of six years, being released in the Sabbath Year (Exod. 21:2; Deut. 15:12-18); in the present passage, release is promised for debt-slaves in the Jubilee Year (v40).



The difference is often explained as the result of competing schools and different textual sources.<sup>27</sup> The best explanation is probably that of Gregory Chirichigno who proposed that the presumption behind the scenario in Leviticus 25:39-43 is that the family property has been lost and *the head of the household* has been sold into debt-slavery; when the entire estate is lost and the head of the household is in bondage, the debt is of such magnitude to fall into the category of a Jubilee Year release.<sup>28</sup> Thus the loss of family property by the head of the household may impact his generation, but the Jubilee ensures the next generation will not continue in poverty due to his losses. The septennial restoration in the Sabbath Year, in contrast, refers to a different scenario. The Sabbath Year restoration envisions a situation where the head of the household is still in possession of his land, but he has been compelled to sell family members into slavery. When debts began to default, it was typical for sons and daughters to be sold into debt-slavery first, since their hope of redemption rested in their father continuing to work the family fields to gain income (cf., Neh. 5:5). Those family members may serve a maximum of six years and, if not bought back prior to that time, be released in the next Sabbath Year.

#### F. TWO SPECIAL CASES INVOLVING GENTILES

The final two scenarios (vv44-46, 47-55) are actually variations on the previous debt-slavery example. After the main example of debt-slavery is given, two dilemmas are introduced to help strengthen our wisdom concerning the Jubilee principle. What if the debt-slaves purchased are *not* Hebrews (and thus, are not among the people redeemed from Egypt by God)? What if the debt-slave is Hebrew, but *the master* is not? The application of the Jubilee principle to debt-slavery in those two instances is explained in the remaining paragraphs of the chapter.

The answer to the first question (is a *non-Hebrew* debt-slave released in the Jubilee?) is no (vv44-46). This release from slavery is not a human right, but a special privilege provided to God's people through his atonement. By right, every person is responsible for his debts. Therefore, debt-slaves who are not partakers in the Day of Atonement (v9) do not share in the Jubilee Year release. Notably, the Jubilee Year trumpet was blown, not at the beginning of the year, but on the Day of Atonement during that year (v9). Release took place, not on the first day of the Jubilee Year, but on the tenth day of the seventh month of that year (the Day of Atonement). It was an economic release, not as a human right but a divine gift flowing from the atonement. It is the scenario of the *non-Hebrew* debt-slave that makes this point most clearly.

The last scenario (vv47-55) addresses the Hebrew debt-slave of a *non-Hebrew master*. This debt-slave is to be released. The surrounding Hebrew community is to hold the Gentile master accountable to ensure that he treats the Hebrew debt-slave properly and permits his redemption when provided for; note the call to accountability in verse 53: "He shall

<sup>27</sup> See the discussion of various approaches by Hartley, *Leviticus*, 430-33.

<sup>28</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 328-36.

treat him as a hired servant year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him *in your sight*.” The community must ensure that Gentiles in the land allow Hebrew debt-slaves their proper redemption rights. But this law also assures the Gentile businessman receives his due from the Hebrew bound to him. It upholds the right of the non-Hebrew sojourner to conduct business and secure the labor of a Hebrew debtor unable to pay his obligations. But he, too, must honor the redemption purchased by Yahweh for his people.

The conclusion of the passage repeats the same basic methods for redemption outlined under the first scenario in the passage. The catalog of scenarios began with the example of lost property, listing the ways in which that property could be redeemed (in vv25-28). The last scenario closes with the same methods of redemption, this time applied to the redemption of persons: a family member of the enslaved Hebrew may, if it is within his means, pay off the debt to redeem his brother (vv48-49a); if the slave himself comes into funds, he is guaranteed the right to pay off his remaining years of labor (vv49b-52); finally, if no provision emerges before the Jubilee, even the non-Hebrew master must release when the horn is sounded on the Day of Atonement in the Jubilee Year (vv53-55). The very first scenario of the Jubilee Year passage (vv25-28) and the last scenario (vv47-55) repeat these same three methods of potential release. As an inclusio, these opening and closing scenarios remind us that all circumstances of economic loss may be redeemed through these methods, with the Jubilee Year release as the ultimate source of assurance.

Jacob Milgrom eloquently captures the economic significance of these Jubilee provisions: “In sum, the people of Israel and its land belong solely to God; neither can be owned in perpetuity... Persons and land may be leased, not sold. The question cannot be resisted: Has a more sublime safeguard against the pauperization of society ever been found?”<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. THE THEOLOGY OF JUBILEES

The name Leviticus gives for this forty-ninth year is “the year of *yôbēl*” (lit., “Year of the Ram [Horn];” v13). Uncertain how to translate the term *yôbēl* in this instance, early scribes simply transliterated the Hebrew word, giving us “jubilee” (Eccl. Greek, *iobelaïos*; Latin, *iubilarius*; English, *jubilee*). However, this translation decision obscures the titular centrality of one particular act behind this Hebrew festival. It was the blowing of the ram’s horn (the *šôpār*) on the Day of Atonement (v9) that was the “proclam[ation] of liberty throughout the land” (v10).<sup>30</sup> The entire year was the Year of the Ram’s Horn; but the special release of that year did not take place until the Day of Atonement when the horn was sounded. That the release took place on the Day of Atonement is the key theological anchor for the economic redemptions provided.

The year presumably would begin like any other Sabbath Year with

<sup>29</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2233.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., the custom in Mesopotamia to call such liberations the “proclamation by fire,” since the king’s edict of liberty was proclaimed with the raising of a torch. (Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel*, 73.)

the observed land fallow. But in the seventh month of the year, on the evening of the ninth day, the people of Israel would begin a twenty-four hour fast for the humbling and repentance that was part of the Day of Atonement. At the end of that fast, the people gathered for "a time of holy convocation" on the tenth day of the month, culminating in a national "food offering to the LORD" (Lev. 23:26-32). It was on that tenth day, probably in conjunction with the end of the fast and God's acceptance of the sacrifices, that the Jubilee Year trumpet was blown: "You shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants..." (Lev. 25:9-10). That would be the point at which properties would revert to their proper heritage and debt-slaves would be set free. Fittingly, just five days later the people gathered for the final and most joyful festival of the yearly calendar: the festival of booths and its end-of-harvest feasting (presumably limited, though not barren, by the reduced food production of a fallow year; Lev. 23:33-43).

The freedom from economic bondage carefully worked out in the Jubilee was explicitly tied to the gift of atonement provided by God for the redemption of his people from sin. The Lord's atonement has both spiritual and economic ramifications, guaranteeing the heavenly king's release from the bondage of sin as well as the bondage of poverty and indebtedness.

## V. THE PRACTICE OF JUBILEES

At this point, it is fitting to ask how the Sabbath Year and Jubilee Year proclamations were practiced in Israel. There is actually very little evidence of their observance in the biblical histories. Some scholars therefore conclude that these provisions were utopian and never implemented.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, these laws would not have been implemented in a mechanistic fashion. We have already observed that such "wisdom laws" were not intended to function in the same, self-effecting and mechanistic fashion as modern legislation. Nevertheless, there is an insightful passage in Jeremiah 34:1-22 concerning a proclamation of liberty (*liqērō' dērôr*) in the days of King Zedekiah that offers important insight into the observance of these laws:

<sup>8</sup>...King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty (*liqērō' dērôr*) to them, <sup>9</sup>that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves... <sup>10</sup>And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people... <sup>11</sup>But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves. <sup>12</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>13</sup>"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of ... the house of bondage, saying, <sup>14</sup>'At the end

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee* (JSOTSup 155; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 34-6.

of seven years each of you must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years; you must set him free from your service' [quoting Deut. 15:12; cf., Exod. 21:2]. But your fathers did not listen to me or incline their ears to me.<sup>15</sup> You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty (*liqērō' dērôr*),...<sup>16</sup> but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves...

<sup>17</sup> "Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty (*liqērō' dērôr*), everyone on to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty (*qōrē' dērôr*) to the sword...<sup>21</sup> Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give... into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon..."

There are two points of interest in this passage for our purposes. First of all, we see in this passage that when Judah did have a king, it fell to the king to make the royal proclamation of liberty as typical in other ancient Near Eastern lands. Evidently it was expected that the Mosaic vision, drawn up with a direct heavenly reign in view, would be adapted to the circumstances of human monarchy once a divinely anointed throne was erected on Mount Zion. King Zedekiah is commended for doing what was right when he made a declaration of liberty in keeping with the Mosaic law.

Secondly, Zedekiah's slave release was not implemented on the Day of Atonement, nor is there any reference to its timing during a Sabbath Year or Jubilee Year.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Zedekiah's release takes place during an invasion of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 34:1). Nevertheless, Jeremiah commends Zedekiah's release (vv14-15) as a proper fulfillment of the Sabbath Year instructions in Deuteronomy 15. This suggests that, just as the Mesopotamian kings could pronounce edicts of release at unexpected times when deemed necessary, the Hebrew rulers were expected to take to heart the need for economic balance taught in the Mosaic Law and to enact liberation edicts as necessary. This is in keeping with the nature of the theological expression of these "wisdom laws," which present the paradigm from which rulers are responsible to deduce just applications based on their circumstances. It is common for interpreters of Old Testament Law to assume the laws functioned like modern regulations; that is, that these laws were designed for rote implementation. However, as the biblical histories show,<sup>33</sup> the Mosaic law is intentionally utopian in its character because it teaches the ideals of justice with realistic "wisdom laws." But no law system accomplishes righteousness in itself; each

<sup>32</sup> Although Nahum Sarna has attempted to establish that Zedekiah was making a Sabbath Year proclamation at the fall festival of that year. (Nahum M. Sarna, "Zedekiah's Emancipation of Slaves and the Sabbatical Year," in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* [Harry Hoffner, ed.; AOAT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973], 143-9.) Others have discounted Sarna's arguments as unlikely. (William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52* [Hermania; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 239; Westbrook, *Property*, 16-17 n. 4.)

<sup>33</sup> E.g., LeFebvre, *Collections*, 58-87, 103-31.

generation's leaders must wrestle with the wisest implementation of the ideals and promises taught in the Mosaic vision. This is clearly the case with respect to the economic release upheld in the Jubilee Year cycle.

In Zedekiah's day, Nebuchadnezzar's army was marching through Judah when Zedekiah suddenly decided to repent and proclaim liberty. He was commended by God for this release as being a proper application of the Mosaic redemption-law models. Because of Zedekiah's obedience, God caused Nebuchadnezzar's army to withdraw (Jer. 34:21). Tragically, once the pressure was off, Zedekiah reversed his liberation edict, leading to the subsequent oracle that the kingdom would be turned over to Babylon.

The striking impression left by this passage is that the vision of a periodic rebalancing of economic conditions was strictly tied to the ritual calendar in the Torah as a teaching method: to show Israel the nature of God's gracious kingship and to establish the requirement for rulers to rule God's people in light of God's atonement. It would have been the duty of Israel's kings to consider the economic conditions of their day and to implement—in connection with the festivals and, as needed, at other times—the re-ordering decrees appropriate for a people for whom God had atoned and whom God had redeemed from slavery. Perhaps some rulers implemented Sabbath Year and Jubilee Year releases with great regularity; perhaps others less so.

In the modern west, we tend to place our confidence in the laws of the land, expecting those laws to preserve justice even when rulers are unjust. In the ancient world, no such illusion was even considered. Law-collections provided an ideal picture of justice in proverbs-like "wisdom laws," but it ultimately fell to rulers to implement justice. Thus the need for kings and judges who "fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe" (Exod. 18:21).<sup>34</sup> The entire calendar of Israel, with its ritual and social controls, presented a model of "theological economics" for real implementation, albeit according to the practicalities of the day as discerned by the rulers in each age. Thus the Passover was often neglected (2Chr. 30:5), and other religious institutions of the festival calendar were variously implemented (e.g., the reforms of Josiah; 2Kgs. 23:1-27) depending on who was on the throne. The Zedekiah passage above fits unremarkably into this ancient Near Eastern conception of law, showing that these periodic releases were in fact observed,<sup>35</sup> but that the faithfulness and exact provisions of their observance would have varied in ways offensive to modern sensibilities of law but commended by the Lord through his prophet Jeremiah.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (JSOTSup 314; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 118–21.

<sup>35</sup> Check Weinfeld citation in n31 on p178 of: Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee* (JSOTSup 155; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> See esp. the thorough review of the evidence by Raymond Westbrook who concludes, "Our verdict, therefore, on the biblical law of Jubilee is that while its basic idea of a release reflects a practicable and practiced institution, that part thereof which is academic and theoretical is the *stipulation of its regular recurrence every fifty years*." (Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* [JSOTSup 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], 50.)

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this final section, I want to reflect on some of the economic lessons that can be drawn from the biblical model of Jubilee. There are many reasons why a rote implementation of the Jubilee would be neither practicable nor appropriate, today. First, the Jubilee Law was never designed for rote implementation; it would always require adaptation to the circumstances of the time (see “The Practice of Jubilees,” above). Second, the Temple and its festivals are no longer in place and we do not, today, have tribal land allotments by divine appointment. Third, the specifics of the Jubilee Law are clearly tailored to an ancient, agrarian society. The realities of a modern industrial, and increasingly knowledge-based society would require very different provisions than those epitomized in the Leviticus 25 model. For these and other reasons, the rote implementation of a Year of Jubilees is not possible today. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be drawn from these provisions. I will suggest seven lessons here, beginning with the more strictly theological lessons and gradually moving into some more practical, economic implications.

For the first and most important lesson, it is necessary to re-assert that rote implementation was never the point of the Jubilee Law. As discussed in the body of this paper,<sup>37</sup> Hebrew laws are not legislation, but legal paradigms of righteousness idealized in terms of the realities of their own time. The primary purpose of a law like Jubilees is not rote implementation, but instruction in the kind of justice the heavenly King promises. Implementation of the paradigm is important as national submission to the heavenly King; but regardless of the wisdom or folly of human rulers, these laws promote a vision of God’s justice for the people’s hope (cf., Psa. 119). The foremost value of Jubilee is its testimony to God’s concern for the economic injustices suffered by his people under human oppressors. Like the singer of the Psalms, God’s people find delight in the vision of God’s kingdom gained by meditating in his law day and night amidst the oppression, injustice, and suffering experienced in human kingdoms (Psa. 1:1-6).<sup>38</sup>

Whatever else might be gained from a study of the Jubilee Year, this lesson must always be cherished above all: Jubilee teaches us that the atonement secures real redemption, not only from sin but also from the effects of sin including its economic effects. Under the government of human rulers, the implementation of just economics will always fall short of our Bible-informed hope. But these laws give assurance that God’s love sees even our economic sorrows and his atonement secures their ultimate redemption to be fully realized in the consummation of his kingdom.

Rather than relating theology to economics to improve economic policy, the best reason to relate theology to economics is to improve our faith in the face of economic failures. Certainly there are practical lessons that can be gained, but we should not take up those practical lessons until we have first given full weight to the faith such provisions inform.

