

## CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS

By Dr. David L. Wheeler

The state of our local, national and global economy is story number one on every front page, every newscast and almost every public affairs blog. And we are afraid. Afraid of losing our jobs and our homes. Afraid of melting pensions and postponed retirements. Afraid because the future holds no guarantees that things will get better.

Will our faith suffer meltdown as well? Jesus told his disciples on the eve of his arrest and crucifixion, which unfolded as a pure catastrophe seemingly empty of hope: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1)* Times like these are a gut check for our faith.

The title of this meditation notwithstanding, I am not an economist! And I would caution all of us not to make facile extrapolations from scripture about economic policy. Some interpreters see a kind of Christian *socialism* in the common purse that Jesus and his disciples shared and in the distribution of resources practiced by the community of believers in the Acts of the Apostles. *“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their goods and possessions and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had needs.” (Acts 2:44-45)* Of course, technically “socialism” means social ownership of the means of production, not a mere distribution system, and these folks were living with a vivid expectation of the imminent return of Christ, not engaged in developing a sustainable economy for the long haul.

But definitions and changed context aside, the faith walk of the original believers calls us to a radical concern for the common good. If we don’t care about our neighbors – neighbors both within and beyond the Body of Christ – we dare not own the name Christian. Sharing with our global mission partners and concern for our immediate neighbors through personal actions and through local church programs are sacred obligations in times like these.

Some Christians see in the many scriptural endorsements of personal thrift and industry (*Proverbs 31:10-31*, *2 Thessalonians 3:6-12*) and the call for initiative and investment in Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (*Matthew 25:14-30*) an endorsement of *capitalism*. Of course, technically “capitalism” involves flexible media of exchange and investment, concepts such as “limited liability” and entities such as “corporations” which did not exist in biblical times. So perhaps any meditation upon a “Christian Economics” raises issues quite different than those involved in debates between modern economic theories. For instance:

- Acknowledgement that *“The earth is **the Lord’s** and all that is in it, the world and **those who live in it.**” (Psalm 24:1)* All that we have and all that we are is a gift from God. Indeed, we are not even our own masters; *[Y]ou are not your own, for you were bought with a price... (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*. This acknowledgement leads us to unceasing gratitude, deep trust no matter what our

- circumstances, and a cheerful willingness to share what is not ultimately *ours*, but always only a portion of God's bounty being channeled through us.
- Acknowledgement that true security and true wealth lie in trusting obedience to God. *"But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things [the necessities of life] will be given to you."* (Matthew 6:33) This acknowledgement brings with it the admonishment, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."* (Matthew 6:19-20) How much of our economic anxiety is self-inflicted? We may not be able to control national and global economic trends, but we can simplify our lives, resist the temptation to accumulate and thereby minimize unnecessary debt.
  - I have often heard *James 1:17* quoted as an acknowledgement that all good things come from God: *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation nor shadow of turning."* A better translation links *our* generosity with God's original generosity. ***"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above..."*** As God is, we are called to be. This is the taproot of any Christian Economics.

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