<sup>37</sup> See, “II. The Nature of the Jubilee Year Law,” on pp. 37, above.

<sup>38</sup> Michael LeFebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 104–9.



A second, key lesson of Jubilee is that sin is the core problem which corrupts economics. The choice to blow the Jubilee trumpet on the Day of Atonement makes this point clear. Many economic theorists regard political policy, or education, or other social corrections as central for rebalancing a struggling economy. Leviticus 25 teaches us that the root of economic imbalance is sin. Yairah Amit draws the same conclusion, stating it this way: "The jubilee law is, therefore, an attempt...[to] overcome the curse of banishment from the Garden of Eden."<sup>39</sup>

The identification of sin as the core problem behind economic imbalance is at once a theological insight and a practical one. It means that economic corrections ought to take into consideration the moral failures of a government and a society as well as political and market issues. Furthermore, the health of the church—the central institution for promoting the atonement—is beneficial to the economics of the society.

A third lesson of Jubilee—and one that straddles both the realms of theology and practice—is the model of debt-forgiveness provided in this text. The poor were not granted an immediate release from their economic burdens. The Jubilee held forth the promise of eventual debt-forgiveness which preserved hope, but debtors continued to bear responsibility for their circumstances. The interests of both the creditor and the debtor were upheld in a careful system that always preserved the hope of the impoverished (and kept creditors from extending perpetual loan arrangements). This balance was achieved by establishing debt-forgiveness in a manner that was not immediately available, but which was a real and certain eventuality. Its distance motivated the debtor's efforts in the present while its eventual certainty motivated the creditor's humane respect for the debtor's efforts. Thus the creditor's interests were protected; yet, the final option of full debt-forgiveness had to be part of the system. Without grace somewhere in an economic system, pure market economics will always become the tool of creditors and the bane of the poor. Modern bankruptcy law borrows, to some extent, upon this notion. The Jubilee offers an ancient foil for critiquing modern approaches to bankruptcy.<sup>40</sup>

A fourth insight from Jubilee is that debt-forgiveness is always a matter of grace, not rights. The Jubilee release only applied to participants in Israel's atonement and not to outsiders. The Jubilee Law does not regard debt-release as a basic human right. "Forgiveness is the act of putting away and canceling claims... It is invoked precisely when the [obligation]...cannot be justified or excused."<sup>41</sup> In Israel, it was on the

<sup>39</sup> Yairah Amit, "The Jubilee Law—An Attempt at Instituting Social Justice," in Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, eds., *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and their Influence* (JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 47–59.

<sup>40</sup> Cf., Paul B. Rasor, "Biblical Roots of Modern Consumer Credit Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10 (1993–4), 157–92; Richard H. Heirs, "Biblical Social Welfare Legislation: Protected Classes and Provisions for Persons in Need," *Journal of Law and Religion* 17 (2002), 49–96.

<sup>41</sup> Chantal Thomas, "International Debt Forgiveness and Global Poverty Reduction," *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 27 (2000), 1715.



basis of God's ultimate ownership of the land and his atonement for sins that debt-forgiveness and the restoration of property was legitimated. Even if a secular society institutes debt-forgiveness without recourse to the Christian God, such forgiveness will always require grace. It should not be pursued as a point of human rights, but through recourse to the moral mandate of grace. In the words of N.T. Wright, "There is no reason in the world's terms why one should cancel debts. If you have people in your power, why not keep them there? Debt cancellation is inexplicable in terms of Marx, Nietzsche or Freud... It is a sign of hope, of love, of the gospel."<sup>42</sup>

A fifth lesson of the Jubilee Law is the importance of protecting the economic opportunity of future generations from the impact of economic disaster in the present generation. The impoverished neighborhoods of modern America provide far too much evidence that, without some system of economic grace, those born into poverty rarely ever break out of it. The specific system of Jubilees may not be practicable in modern society, but there is wisdom in its underlying commitment to policies that hold the present generation responsible for their debts while guarding future generations from becoming trapped by them. Similar protections in modern society would be worth exploration.

A sixth Jubilee lesson is the importance of identifying the cornerstone of prosperity in a given society and regulating the economy around that core concern. In ancient Israel, preserving broad ownership of farmland from generation to generation was the key to sustaining a balanced, prosperous nation. Other industries could change hands with little restriction, but agricultural properties were protected from becoming concentrated into the hands of a wealthy elite. Jubilee represents a system of regulations that ensured the society's core means of wealth—agricultural property—remained widely held across the whole society and through generations. This focus of regulation on core economic interests in society and not others stirs us to nuance which engines of prosperity ought to be protected, not as a matter of rights but as a matter of grace.

Finally, the Jubilee Law reminds us that economic prosperity is not the work of the state alone. Nor is it the result of government and business cooperation, only. Economic prosperity is the fruit of a society where religion, government, and business work harmoniously together. A good political system cannot secure economic balance by itself. The government enforces *civic* order and business promotes economic *activity*, but religion restores *human* dignity. "Human law cannot possibly police every sin. When Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount that anger is a form of murder and to lust is to commit adultery, he underscores the pervasiveness of God's law. But an obvious secondary implication is that human law must have more modest aspirations."<sup>43</sup> The Jubilee shows the necessary relationship between the ministry of atonement by the church and the economic enforcement of government.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Millenium Myth: Hope for a Postmodern World* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 108.

<sup>43</sup> David A. Skeel, Jr., "The Unbearable Lightness of Christian Legal Scholarship," *Emory Law Journal* 57 (2008), 1510.

<sup>44</sup> The modern argument for such a direction was classically expressed by the

The American Liberty Bell—legendarily rung over Independence Hall on July 4, 1776—is inscribed with the words of Leviticus 25:10: “Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof.” This quotation ironically seizes upon the economic promise of the Jubilee Year while overlooking its theological foundation stated in the previous verse: “*On the Day of Atonement* you shall sound the trumpet... And proclaim liberty throughout the land...” (vv9-10). There are many ideals and inspiring phrases of liberty that can be borrowed from Scripture. However, to distill biblical wisdom and leave behind biblical theology is to leave behind the greater part. It benefits the economic and social liberty of a nation when the ministry of atonement is flourishing in its midst.

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nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, William Symington, *Messiah the Prince: The Mediatorial Dominion of Jesus Christ* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, 2012 reprint); cf., Roy Blackwood and Michael LeFebvre, *William Symington: Penman of the Scottish Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 205–8, 263–99.



## A CHRISTIAN ANTIDOTE TO "AFFLUENZA:" CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST

GARY L. SHULTZ JR.\*

### I. INTRODUCTION

On the night of June 15, 2013, Hollie Boyles and her daughter Shelby were helping a lady, Breanna Mitchell, whose vehicle had broken down and left her stranded on the side of the road in Burleson, TX. As they worked on her car another man named Brian Jennings, a local youth pastor, stopped to help them. All four of them were killed when a drunk-driver hit them with his pick-up truck, traveling between 68-70 miles per hour in a 40 miles per hour zone. Nine other people were injured in the crash. The driver was 16-year-old Ethan Couch, and at the time of the crash his blood-alcohol level was .24, three times the legal limit for someone of legal drinking age. Couch was arrested and charged with driving drunk and causing a crash that resulted in the deaths of four people. During the trial Couch admitted his guilt and testified that he had caused the crash, but his lawyers argued that he was not ultimately the one to blame for the crash. Instead, they argued that Couch's parents bore the brunt of the blame for the way they had raised him. Prior to sentencing, a psychologist for the defense, G. Dick Miller, testified that Couch was a victim of "affluenza" because his parents had never set limits for him, had bought him everything he had ever wanted, and taught him that wealth bought privilege. Therefore Couch was incapable of understanding the relationship between his behavior and the consequences of his behavior because of his wealthy upbringing. Instead of jail time or any kind of punishment for his actions, Miller recommended that Couch receive therapy and have no contact with his parents. Judge Jean Boyd subsequently followed Miller's recommendation, sentencing Couch to a long-term treatment facility, 10 years of probation, and forbidding any contact with his parents during his treatment, eschewing the prosecutor's recommendation of 20 years in prison as proper punishment for the crime.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The details of this case can be found in many places on-line. E.g., Jim Douglas and Thomas Unger, "Outrage follows probation for teen who killed four in crash," n.p. [cited 31 March 2014]. Online: <http://www.wfaa.com/news/crime/Defense-pushes-for-intensive-therapy-for-teen-in-drunken-crash-that-killed-4-235288101.html>; and Dana Ford, "'Affluenza' defense psychologist: 'I wish I hadn't used that term,'" n.p. [cited 31 March 2014]. Online: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/12/justice/texas-teen-dwi-wreck/index.html>.

Miller's testimony and Couch's sentencing left many outraged, including family members of the victims, but they do highlight the increasing recognition that affluence is not an unlimited good with only positive benefits, but has serious, negative consequences impacting our society, families, individuals, and churches. A combination of the words "affluence," and "influenza," the term "affluenza" has come to refer to the harmful affects and condition of having too much wealth, for both societies and individuals. These affects are psychological, cultural, and economic. John De Graaf, David Waan, and Thomas H. Naylor, in their book identifying and explaining affluenza, state, "Affluenza's costs and consequences are immense, though often concealed. Untreated, the disease can cause permanent discontent.<sup>2</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* actually added the term in 1997, defining it as "A psychological condition supposedly affecting (esp. young) wealthy people, symptoms of which include a lack of motivation, feelings of guilt, and a sense of isolation."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the increasing acknowledgement of the negative consequences of wealth is the recognition that something needs to be done to combat and even prevent those negative consequences. Economists, psychologists, and social scientists have proposed a number of treatments or solutions to affluenza. As Ian R. Harper and Eric L. Jones indicate, these proposals either focus on external restraints that prevent people from acquiring too much wealth in the first place or internal restraints that encourage a correct understanding and use of wealth and possessions.<sup>4</sup> External restraints include institutions such as the family, the law, and the local community, and the ethical and legal restraints that these institutions put on greed.<sup>5</sup> These ethical and legal restraints are easily ignored or avoided, however, which has led to proposed solutions centered on extreme interventions in the market.<sup>6</sup> Harper and Jones term these kinds of proposed solutions the "authoritarian approach," an approach that "seems affronted by economic success and so hostile to individual rights that it seeks to suppress rather than persuade."<sup>7</sup> They rightly point out that these approaches substitute the fallible decisions of politicians for the fallible choices of consumers and will only succeed through coercion, and therefore that external restraints are not an adequate solution for affluenza.<sup>8</sup> External factors cannot make people content or give them motivation for life beyond the accumulation of wealth and whatever it can buy.

<sup>2</sup> John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2001), 2.

<sup>3</sup> "Affluenza." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ian R. Harper and Eric L. Jones, "Treating 'Affluenza': The Moral Challenge of Affluence," in *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (ed. Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg; Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008), 158-63.

<sup>5</sup> Harper and Jones, "Treating Affluenza," 158.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Oliver James, *Affluenza* (London: Vermilion, 2007); and Avner Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Harper and Jones, "Treating Affluenza," 159.

<sup>8</sup> Harper and Jones, "Treating Affluenza," 160-61.

On the other hand, internal restraints on greed, such as one's moral code or conscience, have the potential to combat affluenza by giving direction for where true contentment is found and how we should think of and use wealth. Harper and Jones demonstrate how social science supports the need for internal restraints if affluenza is truly to be overcome, and propose that the moral antidote to affluenza is found in Christianity.<sup>9</sup> This paper agrees with their assessment and seeks to build upon their proposal by demonstrating from Scripture how Christianity combats and overcomes affluenza through the gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly by transforming our idea of what contentment is and how we find it. We will examine two passages, Philippians 4:10-13 and 1 Timothy 6:6-10, that together give us an understanding of how contentment in and through Jesus Christ is the "antidote" for affluenza. Once we have demonstrated what our passages tell us about contentment and what our attitude toward wealth should be, we will draw some practical applications regarding our contentment in Christ and our use and accumulation of wealth. In light of the importance of the gospel in responding to affluenza, Christians, particularly pastors, must lead the way in modeling contentment in this life and the right attitude to wealth to our churches and our culture if we have any hope of combatting and preventing the negative consequences of affluence.

## II. PHILIPPIANS 4:10-13: CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST ALONE

In Philippians 4:10-13 Paul makes an astounding statement, proclaiming that through Christ he can be content no matter what his circumstances, no matter what he might or might not have:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Paul begins this statement on contentment through Christ by referring to the Philippians' recently revived concern for him. Paul has already used the word *phroneo* eight times in the letter up to this point (1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, 19; 4:2) to refer to an attitude of like-mindedness, a relational concern for one another, and that is his meaning here.<sup>10</sup> The Philippians' concern for him was tangibly expressed through the financial gifts that the church sent him through Epaphroditus (Phil 4:18). Apparently the church had at one time financially supported Paul and his ministry, but for unknown reasons went through a time where they were unable to continue supporting him.<sup>11</sup> Paul is careful to note that even during this

<sup>9</sup> Harper and Jones, "Treating Affluenza," 161-63.

<sup>10</sup> BDAG, 1065.

<sup>11</sup> For speculation on what those reasons might be, see G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter*

period, they were still concerned about him, but he does want them to know how grateful he is for their renewed support. Their gifts have led him to rejoice in the Lord greatly, not only because they are evidence of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel (cf. 1:4), but because they are evidence of the Lord's faithfulness to him.

Having expressed his gratitude, Paul emphasises that he rejoiced in the attitude of concern expressed through the gifts to him rather than the gift itself. He begins verse 11 with a strong negative expression (*ouk hoti*) that he often uses to clarify possible misconceptions of what he has just said (e.g., 2 Cor 1:24; 3:5; Phil 3:12; 4:17; 2 Thess 3:9). Paul clarifies that he is not speaking from any kind of want or need. Although Paul's circumstances of being a prisoner (Phil 1:12-18) most likely left him in great need, he in no way wanted the Philippians to think that he only cared about receiving their money, or that his great joy was due to now having more money. Instead, he takes this opportunity to stress that through his experience he has learned to be content in all circumstances, even the ones he is in presently. Receiving the Philippians' gift did not make him more content.

The word Paul uses for "content" in v. 11 is *autarkes*, which was a common concept in Stoic and Cynic philosophy, and described a person who "becomes an independent man sufficient to himself and no one else."<sup>12</sup> In this way of thinking the content person was someone who depended on no one but himself, who had all of the resources within himself to cope with whatever circumstances came his way. For the Stoics this attitude of contentment required emotional detachment, the exercise of reason over emotion, so that no matter what happened, whether good or bad, a person could resist the force of his circumstances through an act of his will.<sup>13</sup> In designating the attitude he came to learn *autarkes*, however, Paul takes a popular philosophical concept and redefines it in light of the gospel. He doesn't advocate a contentment that comes from within himself, or through emotional detachment, but as he will soon make clear in verse 13, only through Jesus Christ, the one who gives him strength. As Gordon Fee states, Paul "uses the language—and outwardly assumes the stance—of Stoic self-sufficiency, but radically transforms it into Christ-sufficiency."<sup>14</sup> Because Paul is in Christ, he is no longer dependent upon anyone or anything else but Christ for contentment and joy in this world, including the Philippians and their gifts.

Contentment is not something that came naturally to Paul, however, but something that he had to learn. Paul describes the school of his learning in the first half of verse 12, contrasting two opposite conditions he has experienced. Before each of these conditions Paul repeats the verb "know" (*oida*), emphasizing again that his contentment in both of these kinds of circumstances is a result of his learning and experience, not

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*to the Philippians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 308-09.

<sup>12</sup> TDNT 1:466.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, *Philippians*, 310-11.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 427.



something that just came to him. The first of these conditions is being in need, or literally being humbled (*tapeinounsomai*). To be humbled in this context means to lose prestige or status or to be humiliated. In light of the discussion of the Philippians' gift, it almost certainly includes the idea of financial humiliation, or poverty.<sup>15</sup> Paul knows how to be content in poverty, when he has nothing, when external forces have conspired against him and deprived him. At the same time, Paul also knows how to be content when he prospers (*perisseuein*) or when he is rich and not in need.

Paul goes on to explain that finding contentment in these opposite sets of circumstances was possible because he had "learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (12b). Paul had not learned to be content just through his experience of being poor or being rich, or through having experienced both of those states. He was able to be content regardless of circumstances because he had learned the secret to being content; his experiences had allowed him to acquire and then put his knowledge into practice. The word translated "learned the secret" is *memuēmai*, a word used only here in the New Testament and a technical term in the Hellenistic mystery religions of Paul's time, referring to those who had been initiated into the mysteries of a particular religion by going through the sacred rituals. It was also used metaphorically for those gaining insider knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Paul uses this term to indicate that he had gained knowledge that wasn't available to everyone, that he had insight only available to those on the inside. It was this knowledge that allowed him to be content whether he was being humbled or whether he was prospering, whether he was hungry or well-fed, whether he had a lot or a little. As Walter Hansen elaborates:

His joy in the Lord was not heightened by prosperity or diminished by poverty. His concern for the welfare of others was not distracted by living in plenty or want. His contentment in prosperity did not lead him to self-indulgence or self-aggrandizement: having material things did not become his reason for joy; acquiring material things did not make him greedy; protecting material things did not make him anxious.<sup>17</sup>

The secret that Paul had learned, the key to his contentment, was that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him (v. 13). Paul is not saying that he can do whatever he wants because Christ gives him strength.<sup>18</sup> The "all things" he speaks of refer to all the different kinds of circumstances we can experience, as he just detailed in v. 12: poverty or prosperity, hunger or fullness. No matter what his circumstances, Paul can be content because Christ is the one who gives him strength. His sufficiency is not found in himself, and it is not found in what he has or does not have. Paul's sufficiency, knowledge, and contentment are found

<sup>15</sup> BDAG, 1087.

<sup>16</sup> BDAG, 660.

<sup>17</sup> Hansen, *Philippians*, 313-14.

<sup>18</sup> This is a common misunderstanding and misapplication of this verse. See Eric J. Bargerhuff, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible: Surprising Ways God's Word is Misunderstood* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2012), 109-16.

in his being “in Christ.” Jeremiah Burroughs gives us insight into what this looks like:

A Christian finds satisfaction in every circumstance by getting strength from another, by going out of himself to Jesus Christ, by his faith acting upon Christ, and bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul, he is thereby enabled to bear whatever God lays on him, by the strength that he finds from Jesus Christ... There is strength in Christ not only to sanctify and save us, but strength to support us under all our burdens and afflictions, and Christ expects that when we are under burden, we should act our faith upon him to draw virtue and strength from him.<sup>19</sup>

Paul rejoices in the Philippians’ gift, and he makes sure to emphasize again how good it was for them to send it to him (4:14), but that gift is not Christ, and it cannot make him more or less content. Contentment is a state of life that comes through faith in Jesus Christ and the strength he gives us through that faith.

What is true for Paul is true for all who are in Christ. Paul’s intimate union with Christ is the source of his strength in any and all circumstances, and therefore it is what allows him to be content in any and all circumstances. It is what allows him to proclaim that God supplies all of our “needs according to his riches in glory in Christ” (4:19), trusting that when Christ returns in glory, the infinite wealth of the heavenly citizenship he so eagerly awaited would be his (3:20). Paul has already stated that his entire life is in Christ (1:21), that being found in Christ is worth more than anything this world can offer (3:8-9), and that life means knowing Christ in the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his resurrection (3:10-11). These truths are true of all who are in Christ. All who are in Christ can and should learn the secret of being content in all circumstances because Christ is the one who strengthens us. We learn this secret the same way Paul did, as we come to know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings so that we can live in the power of the resurrection, as we walk in faith and look toward the new heavens and new earth whether we are hungry or full, prosperous or poor. Our union with Christ combats affluenza and its consequences because it frees us from desperately trying to find our contentment in our wealth. Therefore it frees us from the anxiety of not having what others have, the guilt of not having as much as someone else, and the greedy justifications that drive us to do anything and everything just to get a little more.

### III. FIRST TIMOTHY 6:6-10: CONTENTMENT IN WHAT GOD PROVIDES

Philippians 4:10-13 teaches us that contentment in any circumstance is possible because contentment is found in Christ alone, through the strength he gives us, and more wealth shouldn’t add to or diminish our contentment in Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:6-10 Paul elaborates upon this

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (1648, Reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964), 63.

truth by explicitly relating godliness to contentment and contentment to the pursuit and accumulation of wealth.<sup>20</sup> This passages states:

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Beginning in 1 Timothy 6:3, for the third time in this letter (1:3-11; 4:1-5), Paul gives instruction to Timothy about false teachers in the church. In this passage he explains what kind of people they are and what the result of their lifestyle will be. Paul states that if anyone in the church doesn't agree with sound words, the words of Jesus Christ, and the doctrine that promotes godliness, he is conceited and without understanding, preoccupied with controversies and disputes which produce envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant bickering between men who are depraved and deprived of the truth, men who believe that godliness is a way of making a profit (6:3-6). One of the hallmarks of a false teacher was his motivation for godliness: wealth, or gain (*porismon*). Godliness in this context is not the quality of life for a believer, but a more general term meaning "religion" or "piety" (*eusebeia*), and refers to the reality of being a believer, of being "in Christ."<sup>21</sup> False teachers were those who were motivated to follow Jesus Christ by the wealth they thought they would gain from it. Paul has already warned Timothy about money being a controlling factor in the life of a pastor or deacon (3:3, 8), and in other contexts he has strongly denied that wealth is any kind of motivation for his ministry (e.g., Acts 2:33; 1 Thess 2:5). Wealth cannot be the motivation to follow Christ, because to be in Christ is to be content in Christ in any and all circumstances (Phil 4:10-13).

In contrast to the misunderstanding of the false teachers about gain and godliness (v. 6 begins with an adversative *de*, "but"), Paul emphasizes in v. 6 that godliness is gain (*porismon*), in fact it is great gain (*porismos megas*), when it is accompanied by contentment. The word Paul uses in this verse for contentment (*autarkeia*) comes from the same root as the word he uses in Philippians 4:11 (*autarkes*) and it carries the same meaning in this context as it did in Philippians 4, the state of being completely sufficient and satisfied in Jesus Christ, as opposed to circumstances, possessions, or anything else. Being in Christ (*eusebeia*) provides the contentment that each individual must learn through their experience as they continue to draw upon the strength that being in Christ provides them. As Knight states concerning v. 6, "When the source (*eusebeia*) is combined with the

<sup>20</sup> For a defense of Paul's authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, see George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 21-52.

<sup>21</sup> BDAG, 412.

inward result (*autarkeia*), then there is ‘great’ (*megas*) gain.”<sup>22</sup> Paul has already made the basis of this contentment explicit in 1 Timothy 4:8, where he states that the profit of *eusebeia* is “all things,” both in the present and in the life to come.

In the remainder of 1 Timothy 6:6-10 Paul relates contentment to wealth. Verses 7-8 indicate the reason we should be content (v. 7 begins with *gar*, “for”). Echoing previous biblical teaching, both of the Old Testament (Job 1:21; Prov 27:24; Eccl 5:15) and of Jesus (Matt 6:19-20; Mark 8:36; Luke 12:15-21), Paul states that we didn’t bring anything into this world, and we can’t take anything out of it either (6:7). In other words, we didn’t have any wealth when we were born, and no matter how much wealth we might accumulate during this life, we can’t take anything with us when we die. Whatever the false teachers might have thought about the spiritual benefits of gaining wealth, wealth has no ultimate, eternal benefit. Instead, as long as we have food and clothing, we should be content (6:8, with the word for “we shall be content,” *arkestesometha*, coming from the same root family as the words Paul used in 6:6 and Phil 4:11). We do need certain things in this life; Paul never condemns having possessions if God graciously provides them, and he never calls Christians to take vows of poverty. As he will indicate in 6:17, “God is the one who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy,” and if God chooses to exceed those basics for his good purposes we can gratefully receive them and put them to good use (as 6:18-19 indicate, that good use means being generous and ready to share). What Paul tells us is where our expectations should be. As long as God provides us with the basics of life, we should be content, because our contentment does not rest in those things but in Christ. As Christians we shouldn’t expect or demand that God will make us wealthy or give us possessions beyond our basic needs, and even if he chooses to do so, that should not, and ultimately cannot, increase our contentment in this life.

The next two verses contrast this godly view of wealth and contentment with the desire to be rich and the negative consequences of that desire, or as our culture now calls this, affluenza. While Paul never condemns being rich, he strongly denounces the desire to be rich that arises from discontentment and prohibits contentment by describing where that desire leads. In distinction from those who are content with the basics of life in Christ, those who want to get rich expose themselves to some dangerous consequences. (6:9). The phrase “fall into” translates the verb *empiptousin*, which is in the present tense, indicating what typically or normally happens, again and again, to those who desire to be rich: they fall into (*eis*) three things. The first is temptation (*peirasmos*), or something that “can be an occasion of sin to a person.”<sup>23</sup> Those who desire to be rich open themselves up to continued enticements to sin. The second thing they fall into is a snare (*pagis*), likely the snare of the devil (cf. 3:17; 2 Tim 2:26), meaning that they not only open themselves up to opportunities to sin, but to entrapment to sin, compulsive and controlling

<sup>22</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 253.

<sup>23</sup> BDAG, 793.

sin. The third thing they fall into is desire (*epithumias*), specifically foolish (*anoetous*) and harmful (*blaberas*) desires. The one who desires to be rich opens himself up to temptation to sin, entrapment to sin, and then enslavement to desires to sin, desires which plunge (*buthizo*) men into ruin (*olethros*) and destruction (*apoleia*). These last two terms are closely related and most likely highlight two different aspects of the sinner's outcome: perhaps bodily and spiritual destruction or present and eternal destruction.<sup>24</sup> Either way, the Bible states what social science has come to confirm: unrestrained greed that comes from a lack of contentment has devastating consequences.

Paul substantiates what he has just said in v. 9 with what he says in v. 10 (again beginning this verse with *gar*, "for"). The "love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Like Philippians 4:13, the first part of this verse is often misquoted and misapplied at two key points.<sup>25</sup> First Timothy 6:10 does not say that money is the root of all evil, but that "the love of money" is "a root of all kinds of evil." George Knight explains why the love of money is so dangerous:

*Philarguria*, "love of money," is what characterizes one who places his or her heart on possessing money, so violating the first commandment of the Decalogue, the commandment to love God (cf. Mt. 6:24 par Lk. 16:13). Because this is an expression of sinful self-love in opposition to the love of God (cf. "lovers of self" and "lovers of money" in 2 Tim. 3:2-4, a list concluding with the contrast "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God"; cf. also Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15), it also violates the inherently related second great commandment (Mt. 22:39) to love one's neighbor.<sup>26</sup>

This attitude leads to all kinds of moral evils (*kakon*), such as injustice, overindulgence, taking advantage of the poor, cheating, stealing, and murder, among many others.

Paul finishes this passage by referring once again to the false teachers who think that godliness is a means of gain and who desire to be rich instead of content with what God provides. By longing after money they have "wandered away from the faith" and "pierced themselves with many griefs." First, they have separated themselves (*apeplanethesan*) from "the faith" (*tes pisteos*), or become apostate, straying from the Christian faith and thereby forsaking Christ himself. They supposed that godliness was a means of material gain, and therefore lost everything eternally. Second, by piercing themselves (*periepeiran*) with "many griefs" (*odunais pollais*) they have brought many self-inflicted wounds upon themselves in this life, which produce sorrow but no repentance (cf. 2 Cor 7:10).<sup>27</sup> This is the outcome of discontent and greed, the current and future experience of

<sup>24</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 256.

<sup>25</sup> Bargerhuff, *The Most Misused Verses in the Bible*, 87-92; and Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (New Studies in Biblical Theology, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 210-11.

<sup>26</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 257.

<sup>27</sup> TDNT, 5:115.

those who suffer from affluenza. This is the outcome that being found in Christ rescues us from by helping us to find contentment in the only place that it can be found: in Christ alone.

#### IV. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As Christians we are called to find our contentment not in what we have, but in who we are in Christ. Philippians 4:10-13 helps us understand how in Christ we can be content in any circumstance; no matter how much we have or don't have. Contentment is not natural to us. We learn it through being strengthened by Christ as we go through life with him, in times of great blessing and in times of want and suffering. First Timothy 6:6-10 builds upon this truth by teaching us that contentment in Christ is the great gain that we seek after, and is found in Christ when God provides us with our basic needs. Wealth cannot bring us contentment, and the discontent that drives us to accumulate wealth, even when we can't spend or use it, drives us away from Christ and toward the terrible consequences of sin and its cycle of entrapment and destruction. God may bless us with wealth beyond our basic necessities, but this cannot be the basis of contentment in this life.

We live in a culture that is desperate for contentment, and often looks for it in affluence, in the accumulation of wealth and possessions. By doing so people are searching for contentment in something that can never offer contentment, and are suffering the consequences. As Harper and Jones say, "Affluence tends to affluenza when the accumulation of material wealth becomes an end in itself and especially when people begin to measure their own worth and that of others in purely material terms."<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, not even the church in America is immune from this, but suffers right along with the rest of our culture.<sup>29</sup> Yet if we are going to combat affluenza with an effective internal restraint, that internal restraint must be our relationship to Jesus Christ, and that means Christians and churches must lead the way in demonstrating contentment in Christ and not in what we own. Two practical implications of Philippians 4 and 1 Timothy 6 can help us do this: embracing a lifestyle of the cross (especially in contrast to the so-called "prosperity" gospel), and learning to store up our treasures in heaven through sacrificial giving.

##### *A. Embracing a Lifestyle of the Cross*

Once we have embraced Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and life-giving resurrection through faith, we are called to live out his death and resurrection as we live lives of faith. Jesus tells us that, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). To be in Christ, or to live a life of godliness, means that we must deny ourselves and take up our crosses. This means

<sup>28</sup> Harper and Jones, "Treating 'Affluenza,'" 161.

<sup>29</sup> As Blomberg demonstrates in *Christians in an Age of Wealth*, 23-32.



a continuing death to sin and self so that we can experience new life in Christ. This gospel lifestyle is at the heart of Martin Luther's theology of the cross. He states, "The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but extinguishing it."<sup>30</sup> When Paul says that he can be content in any and all circumstances because Christ is the one who strengthens him, it is because he is in Christ and has fellowshiped with him in his sufferings in order to experience the glories of his resurrection power (Phil 3:9-10). When he warns us of the desire to be rich, of being discontent with God's provision, it is because that desire is the opposite of taking up your cross; it leads us away from godliness and toward destruction. Followers of Christ must be wary of anything that keeps us from putting sin to death, including our wealth, which has great potential to enflame sin instead of kill it.

Unfortunately, far from embracing Jesus's call to live a gospel lifestyle, 46% of American Christians have instead embraced the opposing lifestyle of the prosperity gospel, or the idea that God wants us to be substantially wealthier, healthier, and happier than we are right now.<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove describes this way of thinking: "According to this new gospel, if believers repeat positive confessions, focus their thoughts, and generate enough faith, God will release blessings upon their lives. This new gospel claims that God desires and even promises that believers will live a wealthy and financially prosperous life."<sup>32</sup> If this is the case in the church, how can we be surprised that our culture has embraced the pursuit of more no matter what it costs? When so many self-confessed Christians seek to be wealthier so that they might be happier, when they seek godliness for gain, they are only Christianizing affluenza, not embracing the biblical gospel or the life it calls us to lead.

The church must be at the forefront not only of proclaiming the biblical gospel of the cross and resurrection, of death to sin and life in Christ, but also of living the biblical gospel, and demonstrating what contentment in Christ looks like. This does not mean looking for suffering, or searching out crosses to bear, by divesting ourselves of all wealth (though this might be the calling of some as Mark 10:21 indicates), but it does mean purposely living life so that our wealth does not become our idol and affluenza our end. This will require churches and pastors to preach and teach what contentment in Christ is and what is not, to denounce the prosperity gospel as a false gospel, to lead the way in giving away their wealth and possessions and not keeping their money all for themselves. It will require Christian businesspeople to purposely practice Christian virtue in their businesses.<sup>33</sup> It will require Christian families to prioritize life before God instead of bigger homes, nicer cars, better vacations, and more lavish retirement accounts. How we handle our finances affects

<sup>30</sup> *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-72), 31:54.

<sup>31</sup> Pew Forum, *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals* (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2006), 147.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *God's Economy: Redefining the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 15.

<sup>33</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, 131-32.



every other area of our lives, as Matthew 6:24 indicates.<sup>34</sup> Embracing a lifestyle of the cross will require intentionally and incessantly choosing to serve God instead of wealth, to put our sinful attitudes toward wealth to death instead of tolerating or enflaming them, so that we can model satisfaction in Christ instead of our affluence.

### *B. Laying up Treasures in Heaven through Sacrificial Giving*

When it comes to our wealth and possessions, the primary way to ensure that we have embraced a lifestyle of the cross and are seeking our contentment in Christ alone is through sacrificial giving. Contentment in Christ is not passivity, and it does not mean less economic involvement, but instead calls for careful stewardship and investment. Again, this is an area where the church in America is currently not meeting a biblical standard. In his book *Christians in an Age of Wealth*, Craig Blomberg surveys the church's giving and presents some startling facts. The per capita giving of American church members as a percentage of their annual income has mostly declined over the past century. Figures for 2009 were barely above two percent, the lowest they have been since the 1940's. Giving is also highly unequally distributed among Christians, with 15 percent of all Christians giving 80 percent of all dollars given to charitable causes, and 20 percent of Christians giving nothing in a given year.<sup>35</sup> Multiple factors contribute to this state of affairs, including the popularity of the prosperity gospel, debt, fear of mismanagement, and a misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches about giving, but whatever the cause the church's giving patterns demonstrate that many Christians are not embracing a lifestyle of the cross or suffer from affluenza themselves.

Jesus states in Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus here describes misplaced values, telling his disciples not to store up treasure for themselves, but to use their treasure for eternal purposes.<sup>36</sup> We must store up treasures in heaven instead of merely accumulating them on earth if we are going to experience the reality of Paul's words in Philippians 4:10-13 and 1 Timothy 6:10. It may seem paradoxical, but the way to gain contentment in Christ and free ourselves from the besetting sin of trying to find our contentment in wealth is to sacrificially give. The way to overcome the restlessness, discontent, and skewed worldview that affluence can bring is to purposely divest ourselves of some of our discretionary income, for the good of others and for the glory of God.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Peter S. Heslam, "The Role of Business in the Fight Against Poverty," in *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (ed. Ian R. Harper and Samuel Gregg; Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2008), 166.

<sup>35</sup> Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth*, 23-24.

<sup>36</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 177.

<sup>37</sup> What sacrificial giving looks like in relation to discretionary income will look

The church should not only be at the forefront of our culture in teaching and preaching this, but in modeling it as well. Sacrificial giving requires giving up lifestyles that require debt and possessions that we do not need. It requires running our businesses and doing our jobs for more than just profit. It means that our churches should be more concerned with the spread of the gospel and the welfare of the poor than with their own comfort. It means being more concerned with what God is doing in us than what material blessings he is bestowing upon us. As Craig Blomberg states, biblical salvation is always holistic, and involves a “transformation in the way God’s people utilize ‘mammon’—material possessions. To the extent the kingdom has been inaugurated from the cross of Christ onward, Christians individually and corporately are called to model that transformation, however imperfectly, as a foretaste of the perfect redemption that must ultimately await the age to come.”<sup>38</sup> Those who model that transformation and give sacrificially, just as Christ did (2 Cor 8:9), don’t have to worry about the negative effects of wealth, but can enjoy its benefits, knowing that giving in Christ is of eternal value.

### CONCLUSION

The gospel allows us to find our contentment in Jesus Christ himself, and thereby frees us from futilely trying to find our contentment in our circumstances or possessions. By freeing us to find true and lasting contentment in Christ himself, the gospel then helps us to understand how the accumulation of wealth and possessions fits with our contentment in Christ, and therefore gives us clear direction on how we should use and think of our wealth. The root of affluenza is not merely discontent, but trying to overcome that discontent through more; more possessions, more money, more of whatever it takes to become satisfied. Christians are those who are supposed to know that this way of life is empty, that wealth was never designed to do this. The only internal restraint that will ever truly work, because it changes things at the fundamental level of the human heart, is the gospel commitment that drives us to endure all things through Christ who strengthens us and helps us know that godliness with contentment is great gain.

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different for every individual and family, depending on a number of variables such as income, cost of living, location, family responsibilities, and seasons of life, among many others. Realizing what we should give and what we should keep for ourselves requires spiritual discernment, prayer, Christian maturity, and a willingness to reassess continually what we are giving, how much we are giving, and why.

<sup>38</sup> Blomberg, *Poverty and Riches*, 246-47.



## SEEKING A FREE CHURCH THEOLOGY OF ECONOMICS: AN EXERCISE IN AVOIDING OXYMORONS

MATTHEW WARD\*

Reading Chad Brand's primer on work, economics, and civic stewardship, *Flourishing Faith*,<sup>1</sup> I disagreed with very little. Chuckling with exasperation at his illustrations of economic policies, furrowing my brow at his examples of injustice, I came away from the book strangely antagonistic toward big government and vaguely concerned about the world economy. However, I had expected to find a biblical framework for a Free Church perspective on economics, but if I were not a conservative Baptist currently living in the United States, much of his primer would have been rather meaningless to me.

Essentially, Brand built his case by creating a negative feeling toward the Obama administration's economic policy and then working backwards, leading the reader to create an association between that negative feeling and a Free Church economic model—identifying his model by what it stands against. It is an effective method of public discourse, but leaves a number of questions unanswered. Brand never really identifies a Free Church theological method and, notwithstanding a few very solid paragraphs at the end of the primer, never really quantifies a Free Church theology of economics. I believe that I can work in the opposite direction as Brand, come to many of the same conclusions, and yet still provide a reasonable Free Church economic framework. In other words, where Brand started with the contemporary American context and backtracked to a Free Church response, I will start with a Free Church model and show how it interprets the contemporary American context.

The driving force behind this article is a simple observation: the idea of a Free Church economic policy is an oxymoron. A Free Church theological framework (insofar as it is distinct from other theological frameworks) highlights the responsibility of the individual and the disciplined community under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Using that focus, a free churchman can discover a clear economic framework that applies to him and his church. Economic policies are governmental and societal; a Free Church perspective is individual and communal. To build my case, I will start by identifying the Free Churches, particularly with respect to their range of economic opinions, flesh out those opinions using

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<sup>1</sup> Chad Brand, *Flourishing Faith: A Baptist Primer on Work, Economics, and Civic Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2012).

basic economic concerns, follow that with an application of those opinions to the contemporary American context, and conclude with a summary of the meaning and implications of this Free Church framework. My basic argument is thus: all Free Church theology necessarily begins and ends with the individual's relationship with Jesus Christ as it is worked out in the believing community and the unbelieving world; their theology of economics should do so as well.

### I. WHO ARE THE FREE CHURCHES?

The term "free" is both a help and a hindrance when it comes to identifying this particular church tradition. On the one hand, it helpfully prioritizes congregational autonomy; the Free Churches do not include Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, or any denomination with an organic, hierarchical structure. But that nomenclature is also a hindrance, as if freedom is the most important thing to a Free Church. Indeed, Brand seems to build the tacit association between a Free Church and a Free Market (Donald Durnbaugh preferred the name "Believers' Church" to prevent such a knee-jerk conclusion). To normalize this connotation, I am going to work with a small group of early free churchmen who really did not have much political or theological freedom, a group often called the Anabaptists. If their theological convictions can be found to have application to conservative Baptists in the United States, that very well may be the basis for a Free Church theology of economics.

The story of the Reformation is well-known, but the subject at hand will push us into the so-called Radical Reformation. To make a long story too short, everywhere the Reformation proceeded there were those who felt it proceeded too slowly or incompletely. For example, Luther faced a Peasant's War, and Zwingli resorted to execution to handle a radical element. The Magisterial Reformers, those who were willing to work with the local magistrates to enact their convictions, marginalized and vilified the radicals (aided in no small part by isolated tragedies such as that at Münster under Thomas Münzter) for disagreeing with their theological foundations, particularly that Christians could use the threat of force in theological or social discourse. That is germane to my argument because a radical group often called Anabaptists is largely considered the forerunners of the modern Free Church tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Because this is not an article on Anabaptist origins, I am only going to summarize some major conclusions about this group of reformers. Two things should be kept in mind that might help explain why the early

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<sup>2</sup> William Estep's marvelous but obscure *Anabaptist Beginnings: 1523-1533*, Bibliotheca Humanistica & Reformatorica XVI (Philadelphia: Coronet Books, 1976) and *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996) and Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008) are highly recommended resources for further research, and they point the readers to a wealth of additional works, including the few primary sources I use in this article. While a monograph would allow for a much more exhaustive review of the available literature, one of my points is that one must be able to take any set of representative Free Church documents and find its place within the Free Church theological method.

Anabaptists are particularly meaningful representatives in a discussion of the Free Churches and economics. First and foremost, these Christians considered themselves a furtherance rather than a disturbance of the ongoing Reformation. They were in broad agreement about many of its impetuses, particularly Luther's *solus* and the ecumenical creeds, so those foundations were often assumed; their writings generally focused on those matters in which they felt the Magisterial Reformers fell short. For example, they argued that Zwingli was wrong to give the Zurich civic authorities control over church property, oversight of clergy, and all rights over compulsory tithes.<sup>3</sup> Being so close to the source of the Free Church tradition, their writings remained clear of much of the political and social baggage that clogs more recent fare; being faced with death (most of whom were martyred), their writings also contained only those matters to which they were truly committed.

Secondly, the era in which they wrote is of special interest to historians of economics. The Reformation happened when it did in part because political and economic conditions enabled (or forced) it. Feudalism was dying. The merchant class was providing enough tax revenue that kings did not have to rely on the nobility as much as in the earlier Middle Ages. The onset of gunpowder warfare was rendering the knight obsolete. The nobility adapted to these new conditions by providing creative incentives for economic growth or by attempting to extract more taxes from the peasants; either option brought instability. Furthermore, the Catholic Church leadership had been behaving badly for centuries, leaving the people with little confidence in its priests and then its sacraments as Luther's message of salvation by faith alone spread throughout Europe. Kings had long been at odds with the Pope over economic matters including investiture, taxes, tithes, and alliances. Reformers and kings had a common enemy in the Catholic Church, so they were more than happy to work together to expel Babylon from their midst. By being willing to disrupt that alliance, Anabaptists opened themselves up to political, economic, and theological persecution.

So what did these Anabaptists believe that made them so anathema to the authorities? Malcolm Yarnell found four characteristics in the writing of Pilgram Marpeck, each of which was rooted in a complete yieldedness to Christ in covenantal discipleship: Christocentrism, both in the person and work of Christ and the personal relationship with Him for salvation; the coinherence of Word and Spirit, between the external witness of the Word and the internal witness of the Spirit; the priority of the biblical order above human invention, both in ecclesial and social structures and theological "isms"; and the believers' church: the disciplined covenantal community interpreting and living out the Word together. Yarnell believed that these principles properly informed the entire Free Church theological method, and we will quickly see what that means in an economic context.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 106.

William Estep wrote a more detailed list of characteristics based on the writings of Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Michael Sattler. Not surprisingly, the two lists match. Estep's list could be roughly broken into corporate and individual elements. Corporately, he believed that the Free Church tradition could be identified by its primary appeal to the New Testament, desire for primitivism, and emphasis on the Believers' Church, which includes believers' baptism and kerygmatic ordinances and the apostolate of the laity (non-hierarchy within or between churches). Individually, the tradition affirms religious liberty and pacifism, and emphasizes personal discipleship even in ethical and social elements. Indeed, the Free Church tradition sees Christianity in this life as primarily discipleship. Undergirding all of this is a sense of unity in Christ and an openness to the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

We can make some important initial observations that will shape our discussion about economics. First, there is a very heavy emphasis on individual responsibility. If the Christian life is primarily discipleship to Christ, then that clearly applies to every area of life and every moment of life. Second, that discipleship is rooted in Word and Spirit, which are co-witnesses to the same truth. A free churchman will not look for answers in ecclesial pronouncements or theological frameworks unless those are clearly biblical; conversely, a free churchman will always be willing to be corrected by the Word of God. Third, the Free Church tradition does not rely on force or coercion. Certainly this applies in matters of personal faith; Estep said of them that "theological and spiritual renewal waits not for new structures so much as for the personal discovery and appropriation of a biblical faith."<sup>6</sup> We will have to discover how this foundation links with biblical commands such as to care for widows and orphans in their distress. Fourth and finally, the Free Church tradition is necessarily rooted in the disciplined, covenantal community—the believers' church. This must be applicable to a certain range of cultural expectations (as in Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*), from isolation to activism, but it cannot be separated from the basic belief that God expects Christians to exist in a church community. The economic implications should already be evident just in these foundation principles, and the next section will spell them out in greater depth.

## II. WHAT ARE THE FREE CHURCH ECONOMIC PRIORITIES?

We could draw a series of economic convictions strictly based on the principles above, but first I want to survey some early Anabaptist documents for economic statements. Again, they did not have the freedoms we have today, and many of them suffered death for their beliefs. If any of their statements (1) line up with the principles already presented and (2) resonate with our very different current economic condition, that might be a sign that we have found a useful general principle. Here are a series of observations from the first ten years of the Anabaptist movement, 1523-1533.

<sup>5</sup> Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 12.



Balthasar Hubmaier was an early leader who, along with Pilgram Marpeck, saw societal engagement as a Christian responsibility. Many of his letters and treatises survived, giving us a wide look into his understanding of a Free Church theology. He was no economist, but his thoughts have economic impact. His *Eighteen Theses* of 1524 described many of his basic convictions, beginning with the common Anabaptist theme from 1 Corinthians 13 that faith must be driven by brotherly love. This obviously applies to every economic transaction. He also believed that church members are obliged to support their pastors financially and that anyone “who does not seek to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow is condemned.”<sup>7</sup> He further warned, “Those who conceal the Word of God for earthly gain sell the blessing of God with Red Esau for a mess of pottage and Christ will also deny him.”<sup>8</sup> His polemic, *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* also of 1524, introduced his thoughts on government. He conceded that “it is well and good that the secular authority puts to death the criminals who do physical harm to the defenseless, Romans 13. But no one may injure the atheist who wishes nothing for himself other than to forsake the gospel.”<sup>9</sup> He echoed this sentiment in *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* in 1525 but taking the opposite approach. After condemning excessive human laws and regulations, he concluded, “But all of this is a small matter, if we now confess our sins, and renounce fraudulent works, and cry to God with Paul: O God! Forgive what we have done in our ignorance. The Red Whore of Babylon, with her cup full of lies, teachings and fables, has made us drunken, blinded and has deceived us. Now our best repentance is to forsake such things forever.”<sup>10</sup>

Hubmaier wrote another document of note for this subject, *On the Sword*, in 1527, in which he presented a biblical model for social responsibility for the individual, the government, and the church. Essentially, he argued that until we are without sin, our kingdom is of this world (John 18:36), and we must thus engage it. Our role therein has a number of aspects, mortality being one of the most important drivers. Because death and judgment come for all men, we realize the importance of both protecting the innocent (Matthew 26:53-54) and not seeking vengeance ourselves (Matthew 5:38). As we focus on treasure in heaven, we learn not to complain about our lot in this life (1 Corinthians 6:7). With respect to the government, he considered it both as an institution and as people. On the one hand, Christians are duty-bound to serve in government office where appointed, even as a judge (though not over Christian disputes; Luke 12:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6:7-8). But on the other hand, government—even Solomon’s—exists because people rejected God’s kingship; he concluded, “Such subjection and burden we must and shall now day by day suffer, endure and bear, obediently and

<sup>7</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “The Eighteen Theses,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “The Eighteen Theses,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “On the Christian Baptism of Believers,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 94.

willingly; also give and render tribute to whom tribute belongs, honour to whom honour belongs.”<sup>11</sup> In the light of this reality, we are to pray for pious Christian leadership and be thankful for any time we have to live a peaceful and quiet life. However, he does question at what point a Christian should no longer support a corrupt government with taxes, offering his own counter-question whether or not those in the magistracy are our neighbors (the answer being yes). His views on the church are interesting from the economic perspective because, although he held the priesthood of all believers in a much stricter sense than Luther or Zwingli, he had to acknowledge a practical distinction between church leaders and laypeople. For example, because it is a conflict of interest, church leaders should *not* take up secular office or control of a business. But at the same time church leaders should not deny such opportunities to church members (as long as they proceed with the right motivation) because we do not all have one duty, “So that one should take the lead in teaching, another protects, a third tills the earth, a fourth makes shoes and clothes. Yet these works all proceed from faith, and are done for the benefit of our neighbor.”<sup>12</sup> He did not necessarily mean that the teacher is more important than the laborer, but that economically the teacher relies on others to survive. Indeed, this illustration extends to the entire Christian community and the community at large—just as God designed the body of Christ as having many members with different functions, so also has God designed human society. Each of these observations will be considered in a Free Church theology of economics.

We can draw some obvious conclusions. The appeal to personal responsibility in faith and work is palpable here and throughout Hubmaier’s writings, as is his understanding of the complexity of human society. The motive of love cannot be legislated, and the government cannot be blamed for one’s sinful choices. Above all, the warning to those who would rather be comfortable (in the good graces of the magistrate) than preach the full Word of God is unmistakable. His views on government are nuanced. He prays for Christian leadership that would allow peaceful people such as Anabaptists to live in peace, but he does not count on such leadership. Indeed, because God instituted government to regulate the sinful behavior of people, Hubmaier expects to suffer and endure the governing authorities. Consequently, the ideal government of an ideal society would be limited, but we do not inhabit an ideal world and must deal with actuals. In the actual world, government exists and has legitimate authority, but its effectual limit is personal repentance. Legislation beyond that limit is worthless.

Pilgram Marpeck was a city engineer, so he shared many of Hubmaier’s feelings about social responsibility. We will focus on his debate with the reformer Martin Bucer in Strasbourg in 1531. Marpeck’s writings in question were his *Exposé of the Babylonian Whore* and *Confession* of the same year. Marpeck and Bucer shared many of the same concerns; Bucer even added church discipline as the third mark of a true

<sup>11</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “On the Sword,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 112-15.

<sup>12</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier, “On the Sword,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 124.

church in response to his experience with Anabaptists. They parted ways at Bucer's willingness (or commitment) to let his social context and his logical priorities shape his ecclesiology, whereas Marpeck looked only to the new covenant with Christ. In particular, Marpeck admonished the authorities for proof-texting Scripture to justify themselves and turning Christ into a persecutor of the churches. This resulted from a confusion of the covenants in which the Reformers were patterning themselves after Moses rather than Christ. But Christ did not coerce uniformity or discipleship; instead, he delayed judgement through patient endurance and loving proclamation. Bucer responded that we are not to serve as Christ served and that the magistrate's violent actions were indeed Christian. Bucer's arguments played much better to the city council, and Marpeck was immediately expelled.<sup>13</sup> There are several things to note about this debate: Marpeck was willing to work through proper channels to make his appeal to the governing authorities, but he did not soften or politicize his argument; Marpeck acquiesced to the ruling of the council, but he did not change his mind or his message; Marpeck believed the council was wrong to wield the sword in matters that should be left to conscience, but he would let God deal with them for that choice.

Hubmaier and Marpeck did not speak for all Anabaptists, and the same diversity and adversity that characterized Anabaptist thought will have to be found in our conclusions today. Many Anabaptists took a much more pessimistic or even isolationist perspective on government. Conrad Grebel strongly believed that Christians should not expect or demand comfort in this life. He implored Thomas Munzter in 1524, "True believing Christians are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter. They must be baptized in anxiety, distress, affliction, persecution, suffering, and death. They must pass through the probation of fire, and reach the Fatherland of eternal rest, not by slaying their bodily but by mortifying their spiritual enemies."<sup>14</sup> Michael Sattler in the *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 declared that no Christian should accept an appointment as magistrate. An anonymous Anabaptist pamphlet in 1530 did not necessarily deny the place of government authority but said that a *true* Christian would never appeal to the magistrate to protect temporal goods or preserve property in temporal peace. One is either a citizen of the magistrate or of Christ; one is either from the land owners or from Christ. "They are true Christians, and not the complainers who accuse men in front of men and otherwise know of no comfort as children of this world because Christ is their judge and Lord."<sup>15</sup> These agreed with Grebel in believing that a Christian should neither expect nor demand comfort in this life. The mirror of the Christian life is the person of Christ who allowed himself to suffer injustice that others might benefit. This is a critical caveat, for these Anabaptists did not believe in suffering for suffering's sake but rather for an opportunity to share the gospel. As with all martyrs, their suffering

<sup>13</sup> Yarnell, *Formation of Christian Doctrine*, 91-97.

<sup>14</sup> "Letters to Thomas Muntzer from the Swiss Brethren," in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> "An Anonymous Anabaptist Pamphlet," in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 160.

would be the proof of their love for their persecutors and their faith in Christ.

These isolationist tendencies sometimes manifested themselves in a kind of economic communalism. An Austrian *Discipline of the Church* from 1528 included an article of faith that “every brother or sister shall yield himself in God to the brotherhood completely with body and life, and hold in common all gifts received of God, and contribute to the common need so that brethren and sisters will always be helped.”<sup>16</sup> The will of the individual is implicit somewhere in this agreement, but that can be addressed in later analysis.

There is one additional writing of extreme interest, the *Twelve Articles of the Peasants* in 1525, which dealt almost exclusively with economic matters. They believed that the relationship between lord and serf was unfair. They did not have authority to designate their tithes, they could not elevate their social status, they could not hunt nuisance animals (a privilege of the lord), and they did not have the same access to community forests or fields as the lord. Lords overworked them, forced additional labor out of them without compensation, charged more rent than their holdings could reasonably produce, and ruined widows through the due of Todfall. They desired that their tithes go to maintain a pastor of their own appointment then to their own poor (although they denied the validity of the so-called small tithe). They also requested that there be a neutral court of arbitration to inspect the value of their holdings that a just tax be determined. Note that they acknowledged the right to private property (even “government” property was the private holding of the lord), but they also believed in community or communal property; they simply denied that a lord could claim ownership of communal property without purchasing it from the community. Furthermore, they were willing to serve the lord above and beyond as long as they received suitable compensation. Their basic request, somewhat at odds with the Austrian *Discipline* above, was that the peasant be permitted “to enjoy his holding in peace and quiet.”<sup>17</sup> Essentially, these peasants believed they possessed certain basic rights; they did not claim any more than those rights; they neither expected nor offered other than suitable payment for goods or services. They also acknowledged that the lords had rights; they simply asked that those lords acknowledge the limits of their rights—that all rights across class were equitable (not equal). Finally, they held in common with other Anabaptists that “such an article we will willingly recede from, when it is proved really to be against the word of God by a clear explanation of the Scriptures.”<sup>18</sup>

### III. SYNTHESIZING SOME EARLY CONCLUSIONS

My intention is not to paint every edge of a Free Church (or even an Anabaptist) theology of economics. That would be impossible in a journal article. I merely want to identify some economic principles that,

<sup>16</sup> “Discipline of the Church,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> “The Twelve Articles of the Peasants,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 61–62.

<sup>18</sup> “The Twelve Articles of the Peasants,” in Estep, *Anabaptist Beginnings*, 63.

due to their presence in early Free Church writings and relationship with Free Church characteristics, modern Free Churchmen should take into account when creating their own framework for decision-making. Should any reader think this is a strange goal, remember that the Free Church theological method is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in salvation. Salvation is uncoerced, which means that the life that emerges from that relationship must also be uncoerced, including theology, ethics, and behavior in every area. In other words, freedom that must be imposed is not true freedom. But there is a universal boundary for that freedom—the Word and the Spirit. To argue that a Free Churchman has the freedom to choose not to submit to the Word or the Spirit would be oxymoronic. Anabaptists were willing to be corrected by the Word of God; so should we today. Now let us add John Bolt's definition of economics to our definition of the Free Churches: "that practical and moral scientific study of the one aspect or dimension of human behavior that involves stewardly exchanging, by free moral agents, scarce things of value for the sake of profit."<sup>19</sup> In what way can this definition be limited by the theological and biblical focus of the Free Churches? In every way. Discipleship is behavior. Discipleship is decision-making. Discipleship is stewardship. Discipleship is the result of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In that way, the Free Churches have much to say about economics. Because I am writing to an audience of Christian leaders, I will save space by leaving the biblical references implicit.

First, Free Church theology, being rooted in the personal discipleship that comes out of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, recognizes the sinfulness of human beings and the need for evangelical love to permeate the actions of the saved. This applies to the disciplined community of the saved, the larger world of the lost, and of course the members of government. Sinful decisions are expected, and though the government exists to regulate the impacts of those decisions, the government's actions are not expected to be any more virtuous than that of an individual (but more on this below). Money is known to be a key factor in sinful decision-making, seeing as how its love is a root of sin and it exists as an idol in direct competition with God. That is why love for humanity, specifically a sacrificial or agape love, must drive every action of a Christian. Every human is a sinner and, apart from the direct intervention of Jesus Christ, will pay the price for his or her own sin in an eternity of separation from God. In this, one takes on the mindset of Jesus Christ who was willing to suffer injustice that salvation might result, who would rather be wronged that forgiveness might occur. What good is a pious (or sanctimonious) life, even one that results in martyrdom, if an evangelical love with its attendant proclamation of the good news of salvation does not play its part in a wider harvest? This means that someone adhering to a Free Church perspective would worry much more about Jesus than about his or her rights in society and, given what was said above about the government, would not worry much at all about the number or quality of those rights in the first place (but again, more on this below).

<sup>19</sup> John Bolt, *Economic Shalom: A Reformed Primer on Faith, Work, and Human Flourishing* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2013), 15.

Second, a Free Church perspective recognizes distinctions in society and that the rights previously mentioned are necessarily distinct based on one's place in society. This is true first of the body of Christ. There are many different gifts in each church, and God has placed those gifts together so as to accomplish a work greater than the sum of its parts. This can be said of the spiritual gifts and the practical gifts, for lack of a better term, because the members of a church have the ability and responsibility of financial care of their church leader(s). Conversely, the church leader should not entangle himself in worldly affairs so as to concentrate on the work of ministry and not let his own love of money cloud his ecclesial judgments. This also means he should not interfere with church members' businesses. With respect to society as a whole, there is no inherent problem with social stratification. The Free Churches understand that their mission is evangelism, not social revolution (in the sense of Grebel's letter to Müntzer). Christ came to save sinners, not society. Class distinctions exist in the world that is, regardless of the world that might one day be. Upper class membership comes with privileges but also challenges, as the rich man standing before God may discover. Lower class membership comes with many challenges, but the eternal perspective looks beyond the trials of this life to the glorious riches of the next. Money is not begrudged anyone. Now, however pessimistic one may be about the sinful nature of humanity, the expectation of oppression, or even the fear of rebellion, there must be a place within this Free Church characteristic for a desire for equity across humanity. This may manifest itself in an outrage against injustice or a willingness to work through government process but *never* in the use of force.

Third, while the Free Church perspective usually recognizes the place and power of government, the Free Churches themselves do not wield any kind of sword, nor do they cooperate in government attempts to do so in matters of conscience. I say usually because this tradition generally wants to be left in peace—cause no trouble, receive no trouble. To this end, it can be safely said that the Free Church tradition would prefer a small government. At an extreme, this desire can be so isolationist as to attempt to ignore the government (or demand an *extremely* small government). But the gospel is known to be an offense, so any kind of social involvement is expected to bring a negative response from the enemies of Christ (even those who cry, "Lord, Lord"). But the Free Churches desire that the stumbling block they place in society is the gospel and nothing else; if they must suffer, let it be for a proclamation of truth. And the reception of truth cannot be coerced. This applies to the message of salvation as well as the theological and moral implications of the gospel. A man will stand before God's judgement for his own actions, therefore such matters of conscience cannot be enforced to any meaningful end. However, some of the moral ends of Christianity demand a certain societal agitation (for example, defending the rights of the widow against Todfall), and there is a disagreement as to what lengths can be taken to achieve those ends: should one simply appeal to the government through normal channels; should one get involved in the government to sway its decisions; or should one attempt to cause changes in the government? If one recognizes the



authority of government, and if one sees that government being destructive of the ends to which the Bible clearly speaks, something has to give. Some matters are rather clear, as in life and death and human freedom. But economic matters are less clear, no matter how strictly one believes that the debtor is slave to the creditor. At least some early Anabaptists spoke out against economic inequity, but they did so reasonably and not rebelliously because they clearly considered this a matter of conscience and not life or death. The means by which they drew this line seems to be their perspective of the human soul.

Fourth, the Free Churches take an eternal perspective on humanity, and this is how they measure their response to social or economic injustice. It is really quite simple. A man dies once and then faces judgment. While there are debates about relative rewards and punishments, the primary concern is whether a soul spends eternity with God or separated from God. Christ suffered injustice because he had patient love for his persecutors, and by his words *and* actions, many were brought from death to life. The same can be said of his disciples and those who would continue to spread his message. They did not allow their desire for comfort interfere with their commission to proclaim the gospel. Comfort, for all intents and purposes, is an economic creature that is heavily influenced by government. Yes, these Anabaptists desired to be left in peace, but that is because their government was claiming *the same gospel truth that they did*. They interpreted the role and purpose of the church differently than the Magisterial Reformers, and they did not believe that such a difference was worthy of persecution (and neither did the magistrates for a time). They understood, however, that should they live under a non-Christian regime they should *not* expect any kind of peace or comfort. They had no worry with the latter scenario because they were buoyed by their own eternal perspective. In this world they expected trouble, but they followed One who overcame the world. Their riches were in heaven; their concern was for those whose riches were only on earth. They were willing to suffer and allow their families to suffer when it came to dealing with the fallen world. They weighed a short-lived economic benefit against the image of their opponent writhing in hell for eternity. This eternal perspective enabled them to navigate complicated (for their time) economic decisions.

Fifth and finally, the Free Churches consequently place the highest possible value on human life. While the quality of that life is constantly measured against the glorious riches of Christ Jesus for all those who believe, the image of God in the life and dignity of a human soul is treated with utmost respect, even for one's opponents or enemies. This truth, as a summary of everything that has been said about them to this point, would more than anything put the Anabaptists at odds with certain economic declarations being made in the name of the Free Churches today. The primary role of the churches, in their estimation, was to equip Christians to hold forth the word of life in a crooked and depraved generation. Anything that interfered with their proclamation had to be jettisoned. This meant that all classes of society had to be treated with dignity, from the very lowest because of their special place in God's heart to the very highest because of the obstacles they faced hearing the gospel. Importantly,



these Anabaptists took it upon themselves to provide care and support for threatened human life. They did not wait for a government program, nor did they allow government indifference to dissuade them from their efforts. They understood that a complex society would not offer equal rights, but they called for equitable rights. This allowed for some latitude in application. In fact, every one of these principles contains a certain amount of latitude that will shape the way we apply them to our contemporary context.

#### IV. WHAT DOES THE FREE CHURCH POSITION LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Reviewing the statements above, it seems that the Free Church position has not changed in the last 500 years. What has changed is our economic context, and we have fallen into some of the very traps of which the early Anabaptists (echoing the New Testament) warned. I do not have the space in this article for every major economic question we currently face, but I hope to establish enough principles that their answers do not seem out of reach. Remember that the Free Church theological method is rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as His disciple in a disciplined community. Their emphasis on Word and Spirit is played out in that community under the guidance of the Bible as illumined by the Holy Spirit. Every action, every decision, every position necessarily comes back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Applying these foundations to an economic context is not difficult; the failure of free churchmen to do so reflects their own sinful tendencies, not the imagined complexities of modern economics.

The Free Church position today begins with the disciple, the individual follower of Jesus Christ. Whereas many Christian authors spill considerable ink bemoaning the woeful condition of our society and economy, a free churchman should spill more tears removing the plank from his own eye before worrying about anyone else. Do not dismiss this step as trite or preachy; according to Free Church principles, if Christians in America were committed to personal discipleship in all areas of life including finances, our country would look extremely different. LifeWay is a major supplier of Sunday School material to many Southern Baptist churches, and they recently published a lesson on financial responsibility from Old Testament wisdom literature (*Explore the Bible*, April 6). It was a very simple lesson of three points: place finances in perspective, earn money with integrity, and honor the Lord with your resources. But I could tell from the discussion my class had that we represented a great deal of uncertainty, ignorance, and failure in this area. Every complaint about Social Security came with admission of some poor spending choices. Every complaint about mistreatment at the hands of a contractor or auto repair shop came with the admission of being somewhat unfair with wages or charges some time in the past. And while my class included many faithful tithers, I cannot count the number of financial discussions I have had in which it became evident that faithful let alone sacrificial giving was not a habit. Personal financial discipleship must be the Free Church emphasis before we delve too deeply into social complaints.

Note that this will allow for a certain amount of disagreement between free churchmen because we are talking about interpretations of the Bible. There are Bible-believing Baptists on both sides of issues including the place of the tithe in a New Testament church, whether or not one should charge interest in a personal loan, whether or not one can take out a loan of any kind (or go into any kind of debt), and whether or not a Christian should accept government welfare. There are two principles in the Free Church position that apply here. First, whatever decision one makes must be based on prayerful study of the Bible rooted in a life of discipleship—nothing else. Decisions based on convenience, profitability, efficiency, or even history are insufficient. Chad Brand built an argument which associated the rise of the Baptists with the rise of America in the 1800s, arguing from the result the value of the Baptists' capitalistic methods (a trend well documented by historians including Nathan Hatch, George Marsden, and Mark Noll).<sup>20</sup> But the result is beside the point. The ends do not justify the means. Baptist methods “worked,” whatever that means, but that really does not tell us anything of real value. Second, whatever decision one makes cannot be imposed on anyone else. I am hard-pressed to relate the economic decisions above to a false gospel (unless one tries to make such a decision salvific). Consequently, they are matters of personal conviction; they are to be discussed in the disciplined community inhabiting the mind of Christ. One can explain one's own position but not broadcast it as eternal, demarcating truth. Several books, including Brand's, give the very strong impression that all free churchmen must be Republican or anti-big government. But that is not for the opinionator to decide.

That said, the Free Church position does align better with small government, but not for the reasons often given—not as a cause, but as an effect. Big government exists as a result of the personal failures of its citizens. Regulations exist because individuals failed to treat people fairly, care adequately for the environment, or respect the rights of others. Welfare exists because individuals and churches failed to care adequately for those in need. The IRS, the SEC, and other agencies exist because individuals have continuously looked for ways to gain unfair economic advantages over others or withhold tax revenue. Had Christians been salt and light and consistently given to Caesar what is Caesar's, the government would have been harder-pressed to grow to the point where it can now restrict the freedoms once available to its citizens and try to place the proverbial bowl over the lamp of the church. The Free Churches recognize the problem with such government growth and should work to reverse it within constitutional means. However, a free churchman must not and cannot use government realities as an excuse to fail in the area of personal discipleship given above. Just as we expect our church members to be bold in evangelism despite social pressures, we must expect our Christian business leaders to take right financial action despite the fear that it will put them at an economic disadvantage, and we must expect our church leaders not to deviate from their mission due to fears related to non-profit

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Brand, *Flourishing Faith*, 120–22.

tax status. Hubmaier was right to admonish that anyone who conceals the Word of God for profit sells the blessing of God. Personal gain and personal comfort must fall exceedingly low on the list of decision-making drivers.

As we live in a society with a growing government, there are two general positions one can take within the Free Church fold: cooperate with the government in meeting social needs, or work independently of the government to achieve those same ends. While the latter obviously proffers greater freedom of methodology, the former gives potential access to a wider range of opportunity. Christians who work for agencies such as Social Security, Veteran's Affairs, and Child Protection Services speak of their ability to make an economic impact on many people even if they must be muted in their proselytizing. All citizens, however, are still liable to government regulations. Private Christian employers must follow the minimum wage and pay all taxes, for example. While they might complain that the government has overreached its purpose in raising the minimum wage to a certain level (and this is a legitimate debate with respect to the earlier line of "matters of conscience"), free churchmen accept that granting the government the authority to set any minimum wage will result in objectionable limits. It is not for a free churchman to complain idly about effects of government on standard of living, the poverty line, or the middle class tax burden; it is for the free churchman to obey the laws of conscience *and* government. If he observes the feared deleterious effects, he works to convince the government to change their regulation but all the while intervenes directly in the economic well-being of the people around him. It is relatively meaningless to distinguish the relative claims of God and government, just as it is meaningless to argue the relative merits of big government and big business; unless the government directly violates the gospel of Jesus Christ, it has legitimate authority *in this life*. One can only draw the line for the acceptable limit of government regulation with great difficulty and usually not with great consistency (conservative evangelicals applaud regulations with which they personally agree). This is how a Free Church can exist in any social or economic system. One might not like the forced redistribution of wealth, but what does that mean to someone living in China or India? And why should a secular government care about God's economy? The Free Church theology of economics is not about the government—it is about the individual and the disciplined community.

Furthermore, the Free Church economic position does not emphasize profits, wealth, or comfort; it emphasizes discipleship, honesty, and faithfulness. Drucker is on the right track when he says that the purpose of business is to create a customer, arguing that profits result from customer-building.<sup>21</sup> But even that misses the first step, which is to treat people with the attitude of Christ regardless of their potential as a customer. This returns to the eternal perspective presented earlier. If

<sup>21</sup> Ian Harper and Samuel Gregg, eds., *Christian Theology and Market Economics* (Northampton, MA; Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010), 114.

one stays focused on eternity, one will see people not as objects or targets (or even customers) but as human beings. Also, one will not judge his actions by profits or temporary comforts but by the desire one day to be called a good and faithful servant. Granted, wealth is amoral, but the means by which one acquires it is not. Harper and Gregg correctly stated that affluence does not cause but only magnifies temptation, and Bolt correctly labeled a market not as an actor but only an enabler.<sup>22</sup> Churches should spend their time disciplining Christians to operate in whatever economic system, not complaining about that system. Wealth (or a lack of it) in a capitalist or socialist society does not change one's personal responsibilities of faithfulness; it only changes the context thereof. With careful and consistent discipleship, a Free Church can help its congregation not to consider the economic impact of a decision before the moral or theological. If something is the "right thing to do," it frankly does not matter if one will lose money as a result. We are to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth.

This, of course, does not mean that free churchmen are to avoid wealth. Early Anabaptists as well as early English Baptists told stories of wealthy individuals using that wealth to care for (or keep alive) those in need. Peter Heslam said well that "material wealth is the only solution to material poverty."<sup>23</sup> This is why brotherly love must drive one's personal finances. If Geneva's churches met benevolent needs out of compulsory tithes, that is little different from a welfare state funded by taxes (for even churches use philanthropy as power). Rather, a disciple of Jesus Christ learns that social responsibility driven by evangelical love fulfills the law of love much more than any other motive. This does not mean that philanthropy is the only purpose for which one gains wealth; it does mean that the eternal perspective of the human soul will answer more questions than it asks. The Free Church position must allow a wide range of interpretations about the possession and use of wealth, but only those guided by Word and Spirit. Consequently, a free churchman would not concern himself with an unequal distribution of said wealth. The parable of the talents implies an unequal distribution of gifts or resources which, however one interprets the point of the parable, necessarily results in unequal economic or social status. That should not be a problem for any free churchman. Jesus' call in John 21:22 clearly says to the disciple who worries about the status of another, "What is that to you? You follow Me." The body of Christ has many different parts of different function, those functions reflect the place of the part in society (even if they do not match), and those differences are never described ontologically. The poor man, the prisoner, the widow and the orphan are all to be received with great care because we do not know what our tomorrow might bring.

<sup>22</sup> Harper and Gregg, *Christian Theology*, 153, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Harper and Gregg, *Christian Theology*, 164-65.

## V. CONCLUSION: NO OXYMORONS

In this brief survey, I see nothing that would indicate that early Free Church theological principles are anything less than valid to a contemporary Free Church theology of economics. They are principles that transcend the type of government or economic system, and they offer the necessary corrective (no matter how unpopular) to the traps of our affluent society. The oxymoron would be for the Free Churches to attempt to drive economic policy. Rather, the Free Church theology of economics emphasizes personal and communal responsibility; changes in the economy from a Free Church perspective should happen from the ground up, not the top down. This allows the Free Churches to operate within any economic system, not simply American capitalism. It also puts the responsibility for faithful discipleship on every church and Christian, giving no opportunity to blame society for economic (or any other kind of) faithlessness.

In summary, Christians should consider evangelical love as the *primary* driver for every economic decision they make, remembering that every person they encounter has an eternal soul. This perspective includes their responsibility to obey the government and use constitutional means to influence it, but it implies that they should worry more about the salvation of their neighbor than the comfort of their home, the faithful presentation of the gospel than their church's tax status. Christians should not be troubled by economic diversity any more than they should fret about physical diversity. They should pay attention to their own faithful stewardship of God's gifts, not the financial decisions of others. Christians should emphasize discipleship, honesty, and faithfulness, not profits, wealth, or comfort. Should the latter follow the former, they can and should rejoice in God's blessing, but must store up their treasures in heaven. Christians can be happy when the government chooses to leave them alone to live quietly, but they cannot shrink away from persecution or threats in order to preserve their wealth.

This article seems to leave open the wider question of an economy driven by Free Churchmen. What would the economy of the United States look like if every major decision maker were a Free Churchman? It would look on a macro scale like I say it would look on a micro scale. The rules for faithful stewardship and discipleship do not change based on scope. Anabaptist economic priorities work in society today or any day, and they focus all attention on Jesus Christ. That is a policy all Christians can and should pursue.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor or Yourself*. 2nd ed. Chicago: Moody, 2014. 288 pp. \$15.99.

How can North American churches appropriately and effectively work to alleviate poverty at home and abroad? Drawing from their extensive experience, authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert wrote *When Helping Hurts* to answer this question. Corbett and Fikkert work together at the Chalmers Center for Economic Development, a research institute that equips churches to minister to low-income people, and teach together at Covenant College in Lookout, GA in the areas of community and economic development. Two motivations drive this book: North American Christians, particularly with their vast wealth, are not doing enough about poverty; and when they do attempt to do something about it, their methods are often more harmful than helpful.

*When Helping Hurts* has four parts, each containing three chapters. Part 1 provides a biblical and theological understanding of poverty, with Chapter 1 focusing on the nature of the gospel and the mission of the church, Chapter 2 on the nature of poverty itself, and Chapter 3 on a biblical understanding of poverty alleviation. Part 2 concerns general principles that should guide our understanding of helping the poor. These include recognizing the different kinds of intervention a situation might call for (Chapter 4), utilizing the poor's assets whenever possible (Chapter 5), and enabling those you are helping to participate in the process (Chapter 6). Parts 3 and 4 provide practical strategies for putting the principles of Parts 1 and 2 into practice, including advice on short term-missions trips (Chapter 7), working in your own community (Chapter 8), and how to get started (Chapters 10-11).

With over 225,000 copies of the first edition (2009) sold, *When Helping Hurts* has had an immense impact on evangelical poverty relief work, and this is a good thing due to the book's strong gospel focus and useful strategies. The authors rightly ground poverty alleviation in the gospel and a holistic understanding of salvation. Chapters 2-3 are particularly helpful in this regard, highlighting how human beings are spiritual, social, psychological, and physical beings, and that every person is poor in the sense of hurting in their relationship with God, themselves, others, and creation. Therefore helping low-income people must take all of these relationships into account, and not just physical, material needs.



As the authors state, "poverty is rooted in broken relationships, so the solution to poverty is rooted in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection to put all things into right relationship again" (77). This idea leads to one of the strongest points in the book, which is that the goal of poverty alleviation is not to make the materially poor into middle or upper-class North Americans, or even to make sure they have enough money, but to restore people to a "full expression of humanness, to being what God created us all to be," in all four relationships (78).

The authors build upon this strong gospel-centeredness by offering several practical applications. Churches must work to combat the individual and systemic causes of poverty, to identify assets that the poor already have instead of duplicating those assets, and to empower the poor to help themselves instead of just doing things for them. This means the default response of churches and individual Christians cannot be to just give more money or things to help the poor, as it too often is (though in cases of immediate need this might be necessary). The authors rightly demonstrate why this default response is most often not only unnecessary but hurtful (106-09). Churches must do the harder, more time-consuming, but much more effective work of developing relationships and leading people to help themselves as they realize their dignity as created beings through the gospel. The authors' much needed critique of the typical short-term missions trip is along these same lines (161-80), as too often these trips are focused on short-term relief at the expense of long-term development.

The book does have some minor weaknesses. Corbett and Fikkert don't adequately distinguish between the church's mission, Jesus' mission, and the individual Christian's mission, (e.g., pp. 14, 37, 40-41, 44, 73-75), and a book such as Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilberts' *What is the Mission of the Church?* would be a helpful supplement. The authors also conflate what the Bible says about helping the poor inside the church with helping the poor outside of the church (e.g., pp. 38-42). Additionally, some of the strategies the authors propose, such as setting up micro-finance institutions for people in developing nations, seem to be beyond the capabilities of the average-sized church. None of these weaknesses take away from the overall value of the book, but do have the potential to lead to confusion or discouragement.

I recommend *When Helping Hurts* to pastors, deacons, missionaries, and any involved in Christian benevolent ministry. The book is written to be used in group studies, and as a pastor I profitably led our deacons through the book using the questions and activities provided by the authors. This resulted in several positive changes for our church's benevolent ministry and a deeper appreciation for the holistic nature of the gospel. The second edition adds two additional chapters, a new foreword by David Platt, and a new conclusion, but these additions don't necessarily warrant a new reading if you have read the first edition. If you haven't, this book offers insights too good to pass up for a minister of the gospel.

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Jennifer Roback Morse, *Love and Economics: It Takes a Family to Raise a Village*. Ruth Institute: San Marcos, CA, 2008. xviii + 308. \$19.75

Jennifer Roback Morse is a trained economist. She has taught at Yale and George Mason; she held a research post at Stanford's Hoover Institution. Today she directs the Ruth Institute, an organization promoting traditional marriage values and mutual respect between spouses. She is also the Senior Research Fellow in Economics at the Acton Institute.

In *Love and Economics*, Morse brings her training to bear on the thorny matter of family dynamics in progressive, American society. The book originally appeared in 2001 with the more provocative subtitle, *Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn't Work*, but the change in labeling has not altered the content. Indeed, putting both subtitles together provides a useful window into Morse's primary thesis: the health of society depends upon intentional, self-sacrificial family practice. Self-interest may make for successful economic practice, but a family pursuing self-interest will neither thrive nor benefit broader society. Stability within society comes when families commit to love, the giving of self.

The argument of *Love and Economics* proceeds predictably over twelve chapters. Morse establishes key tenets of laissez-faire economics, shows their application in prevailing theories of family and parenting, and then develops the case for love's superiority. She does not critique economic theories as such. Her aim, rather, is to show that the family requires a different approach from the free market.

Morse lays the foundation of her argument in the obvious yet profound reality that we begin life with dependence. For a baby to mature successfully, parents must exude love, that is, the giving of self. Rather than investing in their own survival, parents pour themselves with "irrational commitment" into the child's life (24). Nourished by love, the child learns attachment and trust. A parent's self-gift becomes the foundation of the child's health, and, in turn, the social-contract model so dear to economists loses descriptive power. Parents' love may earn coos and smiles, but there is no equal reciprocity. There is, however, love, and love trumps social contract.

From the parent-child relationship, Morse moves to consider the marital relationship (i.e., the conjugal view.) Just as contract theory is inadequate to describe how parents interact with children, so also it fails in marriage. Morse grants that, of all the familial relationships, that between spouses appears most to mimic social contracts, since (generally) marriage begins with both parties anticipating a better life married than unmarried. There are also the vows and free choices. But, she notes, these superficial similarities fade upon closer examination. For success, marriage needs not contract but love, full self-giving without negotiation.

This examination of love and family relationships occupies Parts 1 and 2. In Parts 3 and 4, Morse extends the argument of love's centrality to society. Without a love-driven family, naturally self-centered children do not mature into the cooperative adults society needs for healthy

functioning. Morse recognizes the controversial nature of these claims, given that even under-parented children develop necessary relational skills. She contends, however, that the exceptions prove the rule; no other institution can inculcate commitment to self-giving, without which society crumbles. At home and beyond, we need love.

Morse writes in a lucid and lively style; reading her book is no hardship—neither is seeing its value. For those interested in social thought, Morse provides a helpful goad to reconsider trendy perspectives. Her case for love's fundamental importance deserves consideration. For those involved in shaping hearts and minds—I think of clergy especially, *Love and Economics* merits special attention, since its central claim pertains directly to the ordinary life for which clergy must care. More pastoral attention attuned to the pivotal role of love in the family would bring health to home and church, as well as the society which the church professes to love. For all readers, Morse highlights the significance of the small life; society is shaped, of course, by grand events and big ideas, but love in the ordinary wields an unsurpassed power.

Morse is not alone in this claim. She dialogues ably with philosophers, economists, psychologists and social theorists. Mary Eberstadt's trenchant *How the West Really Lost God* has more recently advanced a similar line of thought. Morse is in good company, then, and her conclusions carry added weight. *Love and Economics* is fine book, worthy of wide readership and even wider acceptance.

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Jeff Van Duzer. *Why Business Matters to God: And What Still Needs to Be Fixed*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2010. 201 pp. \$20.00.

I imagine it is fair to say that theologically-minded pastors do not have much inherent interest in a theological vision of business, and if they did, perhaps driven by a desire to minister to business-people in their congregations, rather than a book addressing business straight on, the tendency would be to research creational theology and/or ethical theology, and then derive meaning for business and economics from those more general and seemingly lofty fields.

Likewise, I imagine it is fair to say that many business-people are not interested in a high-brow theological appraisal of business and wonder if and why such a thing exists. If it did exist, would it really address the quite practical concerns of business: economically, institutionally, and relationally?

While Jeff Van Duzer's *Why Business Matters to God* does not completely solve the dilemmas that manifest themselves in the tensions I pose here, I found it to be a truly practical *and* theological book that enables one to see there is a place for a theological appraisal and vision

of business, and that a *theology of business* is a road worth traveling down, especially for Christians in the marketplace and, dare I say, the thoughtful pastor theologian who wants to minister to them well.

The book is first an argument that business must be theological (16). When the book was published, Van Duzer was the Dean of the School of Business at Seattle Pacific University, a Christian College in Seattle. He is deeply aware of economics and is obviously conversant in theology. He enumerates the tensions and reasons for a divide between the practical aspects and theological vision of a Christian understanding of business and he goes on to confront them in his opening chapter.

Second, in light of claiming there must be a theology of business, Van Duzer aims to show the reader that both the horizon of creational theology, built upon traditional understandings of the Creation Mandate rooted in Gen 1-2, and a redemption theology, rooted in the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20), must be the two lenses we view business through. This second aim addresses and justifies the theological appraisal of business, because, as Van Duzer suggests, it is this dichotomy within theological and ecclesial circles, between creation and redemption theology, which digs the ditch between theology and business. One might say business is an obvious field that suffers from theology's unfortunate tendency to lack synthesis between the existential, normative, and situational in human vocation.

With those two aims in place, the bulk of the explanatory section of the book, Chs. 1-4, then traces a theology of business along the lines of the fourfold biblical-theological drama, especially prominent among Reformed thinking, of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (pp. 18ff). It is no surprise that Van Duzer's Reformed assumptions lend themselves to his interest and vantage point as the Reformed tradition, in particular, has theological categories for a theology of business, perhaps best represented in the Kuyperian tradition and its many branches. In fact, Van Duzer nods at several points to modern day Kuyperians, like Andy Crouch. In doing this, Van Duzer is able to explain that business fits into the creation mandate, was accursed along with all creation post-fall, and yet is currently part of the restoration of the Gospel with meaning and purpose that will endure even into the New Creation. This allows him to explain the complexity and controversy we experience with capitalism and how markets interface with Christian belief. But, it also allows him to encourage the reader toward a hope and trust in business, and that markets, profits, and goods are part of God's eternal purposes. This overarching program both justifies a theological meaning for business and then sets up a foundation for principles of practice, which the author rounds off the book by addressing, namely, the goal worship and redemption by means of *service, sustainability, and support* (151-168). For Van Duzer these three ingredients create the operative ethical and theological environment to enable market transactions *per se* and business people striving to live fruitfully in light of the Gospel as God's agents in a business *per se* to serve the purposes of God.

I believe the book succeeds on the front end by defending a deeply theological appraisal of business, not just concerning Christians who must

act as God's agents in corporations, but also in what markets and goods and services do in terms of creation, common good flourishing, and as acts of love. His rendering of business as a holistic service industry, governed by sustainable practices, with a support/partnership mentality was a thoughtful and, I think, challenging grid to start measuring both one's economics and one's presence as God's agent in a business environment. The book will disappoint devotees of the business-as-means-for-gospel-proclamation crowd, as it will disappoint the business-as-a-worshipful-expression-in-and-of-itself crowd. But perhaps that is what makes this book a truly biblical study in its orientation and method, for it seems Van Duzer has situated the topic at hand within what all of life must be appreciated—a story about both a good creation being restored and a story of people being forgiven of sin and remade in Christ. The title of the book is true to its content. It is up to the reader to apply the principles and vision therein. For the pastor-theologian, this is an accessible yet theological treatment that will contribute to your discourse with business and aid in ministering to those who live in its complex world.

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Wayne Grudem. *Business For the Glory of God: The Bible's Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2003. 96pp. \$16.99.

Written as an expansion of a paper delivered at a lecture, *Business For the Glory of God* offers a brief look at how eleven aspects of business can bring glory to God. Written by Wayne Grudem, theologian, prolific author, and seminary professor most known for his work *Systematic Theology*, this concise book allows the reader to consider areas of business and particularly their inherent goodness. He states at the outset his thesis that "many aspects of business activity are morally good in themselves, and that in themselves they bring glory to God—though they also have great potential for misuse and wrongdoing," (12). He then lists the following business activities for consideration: ownership, productivity, employment, commercial transactions (buying and selling), profit, money, inequality of possessions, competition, borrowing and lending, attitudes of heart and effect on world poverty. Under each of his subsequent chapter headings titled for one of these activities, this thesis is printed in varying form.

Prior to beginning his analysis of these business components, he spends a chapter reviewing the theological reality of humankind as image bearers of God. Specifically, he frames the discussion within the concept of *Imago Dei* and the delight that God has in His image bearers looking like Him. Within this framework, Grudem seeks to answer the question as to whether business is basically good, evil or neutral. He opts for the first: business as inherently good, and a way in which humanity, particularly when redeemed, might image the Creator.

In each of the chapters that follow, Grudem argues from different scriptural texts his belief that business is inherently good. For instance, when he discusses the issue of ownership, he uses, among other verses, the eighth of the Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20. He points to the inference that the prohibition to steal assumes that ownership of property is a God-sanctioned reality. In discussing productivity, he points to the creation mandate of Genesis 1. In his treatment of employment, he directly counters Marxist theory, and utilizes Luke 10:7 to argue that the Bible gives credence to persons being both employers and employees. As he discusses money, he points to a swath of biblical texts that assume the usefulness of money, and he ends his chapter by saying, "...the distortions of something good must not cause us to think that the thing itself is evil," (50). Ultimately, Grudem desires that his readers offer thanksgiving to God for these morally good activities of business. He desires that his arguments not only fuel thinking, but action on the part of the reader regarding their praise of God. He is effective in many ways towards this end.

A primary strength of the book is its accessibility. Both theologically trained and untrained individuals could easily read this book. It seems particularly suited for those in business who are often given books of this length to consider in their own respective businesses. While none of the chapters are exhaustive, each of them contains at least one well-argued point for consideration. Some of the chapters go beyond this. In his chapter on borrowing and lending, Grudem not only offers biblical support to his inferences, he gives some practical macro-systemic examples of how there is goodness inherent to the back and forth of products. A particular niche of this book is that in comparison to concept books on business such as *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, or practical books on business such as *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni, this book evaluates macro-level aspects of business from a biblical and theological lens. A final strength of the book is the inclusion of world poverty. While seemingly desiring to show that the picture of business in the Bible is not that of Marxist, socialist or progressive agendas, Grudem also deals head on with the reality of poverty, and the need for the image-bearers of God to deal with poverty in a God-glorifying way, to include generosity.

Grudem mentions in his Preface that a larger book on the topic is in the works. This alone shortens some potential criticisms of the book, such as its brevity on each topic. That said, a way the book could be strengthened would be a further discussion on some biblical texts that Grudem uses in passing to make his points. Sometimes he accurately points to direct texts on an issue. At other times, he will refer in passing to certain passages, even some passages that are parabolic, and while he does not directly misconstrue them, their use could be accompanied with a little more detail, particularly regarding hermeneutics. Specifically, on less direct texts, a few more words could be added to show that certain inferences made from the usage of a passage are clearly appropriate. While not at all a major concern, this recommendation would only strengthen the work.

Grudem has provided readers with a helpful resource, and one from which pastors, students and laypersons alike would receive benefit.

Dealing with the text, and perhaps with anti-business values often seen in the culture today, Grudem delivers some succinct, helpful and biblical thoughts for consideration.

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Timothy Keller. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York: Penguin Group, 2012. 288 pp. \$26.95.

Timothy Keller, pastor of New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and best-selling author, once again offers us his deep and penetrating insight in a powerful book on the connection between faith and work. Co-written with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, Founder of Redeemer's Center for Faith & Work, the authors draw upon a variety of sources as they look to recover a fuller, more biblical understanding of how we think about work. Far too often, they lament, approaches to understanding a Christian's work focus either on evangelism or making money in order to resource ministry. Yet neither of these address "the issue of how Christians' faith should affect the way they work," (12).

The book is divided into three clear sections. Part 1 begins with "God's Plan for Work," and here Keller thoughtfully unpacks the Genesis creation account. We are reminded that work is not a punishment, "but part of the blessedness of the garden of God," (37). The Bible talks about work before it talks about anything else. God himself engages in work, and it is both orderly and good. Furthermore, the need to work is a part of our basic human makeup—something we were both designed and commissioned to do. In fact, Keller says we should expect a sense of inner loss and emptiness when we do not have meaningful work. Chapters 3 and 4 go on to explore work as cultivation and as service. Keller points out that while our cultural mandate is to develop and build society, the way that we "rule" and "subdue" our world is not by exploiting it, but by exercising good stewardship over it. We are called to bring order out of chaos and draw out creative potential—and whenever we do, "we are following God's pattern of creative development," (59). Our work, moreover, should be seen as a vocation by which we serve others. Here Keller builds upon Luther's revolutionary teaching on work, emphasizing that we honor God when we love our neighbor and serve others through our work.

Part 2 moves on to talk about "Our Problems With Work," explaining how sin's entrance into our world leads to work becoming fruitless, pointless, selfish and idol-revealing. The Fall unravels the fabric of our world, "and in no area as profoundly as our work," (84). As sin disorders and distorts, it causes shame, mistrust, painful labor and strained relationships. While work itself is not a curse, it nevertheless lies under the curse and feels its effects. Specifically, sin threatens the worker's productivity, sense of confidence, and satisfaction. Keller weaves in biblical material from



Ecclesiastes in his chapter entitled “Work Becomes Pointless.” He then follows this up with the stories of the Tower of Babel and Esther in Chapter 8, “Work Becomes Selfish.” Work offers us an opportunity, says Keller, not to serve ourselves or make a name for ourselves—but to use its resources to serve God and neighbor. The final chapter in this section, “Work Reveals Our Idols,” offers us Keller at his best as he builds upon his outstanding analysis of idolatry (see his *Counterfeit Gods*). Here we find an acute analysis of culture as Keller explains its shift from traditional, to modern, to now postmodern. Each culture has a particular way of distorting our view of work—whether by making idols out of stability and duty (traditional), out of progress and reason (modern), or even out of technology and human freedom (postmodern).

The final section of the book zeroes in on how the gospel provides a storyline for redeeming not just our souls, but our work as well. Keller tells us that Christianity offers a unique worldview that locates the problem in sin and the solution in grace. The world is good, but it is also fallen and needs to be (and will be) redeemed. As we understand the gospel storyline and reflect on God’s purpose in our world, this influences how we do our work. Keller supplies examples from the business world, journalism, the arts, and medicine. He urges us to see the gospel as a set of glasses through which we look at everything in our world (which culminates in a set of outstanding questions on page 181.) The last few chapters encourage a “new conception” for work (grounded in common grace) that helps us appreciate the good work of nonbelievers even while keeping ourselves fully and critically engaged with our culture. Christian faith also provides a “new compass” for work as we move away from a cost-benefit analysis mindset and see people as divine image-bearers to be embraced in love. Keller’s closing chapter highlights our “new power” for work that comes explicitly from the gospel. The gospel gives us a new passion for our work, even as it fuels us with a deep sense of rest. The Epilogue discusses the mission of Redeemer’s Center for Faith & Work and its various initiatives.

Early on in the book Keller says that he is attempting to bring together the various emphases of the different traditions within the “faith and work movement” and speak with consistency and greater clarity. I believe he has accomplished this. *Every Good Endeavor* is a joy to read; Keller is expert in weaving in historical and contemporary anecdotes from the realms of business, literature, philosophy and the arts. Along the way we hear from the likes of everyone from Luther and Calvin to Nietzsche, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers and Luc Ferry—all of whom make for great conversational partners. Fascinating snippets from the pen of Tolkien and the life of Mozart round out this enjoyable and mind-opening book. If the aim of the Redeemer imprint is to bring the power of the Christian gospel to every part of life—this book has hit the mark. I believe that scholars, pastors and educated lay leaders alike will gain much from this unique addition to the literature of faith and work.

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Gary A. Haugen and Victor Boutros. *The Locust Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence*. New York: Oxford, 2014. 346 pp. \$27.95

For the past month, the American public has watched the streets of Ferguson, Missouri burn with rage and acrid smoke. The occasion for this burning: the shooting of a black teenager by a white police officer. In many respects the discourse surrounding these events has been predictable. For some, they represent another iteration of America's long-standing devaluation of black personhood. For others, they are but one more example of lawlessness vindicating itself through tropes of racial victimization. For others, they represent the infringement of a militarized state into the unarmed sanctity of American communities. And for still others, especially the families, these events simply represent unending grief. By turns (and this too is predictable) each of these themes has emerged powerfully before the American civic imagination only to disappear again—like shadows in the riot-smoke—into the volatile opacity of our common life.

But something unusual is also taking place. Perhaps because of the intractability of these more enduring themes, much of the most substantive public conversation has begun to coalesce around an issue related to—yet slightly different from—each of these: *the meaning of law enforcement*. In one respect this too is a long-standing American theme. Indeed, at times—as with the Fugitive Slave laws of the 1850s, the Convict Leasing trials of the 1920s, and the War on Drugs of the 1980s—it has been a national obsession. And yet even so, the conversation emerging in the wake of Ferguson is unique. This is because the conversation is less about law enforcement and *race* or law enforcement and *militarization* but about law enforcement *itself*. *When we, the people, confer the power of lethal force upon our neighbors, what do we intend?* In a democratic order policed by its own citizens, there are few questions more foundational to civic thriving than this.

But where does a Christian look for substantive answers to these questions? As a scholar of African American history, a theologian devoted to questions of the public good, and a pastor involved in the training of law-enforcement officers, I have spent the better part of a decade in search of the answer to this question. And strangely, neither my seminary training nor my graduate work—though both were deeply committed to notions of the language of the common good—ever engaged this issue at all. Because of this, I consider the publication of *The Locust Effect* an event of unusually significant import.

In one respect this is because of its contribution to the global conversations surrounding poverty. Gary Haugen of the *International Justice Mission* and Victor Boutros of the *United States Department of Justice* have both given the bulk of their careers serving the world's poor. Over the course of these careers they have seen that much of the "poverty" conversation focuses on economic development, educational support, and medical care as the best hope for poverty's end. And this is true. What Haugen and Boutros have learned however—and this is the essence of the

book's argument—is that because of the “plague of violence” that afflicts the world's poor, none of these strategies finally can be effective. Through a combination of heart-rending accounts and hard-data presentations they show that in the absence of such structures, economic resources are stolen, educational opportunities are foreclosed (children who are raped on the way to school stop going to school), and medical care vanishes. The end of poverty, in other words, requires the end of violence through the development of just structures of law enforcement. Indeed, in their account, this is the very *purpose* of law enforcement: protecting people (especially the poor) from the violence that, like so many locusts, consumes their flourishing.

In another respect it is important because of its contribution to global conversations about power. For a great number of years public conversations about power—and particularly about *martial* power—have been almost wholly binary in nature. On one hand, there are those who take an almost wholly procedural approach, arguing that—given the lawlessness of communities—law enforcement is a necessary evil. On the other hand, there are those who take an almost wholly deconstructive approach, arguing—especially in the wake of Foucault—that law enforcement is little more than a thinly veiled expression of the collective will to destroy those who are weak, marginal, and taboo. Setting aside the relative merits of these perspectives, it is important to understand that both have infected discussions about law-enforcement with an evident and inescapable cynicism. Part of the significance of Haugen's and Boutros' argument is that they offer a positive alternative to either of these views. In their account law enforcement is best understood neither as an indication of our collective evil, nor as an extension of our collective *libido dominandi*, but as an expression of our collective desire to guard the weak and the vulnerable from those who would prey against them. This reframing is profoundly important, and, if taken seriously, could change the global discourse surrounding the meaning and purpose of force.

In a final respect it is important because it holds promise to reignite the imagination of the institution most broadly devoted to the care of the world's poor—the Christian church. It does this not only by foregrounding the plight of our poorest neighbors around the world—a task to which Haugen has faithfully devoted himself—but also by challenging Christians to think in more robustly institutional terms about what it means to care for our neighbors. That is, rather than thinking about the care of the poor in merely relational, evangelistic, or charitable terms (as so many Christian community and global development initiatives seem to do) Haugen and Boutros urge the church to think in institutional and systemic terms, to ask ourselves: “*What kind of economic, educational, ecclesial, medicinal, and martial institutions do our neighbors need? And how can we devote ourselves to building and sustaining these institutions?*” These are the questions that, in the long-run, will need to be both asked and answered if the poor are to be lifted up, and *The Locust Effect* can help the church to do both.

Soon, if the pattern holds, the smoke will blow away, the heat will cool, and the world will turn its eyes from Ferguson, Missouri. But the poor will always be before us. And in seeing them we will be faced, indeed

as we are at this very moment, with the question of how to care for them. As we labor to answer this question, *The Locust Effect* has much to teach us. And if we listen, it may be that when the poor and the police meet in the streets, that meeting will lead not to harm, but to hope.

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Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*. Edited by Edwin Cannan. New York: Random House (Modern Library), 1994. 1,130 pages.

Karl Marx. *Capital: Volume I*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992. 1,152 pages.

Pastors clearly need to grasp the moral and cultural realities of economic systems if they are going to help people understand their daily work as discipleship. Moral and even metaphysical assumptions are embedded in economic systems, shaping both the personal and public meaning of every person's work. Many of these presuppositions originate in the academic discipline of economics. A pastor who has a basic familiarity with the moral and metaphysical development of academic economics will be better equipped to help people understand their daily lives as they go out into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit and strive to live each day for Christ.

Adam Smith is as good a starting point as any. The systematic study of economics had begun to take meaningful shape as a branch of moral philosophy in the High Middle Ages, and reached a quite advanced state of development in the late Middle Ages and the Reformed scholastic period. However, when Smith arrived on the scene, the Christian legacy of economics as a branch of moral philosophy was in the process of being overthrown. The reigning economists of the day were of the radical Enlightenment mold – the French “physiocrats,” so called because they studied economics the way one would study physics. People pursue their self-interest just as objects obey the Newtonian laws of motion, and that's all there is to it. The amoral view of life implied by this approach was triumphantly championed by Bernard de Mandeville, the Ayn Rand of his day.

Smith rescued the moral dimension of economics, but at a great cost. He insisted on grounding economics in ethics – holding out the good of mankind as its proper purpose, heaping scorn upon the selfish tendencies of the commercial and political classes, and deploying his most withering rhetoric against the poisonous ethical cynicism of de Mandeville. His great objection to mercantilism (which was the central battle of his career) was not that it was inefficient, but that it was unjust. It arbitrarily starved the powerless to put money in the pockets of the powerful.

However, the morality with which Smith rescued economics was not Christian morality; it was a morality that made sense to the secular

Enlightenment. He assumed too much integrity in creation, thinking virtue and cooperation would be relatively easy to maintain if people were rationally educated. And he measured the value of labor only in physical terms, thinking (as Arthur Brooks once put it) that economists could measure the value of a person's work by using "beads of sweat" as the unit of measurement.

Smith's signal contribution is *not* the insight that the division of labor delivers gains in economic well-being. That was recognized as far back as Plato and Aristotle. Smith's key argument was that these gains can be dramatically expanded by widening the scope of trade. With more trade, a wider variety of labor specializations becomes possible. (A coworker of mine once remarked that politicians want us to see the Chinese as a billion people out to steal our jobs, when we ought to think of them as a billion customers we could serve; this illustrates the enormous value of trade.) Mercantilism, by restricting trade, denied all people the opportunity to specialize in labor that served the needs of people in other countries.

Smith was not naïve about the dangers of the division of labor. He devotes a section of *The Wealth of Nations* to warning against the possibility that people's horizons would be shrunk, that they would come to live in a very small world where they saw nothing other than the narrow tasks before them. He called for improvements in the education of children (in schools) and adults (in churches) to help people maintain a wider perspective and understand their place in the world. That is still a word in season! Interestingly, against the monopoly systems of education and religion in his day, Smith advocated parental school choice and religious freedom.

The seed of evil sown by Smith's naturalism and materialism did not flower much in his own day. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it killed about 100 million people. Marx's murderous indifference to justice and human life is his own responsibility, but the core fallacies upon which his cockamamie economic theories are built had been endorsed by Smith a century before, as a result of his inadequate moral and metaphysical presuppositions.

Marx detaches the economy from transcendent purpose. He assigns it the (admittedly very important) job of producing worldly goods, but he sees nothing higher than that in economic exchange, as the medieval and Reformation Christians did. In this, he follows Smith.

Marx also follows Smith in thinking the value of any commodity is simply the value of the labor to produce it, which in turn is merely a function of physical exertion. Contrary to popular opinion, this was not the medieval or Reformation view. Earlier economists knew that the economic value of a thing was a function of the needs, decisions and character of its owner. This fact would be rediscovered in 20<sup>th</sup> century economics, though too late to save the world from the depredations of Marxism.

Without Smith's moral concerns to restrain it, in Marx this materialism about value became an engine of destruction. If economic value is objective, scientists can calculate the optimal economic arrangements. Groundless theories based on arbitrary assumptions could be concocted to show that anyone who makes a profit is unjust and exploitative. This

is how stewardship over economic goods was taken away from ordinary people and placed in the hands of elite experts – and once people were reduced in this way to the status of domestic animals, they lost their dignity. Enslaving or killing them in the name of the common good became plausible.

Another key inheritance from Smith is historicism. Marx famously thought that economic history was an inevitably unfolding dialectic, with the forces of ignorance and poverty receding slowly but inexorably before an emerging tide of enlightenment and productivity. This is usually understood as a reaction against Hegel's idealism, but it is also an echo of the economic historicism of the physiocrats and the Scottish Enlightenment, including Smith.

Once we come to appreciate that economic value is spiritual, and not subject to objective calculation, Marx's hugely complex and intricate theories fall down like a house of cards. Smith's work survives better, because he is more concerned with economics as moral philosophy than with formulas and calculations. Yet even Smith's book largely reads as a product of its Enlightenment period. The bankruptcy of both authors' economic materialism has been long since exposed and rejected among professional economists. Alas, their response has been to overreact, retreating into a radically subjective utilitarianism. The task of building an economics that appreciates both the material and the spiritual, the objective and the subjective, is still before us.

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